

How Can I Take my Life Back from my Phone?

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*To all my fathers and brothers at St. Demetrios
Monastery:*

Your Beatitude Metropolitan JONAH, Fr. Aidan,
Fr. Andrew, Br. Michael, Br. Andrew, Br. Benjamin,
Br. Anthony, Paisius, and Michael—

You are my life!

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¹¹ Matthew 5-7.

Introduction

What is good for us as human beings?

This is one of the biggest questions out there, and on a fuller understanding of ethics, what is good for man is closely tied to three ethical questions.

C.S. Lewis posed the three classic ethical questions through the image of a fleet of ships out at sea:²

- 1 How can ships avoid colliding with each other?
- 2 How do ships manage to be shipshape and keep in good running order?
- 3 What destination are the ships out sailing to arrive at in the first place?

The question of what is good for mankind relates to all three of these ethical questions.

I do not believe I can add much to the three classical

² C.S.Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York: Simon & Schuster 1980, 71.

questions, but I do suggest that the question of what *technology use* is good for us is for certain obvious reasons not addressed by the Church Fathers. Not that their words are without bearing or import to technology, but they addressed how these ethical questions are addressed with the technologies and forms of property that existed in antiquity. A loose way of putting this book's whole question is, "What kind of guidance would someone like St. John Chrysostom offer in using technology, if our technology were around in his day?" And in fact the relevance and import extend beyond implying what St. John's remarks about obscene theatre have to do with internet porn. I would suggest that St. Paul offer words that have every relevance here concerning what others have said: "All things are lawful for me"—*maybe*, but all things are not expedient."³

“The demons always fast,” but *we* can profit by fasting.

When I was in England, there was a saying in circulation among Orthodox that I have not really found back in the U.S: “The demons *always* fast.”

A paraphrase of the point of this remark is, “Fasting is one tool among others; it can be of use, but it is neither the beginning nor the end of asceticism.” And with it is an understanding that for converts especially, the fasting aspect of your rule of life is supposed to be something you should be working on with his priest.

I do not wish to exaggerate or unduly promote the

³ I Corinthians 6:12, Classic Orthodox Bible.

use of fasting among Orthodox ascetics; fasting directly benefits only the person who fasts, while almsgiving benefits both giver and the recipient, even if Christ said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”⁴ Prayer is a much bigger deal than either fasting or almsgiving, and the whole collection of ascetics all fit together in the broader pastoral picture.

Nonetheless, I suggest that fasting and an attitude of ““All things are lawful for me,”—*maybe*, but all things are not expedient: “all things are lawful for me,”—*maybe*, but all things edify not.”⁵ have particularly direct bearing on profitable use of technology.

I would briefly state that profitable use of technology is governed by ascetics, while unprofitable use of technology only serves one’s own will. I would also remind the reader that the commandment that could have kept Adam and Eve in Paradise was a command to fast merely from the fruit of one tree, and if our race had fasted, our race would have remained in Paradise. *Fasting can be a way to avoid opening a Pandora’s box.*

I would add a last framing concept:

Technologies have hidden price tags.

In general, the benefits of using a technology are obvious. Technologies whose benefits are not communicated do not really sell; so technologies which sell have some conceivable attraction to them. In general, the

⁴ Acts 20:35, Classic Orthodox Bible.

⁵ I Corinthians 10:23, Classic Orthodox Bible.

benefits of technology call for far less basic investigation than a well-suited analysis of its hidden price tags.

One statement I made, now obsolete in its detailed assertion, but raising a concern that is still relevant, is that “*A television is the most expensive appliance in the house.*” For a washer or a dryer, it costs the purchase price, plus electricity and in this case other utilities, plus supplies like detergent and maybe fabric softener, plus maybe a repair or using breakage as occasion to buy a newer model. However, the damage it does to your pocketbook is in entirety visible up front, and the money it costs you only includes obvious costs.

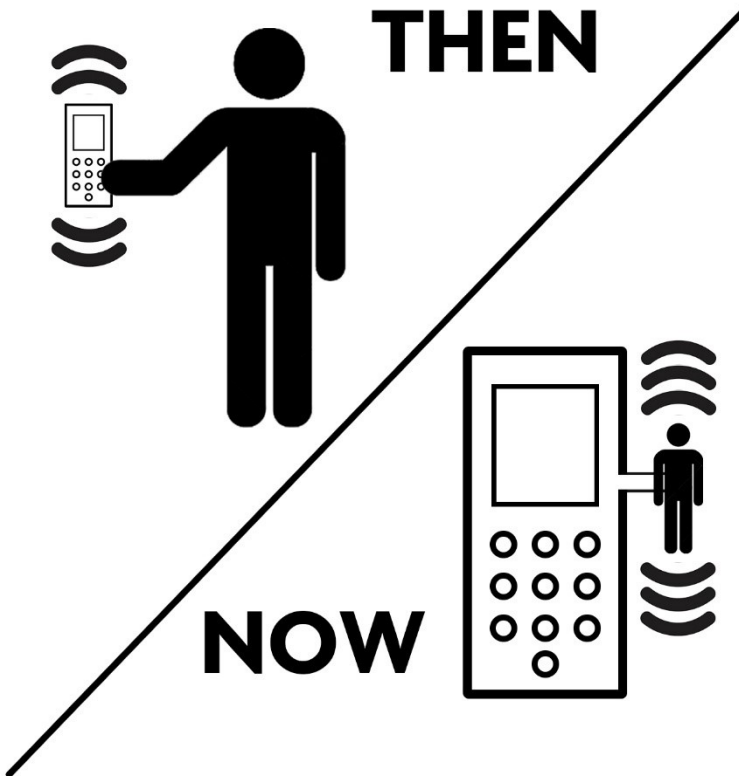
Not so with television. It has very well been observed that in television, the shows are the packaging and the content is the advertising, and little children sometimes pick up that the advertisements are more stimulating and more masterfully crafted than the “real” shows.

Therefore, the damage done to your pocketbook by watching television includes not only the “up front” costs, but costs a steady stream of purchases of things that you didn’t need until television’s advertising informed you that you really, really need it, and in the opinion of some, advertising’s robbing you of the ability to be content with what you have by stimulating covetousness is spiritual damage worse than what the coveting costs your pocketbook. And, if you read books like *Amusing Ourselves to Death*⁶, you may realize that that is outside of the brain rot caused by that kind of technology. So the hidden price tag of a television extends not only to the costs of things you purchased because television commercials stimulated a felt

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

need for them, but also exacts a terrible price to your soul.

Hard to see as they may be, this text is meant to help you see and weigh hidden price tags. They can be more costly than what you can see up front, and they can represent a deeper kind of cost:



Withered like Merlin

In C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*,⁷ the heroes are discussing the kind of time Merlin came in:

“I mean even in Merlin’s time (he came at the extreme tail end of it), though you could still use that kind of [power] in the universe innocently, you couldn’t do it safely. The things weren’t bad in themselves, but they were already bad for us. They sort of withered the man who dealt with him. Not on purpose. They couldn’t help doing it. Merlinus is withered. He’s quite pious and humble and all that, but something has been taken out of him. That quietness of his is just a little bit deadly, like the quiet of a gutted building.”

This last paragraph has everything to do with technology and cell phones in our society. They wither us. When we do not have our intravenous drip of noise, there is something in us like the silence of a gutted building. And something in our technology more like wills in matter, not conscious, or game or other AI. I don’t know how popular it is to be pious or humble today, but in other ways I see many parallels with Merlin.

The temperance movement was started at a time when water was (often) unsafe to drink and alcoholic drinks were consumed as a primary or near-exclusive beverage by children as well as adults, and the temperance movement was originally an effort to rein in the use of alcohol to show more *temperance*. In later forms, for some very serious reasons, the temperance movement was identified with

⁷ C.S. Lewis, “That Hideous Strength,” Internet Archive, January 1, 1970, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.207839/page/n353/mode/2up>.

people pushing for complete abstinence.⁸ I mention the temperance movement, knowing that to many the idea of a “temperance pledge” has seemed quaint and prohibition daffy, because the temperance movement has left at least one very positive lasting legacy. *Most of us, drinker or non-drinker, hydrate by consuming something non-alcoholic most of the time.* That is a wonderful thing, a tremendous legacy, especially if someone’s beverage of choice is plain old water rather than soft drinks or energy drinks, and it really is a legacy to be grateful for even among people who find the temperance movement quaint, daffy, or silly. Furthermore, I believe it would be a wonderful thing if something like that would happen with cell phones and our technologies, if people used their phones but do not default to always-on technology use even if they do not default to an always-on alcoholic hydration where the only real question is *which* alcoholic beverage one chooses to hydrate with.

I am calling in to rein in use of technology that has become increasingly addictive and exacts an increasingly heavy toll on its users. If people heed this call, other people after me may go teetotaler from phone ownership. However, I would hope that this book would say something both to people who want to rein in their addiction to certain technologies and people who will go with a Ralph Nader’s *Unsafe at Any Speed*⁹ approach and take a temperance pledge.

As always, ask your priest

For the concerns addressed in this book, an Orthodox father confessor can be your best friend, and I

⁸ “Temperance Movement,” Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, September 9, 2022), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temperance_movement.

⁹ Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed. the Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile. (Updated.)* (Toronto, etc.: Bantam Books, 1973).

would ask your priest if he is willing to help you untangle yourself from technologies. (If he is not, I would seriously consider engaging a counselor.) A second pair of eyes can be quite helpful, and a priest can offer a very helpful second set of eyes.

In the spiritual life, including freeing yourself from domination by technologies, it is easy to make big, bold moves, and drastically overcommit, then find you've bitten off more than you can chew, and then give up, overwhelmed. The rule for many things in the pastoral life is to start small and build up slowly but steadily.

"Comfort zone" has become a cliché, but I would suggest a slightly broader picture: your *comfort zone*, which does not make immediate progress, your *stretch zone*, where you are being stretched outside of your comfort zone but the challenge can be highly productive, and your *panic zone*, where it is simply too much and you are in an unproductive panic. The ideal I would posit here is to alternate between being in your comfort zone and your stretch zone, ideally under pastorally experienced guidance.

A word about confession

My abbot has told me a couple of times, if I am being assailed by thoughts, "[Just go to] *confession*." I obeyed, the first two times simply following instruction without realizing, or searching for, a reason behind a clear command.

I realized much to my surprise that when I brought that to confession, I was freed and felt a tremendous peace.

Advice that I heard prior to entering a monastery,

and that has been approved to keep in a monastery, is that when I am being assailed by thoughts of escape, pray through it, pray hard, though it seems tough and without hope and eventually help and grace will come, and the feeling when that demon has been vanquished is delightful.

I'm not interested in dealing with guilt, but I am interested in something that will help Orthodox give better and more liberating confessions, and be more relieved and joyful when they have born the shame of showing their wounds to the Great Physician who receives all our confessions.

If you read this and something in this is convicting, I invite you to write it down and defeat it at your next confession.

I have added questions for discussion, study and self-examination. *I would encourage you to take advantage of them*, and pray that they might be part of how you grow spiritually.

A note about the author

Brother Christos Hayward is a novice at St. Demetrios Monastery and holds master's degrees bridging mathematics and computers (UIUC), and theology and philosophy (Cambridge).

Introduction to “The Big Picture: Unpacking Some of the Sermon on the Mount”

In Orthodox theology, everything is connected to everything else. The entire Orthodox way has bearing on what subsequent works in this collection will zoom in on: technologies and how we can respond to them.

The Sermon on the Mount¹⁰ is the crown jewel of the Lord’s teaching in the Gospels, and this work looks at an extended passage from the Sermon on the Mount,¹¹ as well as the life of a saint in which these principles were followed completely. Also discussed are some of the big questions, and a suggestion of what motivates this collection, namely the study of what is good for the human race as relates to technology.

¹⁰ Matthew 5-7.

¹¹ Matthew 5-7.

The Big Picture: Unpacking Some of the Sermon on the Mount¹²

The Sermon on the Mount

In an important portion of the Sermon on the Mount, we read a passage starting with the most Luddite statement the author has ever seen, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth...”:¹³

Trusting God wholly

¹⁹ “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth

¹² Matthew 5-7.

¹³ Matthew 6:19-34, Classic Orthodox Bible

corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: ²¹ for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. ²² The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. ²³ But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴ No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Trusting God for basic needs

²⁵ “Therefore I say unto you, Do not worry about your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than food, and the body than garments? ²⁶ Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ²⁷ Do you think you can add one single hour to your life by worrying? You might as well try to worry yourself into being a foot taller!

²⁸ “And why do you worry for garments? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹ and yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast

into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

³¹ “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or, ‘What shall we drink?’ or, ‘Wherewithal shall we be clothed?’ ³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. ³³ But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ³⁴ Do not worry about the morrow: for the morrow has enough worries of its own.

“If therefore thine eye be single:”¹⁴ other translations have “healthy,”¹⁵ “sound,”¹⁶ or “clear,”¹⁷ and “single” certainly means “sound” or “healthy,” but I submit that “single” is a better translation. The whole passage is against having a divided eye, of trying to keep one eye on things divine and the other eye on chasing after wealth.

Furthermore, the question of whether your eye is “*single*” has a great added poignancy for our age.

At the time the Sermon on the Mount was originally delivered, available wealth could be family, slaves, animals, and precious metals. I do not wish to condone slavery, and I acknowledge that the lot of African-American field slaves was particularly brutal, but when the Prodigal Son was described as making a rehearsed speech and asked to be as one of his father’s hired servants, at that time, in that place,

¹⁴ Matthew 6:22, Classic Orthodox Bible, following KJV.

¹⁵ NLT, NIV, ESV, NSRVUE.

¹⁶ NABRE, RSV.

¹⁷ NASB.

he was requesting a status less privileged than a slave. (Hired servants could be dismissed in an instant.) In Christ's day, and in the day when the Mosaic Law was given, the tendencies towards animal sacrifices were under economic conditions when a primary form of wealth one could own was livestock.

Such property as we have today includes a cornucopia of technologies, and they offer an incredible danger of shattering our attention.

Christ wanted our eye to be single, meaning not divided between God and money. Now we have shattered our attention into a million broken fragments, and phones have much to do with it.

We are seeking mindfulness from the East because we have rejected it in the West. Now the West has not traditionally talked about mindfulness as such, but part of manners has been paying undivided attention to the person you are with. This is in essence the same as Buddhist mindfulness. Now the two are framed differently; in Buddhism, Right Mindfulness is part of the Eightfold Noble Way, one of eight interlocking cardinal virtues, while in the West it has not been described as a virtue but it is something big in manners. I am not interested in convincing people one way or another that mindfulness is a virtue or mindfulness is a major aspect of manners, although I would like readers to see how people could see both possibilities.

Never mind that an Apple Watch by default interrupts the owner at intervals to do deep breathing for mindfulness. Smartphones are designed and sold as a portable "avoid spiritual work" system, and engagement with a phone offers an alternative to mindfulness and a way

to shatter attention. The problem may be exacerbated when children learn to draw out uninterrupted special effects from a phone and leave the onlooker with an impression that he is eavesdropping on an LSD trip.

I remember one conversation I had with a good friend, where he asked me for help with his printer, and after failing to resolve the issue myself, with his consent I called my brother, who worked at a (well-treated internal) help desk, for hardware advice. Everything about that phone call was above board, but I noticed that I was speaking to my friend apologetically about making a cell phone call, as basically rude behavior, even though we both knew I was trying to make a step towards helping him with something he about which he asked me for help.

Fast forward to a few years where my brother was talking with one of his best friends, and my brother wanted to play chess with him, and so had pulled up the rules of chess on Wikipedia. I noticed that my brother was repeatedly telling his friend, “Phone goes away,” because his friend kept out pulling out his phone and playing around while my brother was speaking to him about the rules of chess.

However, let us return to the Sermon on the Mount,¹⁸ because there is another major point I’d like to address. It hinges on the life of St. Philaret the Merciful of Asia Minor, to whom I have written, in a not-yet-approved akathist:¹⁹

To thee, O camel who passed through the eye

¹⁸ Matthew 5-7.

¹⁹ C.J.S. Hayward, “Akathist to St. Philaret The Merciful,” CJS Hayward, April 23, 2021, <https://cjs Hayward.com/philaret/>.

of the needle, we offer thanks and praise: for thou gavest of thy wealth to the poor, as an offering to Christ. Christ God received thy gift as a loan, repaying thee exorbitantly, in this transient life and in Heaven. Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

The life of St. Philaret reads:²⁰

Righteous Philaret the Merciful, son of George and Anna, was raised in piety and the fear of God. He lived during the eighth century in the village of Amnia in the Paphlagonian district of Asia Minor. His wife, Theoseba, was from a rich and illustrious family, and they had three children: a son John, and daughters Hypatia and Evanthia.

Philaret was a rich and illustrious dignitary, but he did not hoard his wealth. Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about the dread Last Judgment and about "these least ones" (Mt. 25:40); the Apostle Paul's reminder that we will take nothing with us from this world (1 Tim 6:7); and the assertion of King David that the righteous would not be forsaken (Ps 36/37:25). Philaret, whose name means "lover

²⁰ "Righteous Philaret the Merciful of Amnia in Asia Minor," Orthodox Church in America, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2022/12/01/103453-righteous-philaret-the-merciful-of-amnia-in-asia-minor>.

of virtue,” was famed for his love for the poor.

One day Ishmaelites [Arabs] attacked Paphlagonia, devastating the land and plundering the estate of Philaret. There remained only two oxen, a donkey, a cow with her calf, some beehives, and the house. But he also shared them with the poor. His wife reproached him for being heartless and unconcerned for his own family. Mildly, yet firmly he endured the reproaches of his wife and the jeers of his children. “I have hidden away riches and treasure,” he told his family, “so much that it would be enough for you to feed and clothe yourselves, even if you lived a hundred years without working.”

The saint’s gifts always brought good to the recipient. Whoever received anything from him found that the gift would multiply, and that person would become rich. Knowing this, a certain man came to Saint Philaret asking for a calf so that he could start a herd. The cow missed its calf and began to bellow. Theoseba said to her husband, “You have no pity on us, you merciless man, but don’t you feel sorry for the cow? You have separated her from her calf.” The saint praised his wife, and agreed that it was not right to separate the cow and the calf. Therefore, he called the poor man to whom he had given the calf and told him to take the cow as well.

That year there was a famine, so Saint Philaret took the donkey and went to borrow

six bushels of wheat from a friend of his. When he returned home, a poor man asked him for a little wheat, so he told his wife to give the man a bushel. Theoseba said, "First you must give a bushel to each of us in the family, then you can give away the rest as you choose." Philaretos then gave the man two bushels of wheat. Theoseba said sarcastically, "Give him half the load so you can share it." The saint measured out a third bushel and gave it to the man. Then Theoseba said, "Why don't you give him the bag, too, so he can carry it?" He gave him the bag. The exasperated wife said, "Just to spite me, why not give him all the wheat." Saint Philaret did so.

Now the man was unable to lift the six bushels of wheat, so Theoseba told her husband to give him the donkey so he could carry the wheat home. Blessing his wife, Philaret gave the donkey to the man, who went home rejoicing. Theoseba and the children wept because they were hungry.

The Lord rewarded Philaret for his generosity: when the last measure of wheat was given away, an old friend sent him forty bushels. Theoseba kept most of the wheat for herself and the children, and the saint gave away his share to the poor and had nothing left. When his wife and children were eating, he would go to them and they gave him some food. Theoseba grumbled saying, "How long

are you going to keep that treasure of yours hidden? Take it out so we can buy food with it.”

During this time the Byzantine empress Irene (797-802) was seeking a bride for her son, the future emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos (780-797). Therefore, emissaries were sent throughout all the Empire to find a suitable girl, and the envoys came to Amneia.

When Philaret and Theoseba learned that these most illustrious guests were to visit their house, Philaret was very happy, but Theoseba was sad, for they did not have enough food. But Philaret told his wife to light the fire and to decorate their home. Their neighbors, knowing that imperial envoys were expected, brought everything required for a rich feast.

The envoys were impressed by the saint's daughters and granddaughters. Seeing their beauty, their deportment, their clothing, and their admirable qualities, the envoys agreed that Philaret's granddaughter, Maria was exactly what they were looking for. This Maria exceeded all her rivals in quality and modesty and indeed became Constantine's wife, and the emperor rewarded Philaret.

Thus fame and riches returned to Philaret. But just as before, this holy lover of the poor generously distributed alms and provided a feast for the poor. He and his

family served them at the meal. Everyone was astonished at his humility and said: “This is a man of God, a true disciple of Christ.”

He ordered a servant to take three bags and fill one with gold, one with silver, and one with copper coins. When a beggar approached, Philaret ordered his servant to bring forth one of the bags, whichever God’s providence would ordain. Then he would reach into the bag and give to each person, as much as God willed.

Saint Philaret refused to wear fine clothes, nor would he accept any imperial rank. He said it was enough for him to be called the grandfather of the Empress. The saint reached ninety years of age and knew his end was approaching. He went to the Rodolpheia (“The Judgment”) monastery in Constantinople. He gave some gold to the Abbess and asked her to allow him to be buried there, saying that he would depart this life in ten days.

He returned home and became ill. On the tenth day he summoned his family, he exhorted them to imitate his love for the poor if they desired salvation. Then he fell asleep in the Lord. He died in the year 792 and was buried in the Rodolpheia Judgment monastery in Constantinople.

The appearance of a miracle after his death confirmed the sainthood of Righteous Philaret. As they bore the body of the saint to

the cemetery, a certain man, possessed by the devil, followed the funeral procession and tried to overturn the coffin. When they reached the grave, the devil threw the man down on the ground and went out of him. Many other miracles and healings also took place at the grave of the saint.

After the death of the righteous Philaret, his wife Theoseba worked at restoring monasteries and churches devastated during a barbarian invasion.

Quite simply, St. Philaret's life offers a practical exegesis of what the Sermon on the Mount says about wealth. It's not just that in a perfect world we could follow the Sermon on the Mount; the Sermon on the Mount's admonition not to borrow trouble from tomorrow because "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"²¹ are entirely practical advice for this world. St. Philaret banked on the practical truth of what the Sermon on the Mount said.

One questionable detail in a life I have read guesses that the layman St. Philaret must have been clairvoyant because he seemingly expected a friend to send forty bushels of wheat. To the contrary, I suggest that St. Philaret's life does not show evidence of clairvoyance, and one point is more strongly made on the assumption that St. Philaret was then *not* acting on clairvoyance, just plain ol' trust in the Lord and the Lord's promises.

St. Philaret gave his last ounce of wheat, not necessarily because he directly knew that an old friend's sending forty bushels of wheat was just around the corner,

²¹ Matthew 7:1, Classic Orthodox Bible.

but because he trusted everything the Sermon on the Mount says about wealth and generosity. He never seemed to believe that God would desert someone who banked on the applicability of the Sermon on the Mount.²² His eye was single and fixed on God, and God knew that he needed food. His treasure hidden away was not gold or silver, but virtue which he loved which is what “treasure in Heaven” really meant, and he was never let down after following the Sermon on the Mount.²³

²² Matthew 5-7.

²³ Matthew 5-7.

Questions for self-examination, study, and discussion regarding “The Big Picture: The Sermon on the Mount:”

1. Do you like the quoted text from the Sermon on the Mount?²⁴
2. What in the Sermon on the Mount²⁵ now challenges you?

²⁴Matthew 5-7. C.S. Lewis wrote, “As to ‘caring for’ the Sermon on the Mount, if ‘caring for’ here means ‘liking’ or enjoying, I suppose no one ‘cares for’ it. Who can *like* being knocked flat on his face by a sledgehammer? I can hardly imagine a more deadly spiritual condition than that of the man who can read that passage with tranquil pleasure. This is indeed to be ‘at ease in Zion’ (Amos 6:1).” in *God in the Dock*, p. 182.

²⁵ Matthew 5-7.

3. What in the life of St. Philaret challenges you?
4. Where are you tempted to try to keep one eye on God and one eye on Mammon?
5. Is there one thing material that you could give up, perhaps for a season, in this dance of joy we are all summoned to?
6. Has God provided for you in the past? If so, what has He done to come through for you?
7. Do you see some areas where you might grow here?

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

Fr. Tom Hopko created a priceless “55 Maxims for the Christian Life”²⁶ 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 much less concise than 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 attention to addictive cell phones.

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>.

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.)

- 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*.²⁷
- 12 Read *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*²⁸ or this book, 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/>)²⁹ and advice for how to take control (<https://www.HumaneTech.com/take-control>),³⁰ but do not limit yourself to that.

²⁷ 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).

²⁸ C.J.S Hayward, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* (Wheaton, IL: CJS Hayward Publications, 2014).

²⁹ "Catalyze a More Humane Future." Center for Humane Technology. Accessed September 14, 2022. <https://humanetech.com/>.

³⁰ "Catalyze a More Humane Future." Center for Humane Technology. Accessed September 14, 2022. <https://humanetech.com/>.

- 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 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 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.”³¹
- 32 When you want to go shopping like some feel-good 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

³¹ Richard J. Foster, *In Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth: Special Anniversary Edition Featuring Two New Essays*, Hodder and Stoughton 2008, 90.

secular religion. (But if you need help, “Get help, without fear or shame.”³²)

- 34 Write snailmail letters, preferably with your own handwriting.
- 35 Recognize that from the Devil’s perspective, “The Internet is for porn”³³—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 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.

³² 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.

³³ “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>.

- 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.³⁴
- 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.
- 47 Cultivate connection with nature.
- 48 Drop your phone and drive.³⁵

³⁴ 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>.

³⁵ 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."

- 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.
- 55 Read, and live, Fr. Tom Hopko's 55 Maxims.³⁶

³⁶ 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>.

Questions for self-examination, study, and discussion regarding “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.”³⁷ 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.”³⁸ What is a modest goal you might reach in one year? What might you achieve in ten years?

³⁷ 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/>.

³⁸ Richard J. Foster, *In Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth: Special Anniversary Edition Featuring Two New Essays*, n.d, 107.

Introduction to “*The Silicon Rule*”

One kind of ethical gem 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

I have stated, in “A Guide to Technology’s Hidden Price Tags”, later in this collection, a lot of theory and analysis. I would like now to give some of what I practice myself.

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 had 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,*”³⁹ 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 many situations.

Additionally, I would like to provide another rule.

³⁹ Classic paraphrase of Matthew 7:12.

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:⁴⁰

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 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

⁴⁰ 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).

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!”⁴¹ In the Orthodox

⁴¹ “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

Church's Greek Bible,⁴² 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 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, and the basis for our interactions, above the assumed life in the Church and frequent reception of sacraments, is the 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 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",⁴³ and I really don't think I'm losing out by not being involved in

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)."

⁴² Genesis 1:27 LXX.

⁴³ Robert A. Heinlein, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (New York: Ace, 2018), 185.

them. Television has over the years 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*⁴⁴ examines artificial unusuality,⁴⁵ 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 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

⁴⁴ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).

⁴⁵ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), chapter XV, 299-322.

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.⁴⁶ 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. 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."⁴⁷ 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 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

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ 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.

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 Buy 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 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 well⁴⁸. However, a real, live encounter with an 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.

⁴⁸ 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).

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 phone

Popes and patriarchs, 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, and 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.

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.

Questions for self-examination, study, and discussion 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 “How Can I Take my Life Back from my Phone?”

This title chapter represents the knot in which the whole rest of the book comes together, and is intended to pack the biggest punch for what you can do regarding phones specifically.

Some have said that people don't buy books; they buy chapters. If you have purchased this book for one chapter, this is probably the chapter you purchased it for.

That stated, this chapter is interconnected with all the rest of the text, and it is intended to be the sharp tip of a solid spear.

It is also intended to have the most relevant low-hanging fruit for people seeking to be freed from the tyranny of life where our phones have turned the tables on us and we are working for our phones.

How Can I Take my Life Back from my Phone?

“Is there someplace in the world that does not have Internet?”

—A prolific poster on Twitter

The *Silicon Rule*

In *The Silicon Rule*, I suggested that a good rule of thumb is to ask, “What do Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children?” Steve Jobs, for instance, did not have a nerd’s paradise for his kids. He had walls with big bookshelves and animated discussions. His children had not seen an iPad when it first entered the limelight. Employees of technology company chose what might seem some remarkably strict rules, because they didn’t buy into the mystique of hot gadgets. They knew better.

In *Bridge to Terebithia*, the author introduced Leslie as privileged with a capital P. The biggest cue of her Privilege is quite possibly *not* that money is not the issue, but that her family Does Not Own a Television. Today that

character might also be introduced as not having a smartphone, for several reasons.

People know on several levels that Facebook and smartphones suck the life out of their users. That's old news. This page is about an alternative.

How I tamed my iPhone

I have what might be called a Holy Grail of iPhone usage. I carry my iPhone, but I rule it, and it does not rule me. It is often at hand, but I have domineered it well enough that I don't compulsively check it. I get almost all of the practical benefits with none of the hidden price tags.

How?

Prequel: How I tamed television

Before I became strictly an iPhone user, I was a slightly relaxed television non-user. I grew up with limited television, one hour per day during the schoolyear and two hours during summer vacation. I read Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*⁴⁹ and the more book-like Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*,⁵⁰ and also books like Stephen Covey's *First Things First*.⁵¹ I slowly

⁴⁹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness* (London: Methuen, 2007).

⁵⁰ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).

⁵¹ Stephen R. Covey, Merrill A. Roger, and Rebecca Merrill, *First Things First* (Simon & Schuster, 2017).

checked out the rest of the way from television. As an older child and later a young man, I had the vibrancy one associates with an unhindered imagination, often finding the days before television, or something that as might as well be the days before television.

One thinks of a Far Side cartoon with a caption of “In the days before television,” and shows a family gathered together and all huddled around a blank spot on the wall where one would expect a television. The irony of the Far Side cartoon is that time before television sucked the life out of everything was much more vibrant, not a family huddled around a vacant spot by a wall.

Prequel: Weston A. Price diet

I’m not specifically interested in converting people to Western A. Price or Paleo diets beyond saying that it is my opinion that your body’s engine merits pure premium fuel, but I wanted to comment on something very specific about *Nourishing Traditions*. As one friend pointed out, some of the ways food is produced are really gross; most vegetable oils besides olive, avocado, and coconut oils have to be extracted under conditions that goes rancid immediately, like popped popcorn, and are then made yellow and clear and not smelling bad by chemical wizardry, or the artificial phenomenon of getting four gallons of milk from a cow per day and then manipulations to make 2% milk (“No significant difference has been shown between milk derived from rbST-treated and non-rbST-treated cows except for the additional ingredients of blood and pus.”). It overall builds a sense of “This is really gross and unfit for human

consumption,” and that’s good.

It is worth your while to read books about how, for instance, standard smartphone use is reprogramming our brains to be bowls of tapioca. I gave, and meant, five stars to Jean-Claude Larchet’s *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*. My own title in the same vein is *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*.

Now on to my iPhone

I check my iPhone at intervals: once per hour, or perhaps once per day. That breaks the spine of constant checking, at least eventually. My phone has three games, all of them for my little nephews, and I’ve come to dodge showing them games on my smartphone, because when I show them a real, physical toy, they can wait turns and share, while smartphone games are addictive enough that when I take out my phone and let them play with it, squabbles consistently follow. In good spirit, when they wanted to play pinball games on my phone, I deleted the pinball game and then made a crude pinball machine out of some leftover wood, nails, rubber bands, large ball bearings, and a plastic pipe. They were initially disappointed, but when they had some time to play with it, they began to be imaginative in a way I have never seen with a smartphone video game.

Returning to my smartphone, I use it for utilitarian purposes, including making bottom-liner use of Facebook and Twitter. Bottom-liner use of Facebook can be constructed, but having it fill the hours is depressing to

anyone.

Specific suggestions for iPhone and Android smartphones

On this point I would say that there are few things you must do, but many things you might do. Probably the single best advice I know is to work with an Orthodox priest who is comfortable freeing you from your chains to technology. Good advice is to make a small change to start, and then slowly but steadily build up until what you have in place is working for you.

I would also underscore that these are suggestions, that some people have found helpful. I do not use all the rules others have found helpful, and I've found benefit in getting stricter with myself as time has passed. However, you don't owe a duty to make all of these your own.

- **Learn from Humane Tech**
(<https://humanetech.com/>).⁵² Humane Tech is a movement to mitigate some of turning people's brains to tapioca, and it is well worth attending. I don't believe they go far enough; I believe that Orthodox asceticism and fasting provide a good backbone, but knowing which apps make you happy and which apps make you sad is at very least a good start.
- **Make a conscious adult decision about**

⁵² "Catalyze a More Humane Future," Center for Humane Technology, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://humanetech.com/>.

what you carry. I would recommend choosing between three primary options:

- **Keep a smartphone, but be sure that you are the one in charge.** This is the option I go with, but only after not carrying a cell phone when they were becoming common, and have less plugged-in days of only checking email once per day. I do more frequent usage, and think that checking it once per hour is also a good baseline, but I only check things more frequently when I have a specific logistical reason. The strongest reason for this may be less the inner logic of dominating your technology, than smartphones being socially mandated.
- **Don't carry a smartphone.** Kings, emperors, popes and patriarchs before the twentieth century lived in great luxury without having any kind of phone access, ever. They weren't deprived. You most likely don't need it.
- **Carry alternate gear.** What about, instead of carrying a smartphone, you carry a standalone GPS, an old-school handset that only does talk and text with a numeric keypad, a paper planner or a small paper pad for your scheduling, todo, and scratchpad use, and

maybe a book or Kindle? That sounds like a lot, but it fits nicely, with room to spare, in my favorite messenger bag. Admittedly these things are not the same convergence device, but it really may be possible to carry everything you want without difficulty. And by the way, their not including social media isn't a defect; it's a feature.

- **Read *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul, and The Luddite's Guide to Technology*.** Pay close attention to the rules in *The New Media Epidemic* as taken from Silicon Valley tech Moms and Dads. Chapter 13 is rich in practical application, mentions a #1 rule of “no phones in bedrooms ever,” and “Alex Constantinople... said her youngest son, who is 5, is never allowed to use gadgets during the week, and her older children, 10 to 13, are only allowed 30 minutes a day on school nights.”⁵³ Not an absolutely different rule from what my parents had for me. Other aspects covered include having the network's router shut off outside of a certain window of time.
- **Take an attitude of “All things are lawful**

⁵³ 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

for me,”—*maybe*, but all things are not expedient: “all things are lawful for me,”—*maybe*, but all things edify not.” We are tempted to try to get the most use out of our investment, when a better use might be more sparing. As far as TV goes, I have sought out to see one Simpsons episode in the past five or so years. Somewhere along the way, I stopped seeing as much television as I was allowed. Don’t use as much as you will let yourself use, and recognize that the most beneficial uses are sometimes the ones with the lightest touch. A smartphone in “Do Not Disturb” mode is just as much capable of calling 911 in a bad situation as any other cell phone.

- **Have an attitude of having a life outside of online activity.** When I grew up, I was taught to cast a line with a fishing rod. I didn’t end up catching much of anything, but my father taught me the basics, face-to-face, with a genuine fishing rod. Young people today are far more likely to learn to cast a line with the accelerometer on a smartphone, and that was a deprivation. I did my studies through travelling to campuses face-to-face even if I used email as well. This is a human baseline that is a survival from the Middle Ages, for that matter a survival from the animal world where young wolves are not handed tools necessarily but are taught how to interact with their environment to hunt, face-to-face with other

wolves. And I would suggest that traveling to a college campus and also using some email is a pretty good baseline for technology use. And in relation to this, we have:

- **Take up a hobby and give smartphones some competition.** It can be hard to just pull back from habitual technology use. It is somewhat easier, even if it is not really easy, to pull back from the draw of technology and engage in something else, such as candle making. Having a constructive hobby can be very helpful as something else to do instead. (I have a simple hobby recommendation engine at <https://cjshayward.com/hobby/>.⁵⁴ It might be helpful to you.)
- **Use your phone for a purpose, and never to treat boredom.** A practice of reaching for your phone when you need it to do something, and not much else, can be great. Your phone can be genuinely nice when you use it to contact an acquaintance by any means, or to order a pair of shoes. It's a trap when you use it to just pass time or make boredom easier to deal with. The most miserable use of Facebook, for instance, is when you're always on.

⁵⁴ C.J.S. Hayward, "Help Me Find a Hobby!," CJS Hayward, November 6, 2019, <https://cjshayward.com/hobby/>.

- **Use older technologies, including older space-conquering technologies, and fast from technologies.** Fasting from technologies is explored in “A Guide to Technology’s Hidden Price Tags,” and while it may not be possible, there are times where you can make a phone call instead of sending an email, or drive to see someone face-to-face instead of making a phone call. (Maybe call, email, or text to make an appointment for a face-to-face visit first, though.) In general, using older space-conquering technologies instead of newer space-conquering technologies can uncover a forgotten richness. Some have had days of no electricity. A Lead Pencil Society day here and there can produce just a little freedom, or even just write a single hand-written, lead-pencil letter to a loved one, or perhaps buy a single, paper book instead of an ebook.
- **Treat porn as a real danger, and get help whenever you need it.** Porn is the disenchantment of the entire universe; it is our day’s biggest attack on men; it is preparation for committing rape. Take things to a father confessor; use a support group; use **XXXchurch.com**.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Carl Thomas, Anna Waters, and Andrew J. Bauman, “XXXchurch: Helping People Break Free of Porn Addiction,” XXXchurch.com, September 8, 2022, <https://xxxchurch.com/>.

- **Don't look at your phone as a treasure from a magic world.** A phone can feel exotic until you're already hooked, but I think of people in the second world where a smartphone may seem a relic from the wonderland of the first world. In fact the U.S. may have more seeking of escape than Uganda. In fact material treasure may be found much more easily in the U.S.—and with it spiritual poverty. I believe that smartphones have uses, but as an experience they are not really helpful if you're an American, and not really helpful if you're a Ugandan friend. There are uses, and you can do things, like read ebooks for instance, which are really sweet. However, being sucked into a phone is not really a helpful way of using it. On those grounds I would advise friends both in the U.S. and Uganda to use phones, maybe, but know that God has placed people around you, and a person is infinitely better than a smartphone. Enjoy the real treasures!

All of this may seem like a lot, but it is very simple at heart:

Start walking on the path and put one foot in front of the other.

That is all you need.

Questions for self-examination, study, and discussion regarding “How Can I Take My Life Back from my Phone:”

1. What would you most like to change about your cell phone use?
2. What can you do to act on that desire?
3. What would be the benefits to you to achieve greater mastery over your cell phone use?
4. What positives does your phone use give to your life?
5. What negatives does your phone use give to your life?
6. What new things have you learned about how to achieve freedom from your phone?

7. What did you already know that would be helpful?
8. How can you combine this article with what you know to work together?
9. What would you like to get rid of today?

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

This work may be distinctive in that its point is not to have a good *last word* on a question, but an attempt to offer a good *first word* on a question about what basic rules will allow us to use the genuine good parts of technology while insulating us from its more negative aspects.

It is an attempt to painstakingly, meticulously, deeply *frame* a deep enough question which had not been so clearly framed when it was written, and *ask* that question of those with pastoral authority, as well as suggesting an initial trajectory.

The highest praise that might be offered to “Social Antibodies’ Needed” is that it may be the first article of its type worth criticizing.

“Social Antibodies” Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy

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

Let me cite the article in full:⁵⁶

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

I recently violated a longstanding
position I have held; to avoid all further
interaction with social media, particularly
Facebook. It wasn’t because of any moral high

⁵⁶⁵⁶ Vince Homan, used by very gracious permission, in his periodic newsletter, 2014.

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

At a recent continuing education event I attended, the speaker presented some dire consequences to uninhibited use of social media. He reported that social media had replaced money as the number one contributor to marriage problems. He said it wasn't so much affairs that online relationships led to; rather it was the persistent flirting that broke down barriers and hedges, which once protected the

marriage. Such interaction often led to a downward spiral, corrupting and compromising the marriage vow. One in five divorces involves the social networking site Facebook, according to a new survey by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. A staggering 80% of divorce lawyers have also reported a spike in the number of cases that use social media for evidence of cheating, with Facebook by far the biggest offender. Flirty messages and and photographs found on Facebook are increasingly being cited as proof of unreasonable behavior or irreconcilable differences. Many cases revolve around social media users who get back in touch with old flames they hadn't heard from in many years.

PBS recently hosted a webinar, *This Emotional Life*, about the internet's impact on relationship and marriage.⁵⁷ One of the panelists, Theresa Bochard, explored the issue a bit farther in an article originally published on PsychCentral.com. She said that after reading hundreds of comments and emails from people who have been involved in online relationships or emotional affairs as well as the responses on several discussion boards, she concluded that while the internet and social media can foster intimacy in a marriage, it seems to do more harm than good. She reported that an astounding 90% of opposite-

⁵⁷ <http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/blogs/does-internet-promote-or-damage-marriage> [footnote original].

sex online relationships were damaging to the marriage. Facebook affairs are threatening healthy couples too.

“I have suggested to myself to write a thank you note to the inventors of Facebook and Myspace because they have been responsible for a significant percentage of my income,” says marriage counselor Dr. Dennis Boike. He’s not kidding. “I’m having people say I never would have expected me to do this. It’s in the privacy of my computer. I’m not going out anywhere, I’m not dressing for it, I’m not smelling of another’s perfume. There are no tell-tale signs except my computer record.” But a new study suggests Facebook can also help disconnect you from your better half. The site, which boasts more than 350 million active users, is mentioned in over 20% of divorce petitions, according to Divorce-Online.

Prominent Houston divorce attorney Bucky Allshouse can understand why. “It’s really kind of shocking what people put on Facebook,” says Allshouse. Perhaps it’s not so shocking that the social networking site can essentially pour kerosene on “old flames.” Most online relationships start out benign: an email from a person you knew in college, friending an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend on Facebook (as suggested by Facebook: “people you might know”), getting to know a co-worker or acquaintance better online. But the

relationship can take a dangerous turn very quickly if you're not careful and even more easily if you are doing most of the talking behind a computer.

We have no non-verbals with which to interpret people's conversation when we communicate online. What we say can be misinterpreted and come off in a way we don't intend. Or worse, we purposely allow our conversation to drift into an unhealthy area, where we put out "feelers" to see if the person we are communicating with will do the same. We will text things to people that would make us blush if we said them in person. All too often the end result is flirting, compromising our values, and allowing the secrecy of social media to sweep us off our feet and into a quagmire of social dysfunction. This is not a victimless choice. Many times, inappropriate conversations through social media lead to great pain with children, spouses, parents, and friends.

One such instance occurred when Jonathan found Sharon on Facebook, 20 years after he dumped her one week after their high school prom. She had never married, while he had and was also the father of two teenagers. During months of emailing and texting, Sharon proved a sympathetic listener to his sense of isolation and loneliness within his own marriage. He found they could talk easily, picking up with the friendship they had had

years before. They shared feelings they had never shared with others. After a few months, they decided to cross a few states and meet half way. Then, they talked of marriage. Shortly after, Jonathan went through with his divorce and months later he and Sharon married. Not surprisingly, and after only four months, they divorced. What happened? Fantasy was hit hard by reality. They went into a marriage without really spending time to know each other as they are today. Their romance was fueled by their history (as 18-year-olds) not their adult present. The romantic idea of reconnecting with an old lover, at a time Jonathan was unhappy in his marriage, was a recipe for danger.

In talking about it later, Jonathan realized he had not intended to start up a romance; he hadn't intended to leave his marriage in the first place. As he and Sharon shared feelings, he felt more cared for by her than by his wife. When asked who raised the issue of marriage, he wasn't sure. "Perhaps she pushed it, but I may have been just been musing something like, 'Wouldn't it have been great if we got married,' and that led her to talk about marriage. I wonder if I led her on. Did I promise more than I had realized and then feel in love with my own fantasy?"⁵⁸

When we cross barriers that were

⁵⁸⁵⁸ <http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903>

[footnote original]

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

Christians must be wary of intimate conversations with people of the opposite sex; it is a trap that too many good people have been caught in. Paul wrote: “We are casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). It is good advice; cast down imaginations ... take every thought captive, because it is often out of our imaginations and thoughts that bad choices are born. Jesus said something similar. Speaking to the disciples he warned, “But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (Matthew 15:18-19). The battleground is not the computer or cell phone; it is the heart and the mind. But secretive messaging avenues like social media

offers can help plant the seed for a battle that good people lose every day.

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

1. Be clear about your agenda in contacting the other person.
2. Limit the frequency of your time online. This sets a good boundary around the social networking contact.
3. Don't talk intimately. By not sharing intimacies with your correspondence, you reduce the chance of sending a message that you want a more intimate relationship.
4. Let your spouse know with whom you are contacting. This openness makes it clear you have nothing to hide. (I would add, especially so if you are contacting a person of the opposite sex).⁵⁹
5. Share your outgoing and received emails/texts with your spouse. Sharing communications removes any chance for jealousy or misunderstandings (I would add, share passwords with your spouse; give them full access to your

⁵⁹ Parenthetical mine [original footnote].

social media sites).⁶⁰

6. Do not meet in person unless your spouse is with you. Meeting up with old friends with your spouse by your side is a reminder that you two are a team and removes sending mixed messages to your former lover. This also reinforces the importance of fixing your marriage before playing with the flames of old flames.[v].⁶¹

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

⁶⁰ Parenthetical mine [footnote original].

⁶¹ <http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903> [footnote original].

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

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

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Vince

This article left me *reeling*.

In part, I wondered if my collection in *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*, was simply wrong. Or if someone might rightly say to me, “What you give in *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology* is helpful up to a point, at least for someone with a similar background to yours. However, regular people need much more concrete guidance.” What struck me very concretely about Pastor Vince’s article is that

it gave very practical advice on how married people can appropriately handle Facebook.

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

The concept of “social antibodies”: it's not just for Facebook

Paul Graham's “The Acceleration of Addictiveness”⁶² is worth reading in full. (It's also worth quoting in full, but he's asked nicely that people link to it instead of reposting, which is a fair request. So I am linking to it even though I'd prefer to reproduce the whole article.)

“The Acceleration of Addictiveness” talks about a bigger picture about things that are addictive as in casual use of the term “addictive.” Though he mentions Facebook as something that's even more addictive than television, he's clear that the big picture is more than addictive little Facebook. Graham talks about a concept of “social antibodies” which I think is incredibly useful.

Decades ago, smoking cut through the US like a hot knife through butter. But, while smoking is still dangerous

62 Paul Graham, “The Acceleration of Addictiveness,” The acceleration of addictiveness, accessed September 15, 2022, <http://www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html>.

and there still continue to be new smokers, we no longer have glamour shots of celebrities holding cigarettes in some flashy, sophisticated, classy pose. Smoking is no longer “sexy;” over the past 20 years it has been seen as seedy, and “smoker” is not exactly the kindest thing to call someone. (I remember one friend commenting that he could think of a number of terms more polite than “smoker,” none of which were appropriate to the present company.) As a society, the US has developed social antibodies to smoking now.

There are many things that we need “social antibodies” for, and we keep developing new technologies, Facebook included, that need social antibodies. The six prescriptions in the quoted articles are essentially social antibodies for how to use Facebook without jeopardizing your marriage. They may seem harsh and excessively cautious, but I submit that they are easier to go through than divorce. Much easier. A piece of cake! And I quote Pastor Vince’s article because it’s something we need more of. It was an excellent tactic.

A helpful parallel to technology: Wine as an example

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

every technology that can cause trouble. So with a respectful note about not drinking alcohol at all, I want to look at social antibodies for moderate, temperate, and appropriate use of wine.

Wine and liquor slowly increased in strength in Western Europe, slowly enough that societies had at least the chance to build social antibodies.⁶³ This makes for a marked contrast to escape through hard liquor among Native Americans, where hard liquor blew through decimated nations and peoples⁶⁴ like escape through today's street drugs would have blown through a Europe already coping with the combined effects of the bubonic plague and of barbarian invasions.⁶⁵ Perhaps there are genetic differences affecting Native Americans and alcohol. A Native American friend told me that Native American blood can't really cope with sugar, essentially unknown in Native American lands apart from some real exceptions like maple syrup. And lots of alcohol is worse than lots of sugar, even if some of us wince at the level of sugar and/or corn syrup in the main US industrial diet. (Even those of us not of Native American blood would do well to restrict our consumption of artificially concocted sugars.) However, aside from the genetic question, introducing 80 proof whiskey to societies

⁶³ Paul Graham, "The Acceleration of Addictiveness," The acceleration of addictiveness, accessed September 15, 2022, <http://www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html>.

⁶⁴ Michele Bitinis, "Indigenous People + Alcohol," Mindpath Health, August 7, 2022, <https://www.mindpath.com/resource/indigenous-people-alcohol/>. Alcohol here and elsewhere is called the top tool of colonial exploitation.

⁶⁵ Kristine B. Patterson and Thomas Runge, "Smallpox and the Native American," *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 323, no. 4 (2002): pp. 216-222, <https://doi.org/10.1097/00000441-200204000-00009>.

that did not always know how to cope with beer would have been rough enough, even if there were no genetic questions and no major external stresses on the societies. If there were something of a stereotype about Native Americans and whiskey, maybe part of that is because hard liquor that had been developed over centuries in the West appeared instantaneously, under singularly unfortunate conditions, in societies that did not always have even the social antibodies to cope with the weaker of beers.

I cite St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book Two, Chapter II: On Drinking⁶⁶ as a model for approaching alcohol (and, by extension, a serious reference point in understanding moderate use of technology), with some reservations. The translation I link to is obscure and archaic, and if you can get past that, the individual prescriptions are the sort that would only be all kept (or, for that matter, mostly kept) by the sort of people who are filled with pride that they observe ancient canons more strictly than any canonical bishop. In other words, don't try these directions at home unless you know you are in agreement with your priest or spiritual father. But the chapter of *The Instructor* on wine offers a priceless glimpse into real, live social antibodies on how to navigate dangerous waters. This is a live example of the sort of things we need. The book as a whole covers several topics, including clothing and boundaries between men and women, and they could serve as a model for pastoral literature to address the challenges offered to spiritual life today. Not specifically that online

⁶⁶ Clement Alexandria, "Orthodox Church Fathers: Patristic Christian Theology Classics Search Engine," Clement of Alexandria: The Instructor: Book II, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/anf02/anf0253.htm>.

interactions between men and women introduce an element of danger. That element of danger has always been there, and always will be there. But online interactions frame things a little differently. This means that people with social antibodies that would show appropriate caution face-to-face might not recognize that you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online, or might not intuit exactly how you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online.

Is the iPhone really that cool?

One news story reported that police officers had started using drug dealers' confiscated iPhones, and realized they were incredibly useful. And I wouldn't dispute that at all. I would say that having an iPhone is a little, but not quite, like being able to call 911, which is the most important number for you to be able to call. 99% of the time it is inappropriate and perhaps illegal to call 911, but the (less than) 1% of the time you should be calling 911, it can save your life. I use my iPhone over 1% of the time; besides built-in phone, email, notes, and looking things up on the web, and including my personal logistical dashboard, and apps like GPS, my iPhone makes me more productive, and unsexy nuts and bolts usage has been very useful. So I wouldn't agree with "Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated my iPhone"⁶⁷ that the iPhone is simply "Terrible For Productivity." It certainly can be, and unrestrained use will be. And for that matter I've seen a lot

⁶⁷ Jeff Graham, "Come with Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated My iPhone," Jeff Graham, June 26, 2014, <https://jeffgraham.myshopify.com/blogs/news/23949953-come-with-me-if-you-want-to-live-why-i-terminated-my-iphone>.

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

The LinkedIn article “Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated My iPhone”⁶⁸ talked about how one family decided to get rid of their iPhones. The author talked about how the iPhone had taken over their lives. They suggested that trying to use their habit to use the iPhone in moderation was a nonstarter, however enticing it may look. And, on a sobering note, they had earlier tried to avoid using smartphones, even for work. And I am convinced they made the right choice: not having any smartphone use is better than addictive smartphone use, hands down. And while I am cautious about advertising responsible smartphone use to people who can't live without their iPhone—the analogy drawn in the LinkedIn article was, “In hindsight, it's like an alcoholic saying ‘I thought I could have it in the house and not drink it.’” But I have iPhone use which is defensible, at least in my opinion; I have drawn a boundary that is partly tacit and partly explicit, and while it can be criticized, it is a non-addictive use of the iPhone. I average less than one text a day; I do not compulsively check anything that's out there. A few of the guidelines I found are,

⁶⁸ Jeff Graham, “Come with Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated My iPhone,” Jeff Graham, June 26, 2014, <https://jeffgraham.myshopify.com/blogs/news/23949953-come-with-me-if-you-want-to-live-why-i-terminated-my-iphone>.

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

- 2 **Limit how often you check your cell phone unprovoked.** When I'm not at work, I try to limit checking email to once per hour. Limit yourself to maybe once per hour, maybe more, maybe less, and restrain yourself. (Once per day is ideal.)

- 3 **When you are going to bed for the day, you're done using your smartphone for the day.** I am not strict in this; I will answer a call, but checking my iPhone, unprovoked, after my evening prayers or my bedtime is a no-no.

- 4 **Don't use the iPhone as a drone that you need to have always going on.** This includes music, texting, games, and apps, including Vince's hero, Facebook. Perhaps the single biggest way that this violates Apple's marketing proposition with the iPhone is that the iPhone is designed and marketed to be a drone that is always with us, a bit of ambient noise, delivering precisely what the Orthodox spiritual tradition, with works like *The Ladder*, tell us is something we don't need. The iPhone's marketing

proposition is to deliver an intravenous drip of noise. The Orthodox Church's Tradition tells us to wean ourself from noise.

- 5 **iPhones have “Do Not Disturb” mode. Use it.** And be willing to make having “Do Not Disturb” as your default way of using the phone,⁶⁹ and turn it off when you want “Please Interrupt Me” mode explicitly.

- 6 **Don't multitask if you can at all avoid it.** I remember reading one theology text which claimed as a lesson from computer science, because people can switch between several applications rapidly, that we should take this “lesson” to life and switch between several activities rapidly. And in a business world where multitasking has been considered an essential task, people are finding that multitasking is fool's gold, an ineffective way of working that introduces a significant productivity tax where people could be doing much better. Smartphones make it trivially easy to multiask. Don't, unless a situation calls for it. I note with some concern that the most I've been shocked at someone using an iPhone was when kids 12 and under were manipulating the iPhone, not to get something to done, but to activate the iPhone's smooth animations. Looking over their shoulders in shock

⁶⁹ 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.

has felt like I was eavesdropping on a (non-chemical) acid trip. Children's use of iPhones driven by slick animated transitions between applications are even more unhelpful than what the business world means by multitasking. (This feature of kids' use of iPhones has made me kind of wish iPhones were not used by people under 18.)

Now I should post this with a clarification that this is, so to speak, pastoral advice to myself. I've found the basic approach helpful, and priests and spiritual fathers may draw on it if they choose in their best judgment to take something from it, but I have not been ordained or tonsured, and I would fall back on the maxim, "As always, ask your priest." My reason to post them is to provide another reference point beyond those given to "social antibodies" in dealing with technology. With these antibodies, I hold the reins, or at least I hold the reins a little better than if I didn't have these antibodies. But I am aware of something vampiric, something that sucks out energy and life, in even my more moderate use of some technologies, and I am a little wary of comparing my use of technology to moderate and sober use of alcohol. Appropriate use of alcohol can be good, and apart from the risk of drinking getting out of control, it is an overall positive. I'm leery of claiming the same for my use of technology, even if I've tried hard to hold the reins and even if I may do better than average. There is something that has been drained from me; there is something that has been sucked out of me. Maybe I am less harmed than others: but my use of technology has harmed me. I am wary of saying now, "I've found the solution."

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

Pastoral guidance and literature needed

I visited Amazon to try to get a gauge on how much Orthodox pastoral resources about appropriate use of computers, mobile, internet, and technology were out there,

a sort of The Instructor for technology today, and my search for orthodox internet found 109 resources from Christianity, Judaism, and the occult, none of which seemed to be about “How does an Orthodox Christian negotiate the social issues surrounding computers, smartphones, tablets, the Internet, apps, and technology?” Some other searches, such as orthodox pastoral internet, orthodox pastoral smartphone, and orthodox pastoral technology turned up nothing whatsoever. A search for “orthodox technology” turned up one page of search results with... several connected works of my own. Um, thanks, I think. I guess I’m an expert, or at least a resource, and even if I didn’t want to, I should probably make myself available to Orthodox clergy, with my spiritual father and bishop foremost. But this compliment to me, if it is such, caught me quite off-guard; I was expecting to see at least some publications from people with pastoral authority and experience. But seeing as I’m the local expert, or at least a first author for this particular topic, I’ll briefly state my credentials. I have been an Orthodox Christian for a decade, so no longer a recent convert, have works on social dimensions of technology dating back as far as 1994, have two years of postgraduate theology under slightly silly conditions at Cambridge, and two more years under very silly conditions at a sort of “Monty Python Teaches Theology” PhD program (one Orthodox priest consoled me, “All of us went through that”), but did not complete the program. I grew up with computers back when my home computer access meant going to an orange and black terminal and dialing up a Dec MicroVAX on a 2400 (or less) baud modem, was on basically non-web social networks years before it became a buzzword, have worked with the

web since before it went mainstream, much of it professionally. I've been bitten by some of the traps people are fighting with now. So I guess I am, by default, a local expert, although I really think a responsible treatment of the issues raised here would see serious involvement from someone with pastoral qualifications and experience. I haven't been tonsured, at least not yet.

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

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

answered, “Truth!” Then the philosopher held the visitor under the water for a little while, and asked him the second time, “What do you want?” The visitor answered, “Truth!” Then the philosopher held the visitor under water for what seemed an interminable time, and let him up and asked, “What do you want?” The visitor gasped and said, “Air!” The philosopher said, “When you want Truth the way you want air, you will find it.”⁷⁰

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

And I would like to suggest some guidelines for fighting Internet porn, quite possibly the most commonly confessed sin among young men today. (Note upon revisiting this article a few years later: it’s not just young men; older men and some women have porn to confess too.) Sexual sins are among the most easily forgiven: but they are a deep pit. So, in the interest of providing a “dartboard” draft that’s put out for people to shoot at, I am intentionally

⁷⁰ I have heard this anecdote in speech and in homilies. It appears to be an urban legend; see Christos Hayward, “Is the ‘When You Want Truth the Way You Want Air, You Will Find It.’ Anecdote Part of Historic Philosophy, or Just an Urban Legend?,” Philosophy Stack Exchange, accessed September 17, 2022, <https://philosophy.stackexchange.com/questions/93616/is-the-when-you-want-truth-the-way-you-want-air-you-will-find-it-anecdote-pa?noredirect=1>.

saying more, rather than less, because it's easier for a pastoral conversation to select from a set of options than furnish arbitrarily more additional options. Here are several things I'd consider, both sacred and secular:

- 1 **I have heard of some helpful things being said in response to confession of sexual sin**, such as, "St. Basil said that a man in lust is like a dog licking a saw; the salt it likes tasting is the taste of its own woundedness," and so there is a vicious cycle.⁷¹

Another point is to ask a man by what activity just after viewing porn he engages in next, the masturbatory act that constitutes a final exploitation of one or more models' unhappy, defiling, violating performance. However, I have not heard of a list anywhere near this complete being given when a man confesses a very common (now) sin. Maybe parts of it could be incorporated into advice given at confession.

- 2 **"If your right eye offends you, tear it out and throw it away from you:** for it is better for you that one part of your body should die than that your whole body should be thrown into Hell." These words are not to be taken literally; if you tore out your right eye you would still be sinning with your left eye, and the Church considers that it was one of Origen's errors to castrate himself. But this is a forceful way of stating a profound truth. There is an

⁷¹ I certify that I have been told this, but I have not been able to trace a source.

incredible freedom that comes, a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light, when you want purity the way you want “Air!”, and you apply a tourniquet as high up as you need to, to experience freedom. Give your only computer power cable to a friend, for a time, because you can’t have that temptation in the house? That is really much better than the alternative. Have the local teenager turn off display of images in Chrome’s settings? That is really much better than the alternative. Webpages may look suddenly ugly, but not nearly as ugly as bondage to porn. Only check email at the library? That is really much better than the alternative. Unbundle what your cell phone now gives, ask your carrier to turn off your data plan (but keep on talk and text), and buy a standalone GPS as the one app that is really needed? Your future self deserves the sacrifice, and it is a straightforward sacrifice to make. These tourniquets may be revised in pastoral conversation, but tearing out your right eye is much more free and much less painful than forever wanting to be free from addiction to porn, but also secretly hoping to give in to the present temptation; as the Blessed Augustine prayed, “Lord, give me chastity and continency, but not yet.”⁷² There is a great deal of power in wanting purity now, and once you go slash-and-burn, the power is amazing.

3 Install content-control software, and have

⁷² Bl. Augustine, *Confessions*, 7:17, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers at <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/npnf101/npnf1025.htm>.

things set up so that only the woman of the house knows the password to make exceptions. There are legitimate needs for exceptions, and I remember being annoyed when I went to customize Ubuntu Christian Edition and finding that a site with all sorts of software to customize the appearance of Ubuntu was blocked, apparently because of a small sliver of soft porn in the wallpaper section of a truly massive site. There will be legitimate exceptions, but it cuts through a lot of self-deception if you get the exception by asking your wife.

- 4 **Don't bother trying to find out how to disable ~~porn mode~~ "Incognito Mode" on your browser;** set up a router to log who visits what websites. However much browser makers may tout themselves as being all for empowerment and freedom, they have refused to allow men who want freedom from porn and parents who care for their children asking for a way to shut off porn mode.⁷³ (Even if you found a pre-porn-mode browser version, it would place you at incredible information security risk, and not only because your browser is the #1 way to attack your computer.) But there is something else you should know. Routers exist that can log who visits what when, and if you know someone who is good with computers (or you can use paid technical

⁷³ A search on Firefox add-ons for "turn off porn mode" returns two results, both of which are themes and not, so far as I can tell, plugins that would disable porn mode functionality. "2 Results Found for "Turn off Porn Mode," Add, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/search/?q=turn+off+porn+mode>.

support like the Geek Squad), have a router set up to provide a log of what computers visited what URLs so that the wife or parents know who is visiting what. The presence of a browser's porn mode suddenly matters a lot less when a router records your browsing history whether or not the browser is in porn mode.

- 5 **Rein in your stomach. Eat less food. Fast.** It is a classic observation in the Orthodox spiritual tradition that the appetites are tied: gluttony is a sort of “gateway drug” to sexual sin, and if you cut away at a full stomach, you necessarily undermine sexual sin and have an easier contest if you are not dealing with sexual temptation on top of a full stomach. And it has been my own experience that if I keep busy working, besides any issues about “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop,” the temptation to amuse and entertain myself with food is less. So that cuts off the temptation further upstream. If you eat only to nourish the body, it helps. Even if nourishing food tastes good, cutting out junk like corn-syrup-loaded soft drinks, or anything sold like potato chips in a bag instead of a meal, and moderating consumption of alcohol (none before going to bed; it can make you drowsy but it doesn’t work as a sleeping pill that will overall help you get better rested),⁷⁴ will help.

- 6 **When you are tempted, ask the prayers of St. John the Much-Suffering of the Kiev Near**

⁷⁴ “Alcohol and Sleep,” Sleep Foundation, March 11, 2022, <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/nutrition/alcohol-and-sleep>.

Caves, perhaps by crossing yourself and saying, “St. John the Much-Suffering, pray to God for me.” In the Orthodox Church you may ask the prayers of any saint for any need, but St. John is a powerful intercessor against lust. That is part of why I asked Orthodox Byzantine Icons to hand-paint an icon of St. John for me;⁷⁵ so I would have the benefit of the icon myself, and because I wanted Orthodox Byzantine Icons’s catalogue to make available the treasure of icons of St. John the Much-Suffering to the world, which they would. Other saints to ask for prayer include St. Mary of Egypt, St. Moses the Hungarian, St. Photina, St. Thais of Egypt, St. Pelagia the Former Courtesan, St. Zlata the New Martyr, St. Boniface, St. Aglaida, St. Eudocia, St. Thomais, St. Pelagia, St. Marcella, St. Basil of Mangazea, St. Niphon, and St. Joseph the Patriarch.⁷⁶

- 7 **If you have been wounded, bring your wound to confession the next weekend.** (And try to have a rule of going to church each week.) It can be powerful, when you are facing a temptation, not to want to confess the same sin again in a couple of days. But in parallel with this remember when a visitor asked a saintly monk what they did at the monastery, and the saintly monk answered, “We fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up.” Fall down

⁷⁵ C.J.S. Hayward, “St. John the Much-Suffering,” CJS Hayward, September 23, 2021, <https://cjs Hayward.com/john/>.

⁷⁶ Taken from a leaflet called *Prayers for Purity* that so far as my searches have turned up, has never been on Amazon.

seven times and rise up eight, fall down seventy-seven times and rise up seventy-eight, keep on repenting for as long as you need to to achieve some freedom, and know that some saints before you have risen after falling very many times.

- 8 **Buy a prayer rope, and use it.** When you are tempted, keep repeating a prayer for one prayer rope, and then another, and another, if you need it. Pray “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” or to St. John the Much-Suffering, “Holy Father John, pray to God for me,” or to St. Mary of Egypt, “Holy Mother Mary, pray to God for me.”
- 9 **Use the computer only when you have a specific purpose in mind, and not just to browse.** Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop.

“Look not round about thee in the streets of the city,
Neither wander thou in the solitary place thereof.
Turn away thine eye from a beautiful woman, and
look not upon another's beauty;
For many have been deceived by the beauty of a
woman; for herewith love is kindled as a fire.”⁷⁷

Men’s roving sexual curiosity will find the worst-leading link on a page, and then another, and then another. Stop using roving curiosity when you are at a computer altogether; if you need to deal with boredom, ask your priest or spiritual father for

⁷⁷ Ecclesiastes 9:7-8, Classic Orthodox Bible.

guidance on how to fight the passion of boredom. Don't use the Internet as a solution for boredom; that's asking for trouble.

- 10 **Use a support group, if one is available in your area.** If I were looking for a support group now, I would call Christian counseling centers in the area if available. Talking with other people who share the same struggle can help.
- 11 **Use XXXchurch.com, or at least explore their website.** Their entire purpose is buying you your freedom from lust.
- 12 **Yearn for purity.** In the homily, "A Pet Owner's Rules," I said:

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

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

...

Lust is also drinking out of the toilet. Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe. It is a magic spell where suddenly nothing else is interesting, and after lust destroys the ability to enjoy anything else, lust destroys the ability to enjoy even lust.

Proverbs says, “The adulterous woman”—today one might add, “and internet porn” to that—“in the beginning is as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword.” Now this is talking about a lot more than pleasure, but it is talking about pleasure. Lust, a sin of pleasure, ends by destroying pleasure. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.

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

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

I would suggest that we need a comprehensive—or at least somewhat comprehensive—set of guidelines for Orthodox use of technology. Such a work might not become dated as quickly as you may think; as I write in the resources section below, I unhesitatingly cite a 1974 title as seriously relevant knowing full well that it makes no reference to individually-owned computers or mobile devices: it’s a case of “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Or, perhaps, two works: one for clergy with pastoral responsibilities, and one for those of us laity

seeking our own guidance and salvation. I believe that today, we who have forms of property and wealth undreamed of when Christ gave one of the sternest Luddite warnings ever, **Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth**,⁷⁸ can very easily use things that do not lead to spiritual health: sometimes like how Facebook can erode marriages that are well defended as regards old-school challenges.

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

The Orthodox Church, or rather the Orthodox-Catholic Church, is really and truly Catholic, Catholic ultimately coming from the Greek kata, "with", and holos,

⁷⁸ Matthew 6:19, Classic Orthodox Bible.

“whole”, meaning “with the whole”, meaning that the entirety of the Orthodox Church belongs to every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: the saints alike living and dead, the ranks of priesthood and the faithful, and marriage and monasticism in entirety belong to every Orthodox Christian, every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: and giving the advice “Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!” as the limits of where the Orthodox-Catholic Church’s God and salvation can reach, is very disappointing. It’s comparable to saying that only monastics can be saved.

Total avoidance of all electronic technology is guidance, but not appropriate guidance, and we need advice, somewhat like the advice that began on how to use Facebook, to what I wrote about iPhones or internet porn. A successful dartboard makes it easier to say “What you said about _____ was wrong because _____ and instead we should say _____ because _____.” And I am trying to raise the question of how Orthodox Christians may optimally use technology in furtherance of living the divine life.

Is astronomy about telescopes?

No!

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

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

And how much more must Orthodox discussion of

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

Resources for further study

Books

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

St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*.⁷⁹ I reference Book II and its chapter on wine as paradigms we might look too.

CJS Hayward, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*.⁸⁰ You

⁷⁹ Clement Alexandria, "Orthodox Church Fathers: Patristic Christian Theology Classics Search Engine," Clement of Alexandria: The Instructor: Book II, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/anf02/anf0253.htm>.

⁸⁰ C.J.S Hayward, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* (Wheaton, IL:

don't need to read all of my ebooks on the topic, and they overlap. This one I'm offering because I don't know of anything better in (attempting to) address classic Orthodox spirituality to the question of ascetical use of technology. (There is a more complete, several hundred pages title *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* which provides a resource for readers who want a more exhaustive analysis.

Metropolitan Gregory (Postnikov), *How to Live a Holy Life*.⁸¹ This 1904 title gives concrete practical instruction. The technology is different from today's technology, but it serves an interesting and valuable reference point for today.

Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*.⁸² Mander is a former advertising executive who came to believe things about television, with implications for computers and smartphones, For instance, he argues that sitting for hours seeing mainly the light of red, green, and blue fluorescent pixels is actually awfully creepy. Mander has no pretensions of being an Orthodox Christian, or an Orthodox Jew for that matter, and sounded an alarm in his apostasy from advertising that is worth at least hearing out. (Related titles, good or bad, include *The Plug-in Drug*⁸³ and *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.⁸⁴)

CJS Hayward Publications, 2014).

⁸¹ Gregory Englehardt Postnikov, *How to Live a Holy Life* (Chicago: Holy Trinity Publications, 2005).

⁸² Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).

⁸³ Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug: Television, Computers, and Family Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

⁸⁴ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness* (London: Methuen, 2007).

Online Articles

(The only Orthodox articles I mention are my own. This is not by choice. When I first wrote this, I had tried and failed to find other Orthodox authors addressing the topic.)

Paul Graham, “The Acceleration of Addictiveness.”⁸⁵ The author of *Hackers & Painters*⁸⁶ raises a concern that is not specifically Orthodox, but “just” human. (But Orthodoxy is really just humanity exercised properly.)

Jeff Graham, “Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated My iPhone.”⁸⁷ It contains what look like useful links.

Vince Homan, in the 2014 newsletter article quoted above. I do not believe further comment is needed.

All the articles below are included in the more exhaustive collection *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*.⁸⁸

CJS Hayward, “Technonomicon: Technology, Nature,

⁸⁵ Paul Graham, “The Acceleration of Addictiveness,” The acceleration of addictiveness, accessed September 15, 2022, <http://www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html>.

⁸⁶ Paul Graham, *Hackers & Painters: Big Ideas from the Computer Age* (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly, 2010).

⁸⁷ Jeff Graham, “Come with Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated My iPhone,” Jeff Graham, June 26, 2014, <https://jeffgraham.myshopify.com/blogs/news/23949953-come-with-me-if-you-want-to-live-why-i-terminated-my-iphone>.

⁸⁸ C.J.S Hayward, *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology* (Wheaton, IL: CJS Hayward Publications, 2014).

Ascesis.”⁸⁹ This is a first attempt to approach a kind of writing common in the *Philokalia* on the topic of ascetical use of technology.

CJS Hayward, “Veni, Vidi, Vomui: A Look at, “Do You Want to Date My Avatar?”.”⁹⁰ My brother showed me a viral music video, “Do You Want to Date My Avatar?”, very effectively done. This is a conversation hinging on why I viewed the video with horror.

CJS Hayward, “Plato: The Allegory of the... *Flickering Screen?*.”⁹¹ With slight, with minimal alterations, the most famous passage Plato wrote speaks volumes of our screens today.

CJS Hayward, “iPhones and Spirituality.”⁹² This piece is partly about appropriate use of smartphones and partly what we lose of real, human life when we lay the reins on the iPhone’s neck. It was originally a Toastmasters speech. CJS Hayward, “A Guide to Technology’s Hidden Price Tags,” included in this collection. This is my most serious attempt at making an encompassing treatment to prepare people for different technologies. Pastor Vince’s article helped me realize it was too much of a do-it-yourself kit, appropriate as

89 C.J.S. Hayward, “Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Ascesis,” CJS Hayward, March 4, 2020, <https://cjshayward.com/technonomicon/>.

90 C.J.S. Hayward, “Veni, Vidi, Vomui: A Look at ‘Do You Want to Date My Avatar?’,” CJS Hayward, April 2, 2022, <https://cjshayward.com/avatar/>.

91 C.J.S. Hayward, “Plato: The Allegory of the... Flickering Screen?,” CJS Hayward, October 15, 2021, <https://cjshayward.com/plato/>.

92 C.J.S. Hayward, “iPhones and Spirituality,” CJS Hayward, September 23, 2021, <https://cjshayward.com/iphone/>.

far as it goes, but not addressing what the proper pastoral application of the principles should be. That is why I am writing a piece that will, I hope, provoke Orthodox clergy to expand our coverage in pastoral literature.

Questions for self-examination, study, and discussion regarding “Social Antibodies” Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy:”

1. What are some of the societal controls do we have regarding smoking and alcohol?
2. What do you think good social controls would be for our technologies, including smartphones?
3. What can you do from Humane Tech resources (<https://humanetech.com>) to be take control of your phone?
4. Is there an abstinence, a fasting from some technology or app, that you might discuss with a father confessor to try for a time?

5. Is there something you think you need from technologies that, if you think about it, maybe you do not need after all?
6. “Is there a luxury you could give up in this invitation to joy?”⁹³

⁹³ C.J.S. Hayward, “Money,” CJS Hayward, March 4, 2020, <https://cshayward.com/money/>.

Introduction to “A Guide to Technology’s Hidden Price Tags”

This collection gives pride of place to dealing with cell phone that have the Frankenstein-like attributes of our having created a monster, and are arguably more Frankenstein-like than foods using GMOs that are rightly termed “Frankenfoods.” The #1 intended takeaway is reduced takeover of our lives from our phones.

It can still be worthwhile to look at the broader technological picture and its implications. That is what this work, originally titled “The Luddite’s Guide to Technology,” is exactly written to do.

(That’s the article. The book that has it for a title chapter, *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*, is advisable if you get to the end of this book and wish there were more.)

How we relate to cell phones specifically, and how we relate to technology in general, are two sides of the same coin, and covering the other side of the coin is also helpful for immediate concerns with cell phones.

Cell phone use is a microcosm of our total relationship with technologies.

A Guide to Technology's Hidden Price Tags

Since the Bridegroom was taken from the disciples, it has been a part of the Orthodox Church's practice to fast. What is expected in the ideal has undergone changes, and one's own practice is done in submission to one's priest. The priest may work on how to best relax rules in many cases so that your fasting is a load you can shoulder. There is something of a saying, "As always, ask your priest," and that goes for fasting from technology, too, meaning, specifically, that if you read this article and want to start fasting from technologies, and your priest says that it won't be helpful, leave this article alone and follow your priest's guidance.

From ancient times, there has been a sense that we need to transcend ourselves. When we fast, we choose to set limits and master our belly, at least partly. "Meats for the belly, and the belly for foods"—*maybe*, but God shall destroy both it and them."⁹⁴ So the Apostle answered the hedonists of his day. The teaching of fasting is that you are more than the sum of your appetites, and we can grow by giving something up in days and seasons. And really fasting from foods is not saying, "I choose to be greater than this particular luxury," but "I choose to be greater than this

⁹⁴ I Corinthians 6:13, Classic Orthodox Bible, altered.

necessity.” Over ninety-nine percent of all humans who have ever lived never saw a piece of modern technology: Christ and his disciples reached far and wide without the benefit of even the most obsolete of electronic communication technologies. Monks have often turned back on what luxuries were available to them: hence in works like the *Philokalia*⁹⁵ or the *Ladder*⁹⁶ they extol the virtue of sleeping on the floor. If we fast from technologies, we do not abstain from basic nourishment, but what emperors and kings never heard of. At one monastery where monks lived in cells without running water or electricity, a monk commented that peasants and for that matter kings lived their whole lives without tasting these, or finding them a necessity. (Even Solomon in all his splendor did not have a Facebook page.)

In Orthodoxy, if a person is not able to handle the quasi-vegan diet in fasting periods, a priest may relax the fast, not giving *carte blanche* to eat anything the parishioner wants, but suggesting that the parishioner relax the fast to some degree, eating some fish or an egg. This basic principle of fasting is applicable to technology: rather than immediately go cold turkey on certain technologies, use “some fish or an egg” in terms of older technologies. Instead of texting for a conversation, drive over to a nearby friend.

(Have you ever noticed that during Lent many Orthodox Christians cut down or eliminate their use of Facebook?)

Donald Knuth, one of the leading lights in computer

⁹⁵ Palmer G.E.H., KALLISTOS Ware, and Philip Sherrard, trans., *The Philokalia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979).

⁹⁶ St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Boston, MA: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2019).

science, got rid of his email address well over a decade ago. He said that email was good for being on top of the world, and what he wanted was to be at the bottom of the world and do research. In other words, he had certain goals, and he found that email was not a helpful luxury in reaching those goals. Knuth is also a (non-Orthodox) Christian.

As mentioned in “Technonomicon,”⁹⁷ what we call space-conquering technologies might slightly more appropriately be called body-conquering technologies, because they neutralize some of the limitations of our embodied state. The old wave of space-conquering technologies moves people faster or farther than they could move themselves, and older science fiction and space opera often portrays bigger and better versions of this kind of space conquering technologies: personal jet packs, cars that levitate (think Luke Skywalker’s land speeder), or airplanes that function as spacecraft (his X-Wing). What is interesting to me here is that they serve as bigger and better versions of the older paradigm of space-conquering technologies, even if Luke remains in radio contact with the Rebel base. That is the older paradigm. The newer paradigm is technologies that make one’s physical location irrelevant, or almost irrelevant: cell phones, texting, Facebook, and remote work, are all not bigger and better ways to move your body, but bigger and better ways to do things in a mind-based context where the location of your body may be collected as in Google Plus, but your actual, physical location is really neither here nor there.

97 C.J.S. Hayward, “Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Ascesis,” CJS Hayward, March 4, 2020, <https://cjsheyward.com/technonomicon/>.

My own technology choices

I have a maxed-out Getac x500, an armored computer that is intended to quite plausibly still be running when the original owner has grown middle-aged, grown old, or died of old age. It may be stolen from me but it is purchased in the intent of not needing to buy a laptop again. It runs Windows 10 natively and for 99% of the time, it is running virtual Linux Mint as well. My point in mentioning it here is that I did not purchase it as the hot, coolest new thing, but as a last hurrah of an old guard. The top two applications I use are Google Chrome and the Linux terminal, and the old-fashioned laptop lets me take advantage of the full power of the Unix command line, and lets me exercise root privilege without voiding the warranty. For a Unix wizard, that's a lot of power. And I realized this might be my only opportunity in a while to purchase a tool I want to use for a long while.

Laptops might continue to be around for a while, and desktops for that matter, but their place is a bit like landline phones. If you have a desk job, you will probably have a desktop computer and a landline, but the wave of the future is smartphones and tablets; the hot, coolest new thing is not a bulky, heavy MacBook, but whatever the current generation of iPad or Android-based tablet is. One youngster said, "Email is for old people," and perhaps the same is to be said of laptops.

I also have an iPhone 8 Plus, which I want to keep running as long as I can hold on to it, as a working iPhone that uses 4G instead of 5G. I upgraded from one of the original iPhones to an iPhone 4, not because I needed to have the latest new thing, but because my iPhone was

necessarily on an AT&T contract, and however much they may advertise that the EDGE network my iPhone was on was “twice the speed of dialup,” I found when jobhunting that a simple, short “thank you” letter after an interview took amazingly many minutes for my phone to send, at well below the speed of obsolete dial-up speeds I had growing up: AT&T throttled the bandwidth to an incredibly slow rate and I got a newer iPhone with Verizon which I want to hold on to, even though there is a newer and hotter model available. But I am making conscious adult decisions about using the iPhone: I have sent perhaps a dozen texts, and have not used the iPod functionality. I use it, but I draw lines. My point is not exactly that you should adopt the exact same conscious adult decisions as I do about how to use a smartphone, but that you make a conscious adult decision in the first place.

And lastly, I have another piece of older technology: a SwissChamp XLT, the smallest Swiss Army Knife that includes all the functionality of a SwissChamp while also having the functionality of a Cybertool.

I mention these technologies not to sanction what may or may not be owned—I tried to get as good a computer as I could partly because I am an IT professional, and I am quite grateful that my employer let me use it for the present contract. I also drive a 2008 Ford Escape But with this as with other technologies, I haven’t laid the reins on the horse’s neck. I only use a well-chosen fragment of my iPhone’s capabilities, and I try not to use it too much: I like to be able to use the web without speed being much of an issue, but I’m not on the web all the time. I have never thought “My wheels are my freedom;” I try to drive insofar as it advances some particular goal.

And I'm not aware of the brands too much. When I wrote this I didn't really know what brands my clothing are, with one exception, Hanes, which I am aware of predominantly because the brand name is sewed in large, hard-to-miss letters at the top.

And I observe that technologies are becoming increasingly "capture-proof". Put simply, all technologies can be taken away from us physically, but technologies are increasingly becoming something that FEMA can shut off from far away, in a heartbeat. All network functionality on smartphones and tablets are at the mercy of network providers and whoever has control over them; more broadly, "The network is the computer," as Sun announced slightly prematurely in its introduction of Java. My own Unix-centric use of my Mac on train rides, without having or wanting it to have internet access during the train ride, may not be much more than a historical curiosity.

But the principle of fasting from technology is fine, and if we can abstain from foods on certain days, we can also abstain from or limit technologies on certain days. Furthermore, there is real merit in knowing how to use older technologies. GPS devices can fail to pick up a signal. A trucker's atlas works fine even if there's no GPS signal available.

The point of this soliloquy

The reason I am writing is that I am not aware of too many works on how to use technology ascetically. St. Paul wrote, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can

carry nothing out. And having food and garments let us be therewith content.”⁹⁸ This statement of necessities does not include shelter, let alone “a rising standard of living” (meaning more things that one uses). Perhaps it is OK to have a car; it is what is called “socially mandated”, meaning that there are many who one cannot buy groceries or get to their jobs without a car. Perhaps a best rule of thumb here is, to repeat another author, “Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need.”⁹⁹ It is a measure by which I have real failings. And don’t ask, “Can we afford what we need?”, but “Do we need what we can afford?” If we only purchase things that have real ascetical justification, there’s something better than investing for the left-over money: we can give to the poor as an offering to Christ. Christ will receive our offering as a loan.

Some years ago I wanted to write “The Luddite’s Guide to Technology,” and I simply stopped because I realized I wasn’t writing anything good or worthy of the title. But note the attitude of the Church Fathers given the technology of the day: monasticism renounces all property, and the faithful are called to renounce property in their hearts even if they have possessions. Monastic literature warns the monk of seeking out old company, where “old company” does not mean enticement to sexual sin exactly, but one’s very own kin. The solitary and coenobetic alike cut ties to an outside world, even ties one would think were sacrosanct (and the Bible has much to say about caring for one’s elders). If a monk’s desire to see his father or brother

⁹⁸ I Timothy 6:6-8, Classic Orthodox Bible.

⁹⁹ Richard J. Foster, *In Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth: Special Anniversary Edition Featuring Two New Essays*, Hodder and Stoughton 2008, 90.

is considered a temptation to sin that will dissipate monastic energy, what do we have to make of social media? The friendships that are formed are of a different character from face-to-face relationships. If monks are forbidden to return to their own kin as shining example, in what light do we see texting, email, IM's, and discussion forums? If monks are forbidden to look at women's faces for fear of sexual temptation, what do we make of an internet where the greatest assault on manhood, porn, comes out to seek you even if you avoid it? It's a bit like a store that sells food, household supplies, and cocaine: and did I mention that the spammers driving you to sample a little bit of cocaine are much pushier than those offering a biscuit and dip sample?

The modern Athonite tradition at least has Luddite leanings; Athos warns against national identification numbers and possibly computers, and one saint wrote apocalyptically about people eating eight times as much as people used to eat (has anyone read "The Supersizing of America"¹⁰⁰?) and of "wisdom" being found that would allow people to swim like fish deep into the sea (we have two technologies that can do that: SCUBA gear and submarines), and let one person speak and be heard on the other side of the world (how many technologies do we have to do that? Quite a lot).

All of this is to say that Orthodoxy has room to handle technologies carefully, and I would suggest that not all technologies are created equal.

¹⁰⁰ Barbara J. Rolls, "The Supersizing of America," *Nutrition Today* 38, no. 2 (2003): pp. 42-53, <https://doi.org/10.1097/00017285-200303000-00004>.

The Guide Itself

For the different technologies presented my goal is not exactly to point to a course of action as to suggest a conscious adult decision to make, perhaps after consulting with one's priest or spiritual father. And as is usual in Orthodoxy, the temptation for converts is to try to do way too much, too fast, at first, and then backslide when that doesn't work.

It is better to keep on stretching yourself a little.

Sometimes, perhaps most of the time, using technology in an ascetical way will be countercultural and constitute outlier usage.

Advertising

Advertising is kin to manipulation, propaganda, and pornography.

Advertising answers the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?" by decisively saying, "Man was made for economic wealth." It leads people to buy things that are not in their best interest. If you see someone using a technology as part of a form of life that is unhelpful, the kind of thing that makes you glad to be a Luddite, you have advertising to thank for that.

Advertising stirs discontent, already a problem, and leads people to ever higher desires, much like the trap of pornography. The sin is covetousness and lust, but the core structure is the same. Advertising and pornography are closely related kin.

Advertising doesn't really sell product functionality;

it sells a mystique. We may have legitimate reason to buy the product, but not the mystique. Back off on a useful purchase until we are really buying the product and not the mystique.

Alcohol

Alcohol is something where you cannot safely lay the reins on the horse's neck. You need to be in command, or to put it differently ceaselessly domineer alcohol if you use it. This domineering is easy for some people and harder for others, and some people may be wisest to avoid the challenge.

Something of the same need exists in our use of technology. We may use certain technologies, or may not, but it is still a disaster to let the technology go wherever it wills. Sometimes and with some technologies, we may abstain. Other technologies we may domineer, even if we may find if we are faithful that "my yoke is easy and my burden is light:" establishing dominion and holding the reins may be easier when it becomes a habit. But the question with a technology we use is not, "May we use it as much as we want, or not at all?", any more than the question about wine would be, "May we use it as much as we want, or not at all?" Proper use is disciplined. Proper use is domineering. We do not always have it spelled out what is like having one or two drinks on some day, and what is like having five or ten. Nor do we have other rules of thumb spelled out, like, "Think carefully about drinking when you have a bad mood, and don't drink in order to fix a bad mood."

The descriptions of various "technologies and other things" are meant to provide some sense of what the

contours of technologies are, and what is like drinking one or two drinks, and what is like drinking five or ten drinks a day.

Alvin Toffler's Future shock

Some people have said that Americans are in a constant state of “future shock,” “future shock” being understood by analogy to “culture shock”, which is a profoundly challenging state when you are in a culture that tramples assumptions you didn't know you had. Not all of future shock is in relation to technology, but much of it is.

We think of a “rising standard of living,” meaning more unfamiliar possessions in many cases, and even if the economy itself is not a rising standard of living now, we have accepted the train of new technology adoption as progress, but there has been something in us that says, “This is choking something human.” And in a sense this has always been happening, for the older technologies as the new when the older technologies when they were new, for movies as much as augmented reality.

Neal Stevenson said, “The future is here — it's just not evenly distributed.”¹⁰¹

Anti-aging medicine

The Christian teaching is that life begins at conception and ends at natural death, and not that life begins at 18 and ends at 30.

The saddest moment in *The Chronicles of Narnia* comes when we hear that Her Majesty Queen Susan the Gentle is “no longer a friend of Narnia;” she is rushing as quickly as possible to the silliest age of her life, and will

¹⁰¹ *The Economist*, December 4, 2003.

spend the rest of her life trying to remain at that age, which besides being absolutely impossible, is absolutely undesirable.

Quite a lot of us are afflicted by the Queen Susan syndrome, but there is a shift in anti-aging medicine and hormone replacement therapy. Part of the shift in assistive technologies discussed below is that assistive technologies are not just intended to do what a non-disabled person can do, so for instance a reader can read a page of a book, giving visually impaired people equivalent access to a what a sighted person could have, to pushing as far what they think is an improvement, so that scanning a barcode may not just pull up identification of the product bearing the barcode, but have augmented reality features of pulling a webpage that says much more than what a sighted person could see on the tab. One of the big tools of anti-aging medicine is hormone replacement therapy, with ads showing a grey-haired man doing pushups with a caption of, “My only regret about hormone replacement therapy is that I didn’t start it sooner,” where the goal is not to restore functionality but improve it as much as possible. And the definition of improvement may be infantile; here it appears to mean that a man who might be a member of the AARP has the same hormone levels as he did when he was 17.

One professor I had who was teaching French philosophy, discussed Utopian dreams like turning the seas to lemonade, and called these ideas “a Utopia of spoiled children.” Anti-aging medicine is not about having people better fulfill the God-ordained role of an elder, but be a virtual youth. Now I have used nutraceuticals to bring more energy and be able to create things where before I was not, and perhaps that is like anti-aging medicine that has me

holding on to youthful creativity when God summons me to go further up and further in. However, everything I know about anti-aging is that it is not about helping people function gracefully in the role of an elder, but about making any things about aging optional.

In my self-absorbed “Seven-Sided Gem,”¹⁰² I talked about one AARP magazine cover, then called *My Generation*, which I originally mistook for something GenX. In the AARP’s official magazine as I have seen it, the marketing proposition is the good news, not that it is not that *bad* to be old, but it is not that *old* to be old. The women portrayed look maybe GenX in age, and on the cover I pulled out, the person portrayed, in haircut, clothing, and posture, looked like a teenager. “Fifty and better people” may see political and other advice telling them what they can do to fight high prescription prices, but nothing I have seen in that *My Generation* issue gives the impression that they can give to their community, as elders, out of a life’s wealth of experience.

Not that there are not proper elders out there. I visited a family as they celebrated their son’s graduation, and had long conversations with my friend’s mother, and with an elderly gentleman. She wanted to hear all about what I had to say about subjects that were of mutual interest, and he talked about the wealth of stories he had as a sailor and veterinarian. In both cases I had the subtle sense of a younger person being handled masterfully by an elder, and the conversation was unequal—unequal but entirely fitting: neither of them was trying to say, “We are equal—I might as well be as young as you.”

102 C.J.S. Hayward, “Seven-Sided Gem,” CJS Hayward, February 4, 2022, <https://cjsheyward.com/gem/>.

Anti-aging medicine is not about aging well, but trying to be a virtual young person when one should be doing the serious, weighty, and profoundly important function as elders.

Assistive technologies

This, at least, will seem politically incorrect: unless they have an inordinate monetary or moral cost, assistive technologies allow disabled people to function at a much higher level than otherwise. I am not going to say that people with disabilities who have access to assistive technologies should turn them down, but I am going to say that there is something of which I am wary in the case of assistive technologies.

There is the same question as with other technologies: “Is this really necessary? Does this help?” A blind friend said,

I was recently interviewed for a student’s project about assistive technology and shopping, and I told her that I wouldn’t use it in many circumstances. First of all, I think some of what is available has more ‘new toy’ appeal and is linked to advertising. Secondly, I think some things, though they may be convenient, are dehumanising. Why use a barcode scanner thingummy to tell what’s in a tin when I can ask someone and relate to someone?

Now to be clear, this friend does use assistive technologies and is at a high level of functioning: “For unto

whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.”¹⁰³ I get the impression that the assistive technologies she has concerns about, bleed into augmented reality. Though she is absolutely willing to use assistive technologies, particularly when they help her serve others, she is more than willing to ask as I am asking of many technologies, “What’s the use? Does this help? Really help?”

There is another, more disturbing question about assistive technologies. The question is not whether individual assistive technologies are helpful when used in individual ways, but whether a society that is always inventing higher standards for accessibility and assistive technology has its deepest priorities straight. And since I cannot answer that out of what my friend has said, let me explain and talk about the Saint and the Activist and then talk about how similar things have played out in my own life.

I write this without regrets about my own efforts and money spent in creating assistive technologies, and with the knowledge that in societies without assistive technologies many disabled people have no secular success. There are notable examples of disabled people functioning at a high level of secular success, such as the noted French Cabalist Isaac the Blind, but the much more common case was for blind people to be beggars. The blind people met by Christ in the Gospel were without exception beggars, and there are blind beggars in first world countries today.

What objection would I have to assistive technologies which, if they may not be able to create sight as of yet, none the less make the hurdles much smaller and less significant. Medicine cannot allow some patients to read a paper book,

¹⁰³ Luke 12:48, Classic Orthodox Bible.

but assistive technologies make a way for them to access the book about as well as if they could see the book with their eyes. What is there to object in making disabled people more able to function in society as equal contributors?

The answer boils down to the distinction between the Saint and the Activist as I have discussed them in “Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist.”¹⁰⁴ The society that is patterned after the Saint is ordered towards such things as faith and contemplation. The society patterned after the Activist is the one that seeks to ensure the maximum secular success of its members. And if the Activist says, “Isn’t it wonderful how much progress we have made? Many disabled people are functioning at a high level!”, the Saint says, “There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your Activism. We have bigger fish to fry.” And they do.

Now to be clear, I am not saying that you should not use assistive technologies to help give back to society. Nor do I regret any of the time I’ve spent on assistive technologies. The first idea I wanted to patent was an assistive technology. But I do indeed have bigger fish to fry.

There is a way in which I am a little like the blind beggar in many societies that took the Saint for their pattern. It’s on a much lesser scale. I tried my hardest to earn a Ph.D. in theology. At Cambridge University in England the faculty made me switch thesis topic completely, from a topic I had set at the beginning of the year, when two thirds of the year had passed and I had spent most of my time on my thesis. My grades were two points out of a hundred less than the cutoff for Ph.D. continuation, and

¹⁰⁴ C.J.S. Hayward, “Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist,” CJS Hayward, June 12, 2021, <https://cjsheyward.com/gandhi/>.

Cambridge very clearly refused for me to continue beyond my master's. Then I applied to other programs, and Fordham offered an assistantship, and I honestly found cancer easier than some of the things that went wrong at Fordham.¹⁰⁵ I showed a writeup of my life at Fordham to a friend and he wrote, "I already knew all the things you had written up, and I was still shocked when I read it." All of which to say is that the goal I had of earning a doctorate, and using that degree to teach at a seminary, seemed shattered. With all that happened, the door to earning a Ph.D. was decisively closed.

Now I know that it is possible to teach at a seminary on a master's; it may be a handicap, but it certainly does not make such a goal impossible. But more broadly God's hand was at work. For starters, I survived. I believe that a doctor would look at what happened and say, "There were a couple of places where what happened could have killed you. Be glad you're alive." Beyond that, there is something of God's stern mercy: academic writing takes a lot more work than being easy to read, and only a few people can easily read it. I still have lessons to learn about work that is easy to read. But all the same, there is a severe mercy in what God has given. I have a successful website largely due to chance, or rather God's providence; I was in the right place at the right time and for all my skill in web work happened to have successes I had no right to expect.

And God works through assistive technologies and medicine. When I was in middle school, I had an ankle that got sorer and sorer until my parents went to ask a doctor if

¹⁰⁵ See C.J.S. Hayward, "Profoundly Gifted and Orthodox at Fordham," CJS Hayward, September 2, 2022, <https://cjsheyward.com/orthodox-fordham/>.

hospitalization was justified. The doctor's response, after taking a sample of the infection, said, "Don't swing by home; go straight to the hospital and I'll take care of the paperwork on this end for his admission."

I was hospitalized for a week or so, the bed rest day and night being the first time ever that I managed to get bored teaching myself from my father's calculus textbook. After I was discharged I still needed antibiotic injections every four hours. That involved medical treatment is just as activist as assistive technology, and without it I would not have written any the pieces on this website besides the Apple][BASIC four dimensional maze.¹⁰⁶

I am rather glad to be alive now.

So I am in a sense both a Ph.D. person who was lost on Activist terms, but met with something fitting on a Saint's terms, and a person who was found on Activist terms. God works both ways. Still, there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in Activism.

Augmented Reality

When I was working at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, one part of the introduction I received to the CAVE and Infinity Wall virtual reality was to be told that virtual reality "is a superset of reality," where you could put a screen in front of a wall and see, X-ray-style, wires and other things inside the wall.

Virtual reality does exist, and is popularized by SecondLife among many other projects, but that may not be the main niche. The initial thought was virtual reality,

¹⁰⁶ Re-implemented using web technologies at C.J.S. Hayward, "A Four-Dimensional Maze," CJS Hayward, November 5, 2019, <https://cjsheyward.com/maze/>.

and when the dust has started to settle, the niche carved out was more a matter of augmented reality. Augmented reality includes, on a more humble level, GPS devices, and iPhone apps that let you scan a barcode or QR code and pull up web information on the product you have scanned. But these are not the full extent of augmented reality; it's just an early installment. It is an opportunity to have more and more of our experience rewritten by computers and technology. Augmented technology is probably best taken at a lower dose and domineered.

Big Brother

Big Brother is a collection of technologies, but not a collection of technologies *you* choose because they will deliver a Big Brother who is watching you. Everything we do electronically is being monitored; for the moment the U.S. government is only using it for squeaky-clean apparent uses, and has been hiding its use. Even the Amish now are being monitored; they have decided not to hook up to a grid, such as electricity or landline phones, but cell phones can be used if they find them expedient to their series of conscious decisions about whether to adopt technologies. The Amish use the horse and buggy, but not the car, not because the horse is older, but because the horse and buggy provide some limited mobility without tearing apart the local community. The car is rejected not because it is newer, but because it frees people from the tightly bound community they have. And because they carry cell phones, the NSA tracks where they go. They might not do anything about it, but almost everything about us is in control of Big Brother. Though I know at least one person who has decided carrying a cell phone and having an iPass

transponder is not worth being tracked, you have to be more Luddite than the Luddites, and know that you are already on file, if you are to escape observation.

Big Brother has been introduced step by step, bit by bit. First there were rumors that the NSA was recording all Internet traffic. Then it came out in the open that the NSA was indeed recording all Internet traffic and other electronic communications, and perhaps (as portrayed on one TV program) we should feel sorry for the poor NSA which has to deal with all this data. That's not the end. Now Big Brother is officially mainly about national security, but this is not an outer limit either. Big Brother will probably appear a godsend in dealing with local crime before an open hand manipulating the common citizen appears. But Big Brother is here already, and Big Brother is growing.

Books and ebooks

A friend said in reference to *Harry Potter* that the Harry Potter series got people to read, and anything that gets people to read is good. My response (a tacit response, not a spoken one) is that reading is not in and of itself good. If computers are to be used in an ascetically discriminating fashion, so is the library; if you will recall my earlier writing about slightly inappropriate things at Cambridge and worse at Fordham,¹⁰⁷ every single person I had trouble with was someone who read a lot, and presumably read much more than someone caught up in *Harry Potter* mania. Some evidence that reading is not in and of itself good is to be found in that every person who gave me real trouble read

¹⁰⁷ C.J.S. Hayward, "Profoundly Gifted and Orthodox at Fordham," CJS Hayward, September 2, 2022, <https://cjshayward.com/orthodox-fordham/>.

more than is common among *Harry Potter* fans.

Orthodoxy is at heart an oral, or oral-like, culture, and while it uses books, it was extremely pejorative when one friend said of a Protestant priest in Orthodox clothes, “I know what book he got that [pastoral practice] from.” The first degree of priesthood is called a ‘Reader’, and when one is tonsured a Reader, the bishop urges the Reader to read the Scriptures. The assumption is not that the laity should be reading, but need not read, the Scriptures, but that the laity can be doing the job of laity without being literate. Even where there is reading, the transmission of the most important things is oral in character, and the shaping of the laity (and presumably clergy) is through the transmission of oral tradition through oral means. In that sense, I as an author stand of something exceptional among Orthodox, and “exceptional” does not mean “exceptionally good.” Most Orthodox authors now come to Orthodoxy from the West, and their output may well be appropriate and a fitting offering from what they have. However, the natural, consistent result of formation in Orthodoxy does not usually make a non-author into an author.

As far as books versus ebooks, books (meaning paper codices) are a technology, albeit a technology that has been around for a long time and will not likely disappear. Ebooks in particular have a long tail effect, where in Amazon the vast majority of infrequently selling ebooks bring more sales than the small number of biggest performers. The barriers to put an ebook out are much more than to put a traditional book out. It has been said that ebooks are killing Mom and Pop bookstores, and perhaps it is worth taking opportunities to patronize local businesses. But there is another consideration in regards to books versus cheaper

Kindle editions. The Kindle may be tiny in comparison to what it holds, and far more convenient than traditional books.

But it is much more capture proof.

“Capture proof”

In military history, the term “capture-proof” refers to a weapon that is delicate and exacting in its maintenance needs, so that if it is captured by the enemy, it will rather quickly become useless in enemy soldiers’ hands.

The principle can be transposed to technology, except that possessing this kind of “capture-proof” technology does not mean that it is an advantage that “we” can use against “them.” It comes much closer to say that FEMA or any of a host of explicitly hostile actors can shut down its usefulness at the flick of a switch. As time has passed, hot technologies become increasingly delicate and capture-proof: a laptop is clunkier than a cool tablet, but the list of things one can do with a tablet without network access is much shorter than the list of things can do with a laptop without network access. Or, to take the example of financial instruments, the movement has been towards more and more abstract derivatives, and these are fragile compared to an investment in an indexed mutual fund, which is in turn fragile compared to old-fashioned money.

“Cool,” “fragile,” and “capture-proof” are intricately woven into each other.

Einstein said, “I do not know what weapons World War III will be fought with, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.” We might not have to wait until World War IV. Much of World War III may be fought with

sticks and stones.

Cars

Perhaps the most striking Luddite horror of cars that I have seen is in C.S. Lewis. He talked about how they were called “space-conquering devices,” while they should have been called “space-annihilating devices,” because he experienced future shock that cars could make long distances very close. (Diana Gabaldon said, “An Englishman thinks a hundred miles is a long way; and American thinks a hundred years is a long time.”)¹⁰⁸ The “compromise solution” he offered was that it was OK to use cars to go further as a special solution on weekends, but go with other modes of transport for the bread-and-butter of weekdays. (And this is more or less how Europeans lean.)

Cars are one of many technologies that, when introduced, caused future shock. It’s taken as normal by subsequent generations, but there is a real sense of “This new technology is depriving us of something basically human,” and that pattern repeats. And perhaps, in a sense, this shock is the pain we experience as we are being lessened by degrees and slowly turning from man to machine-dominated.

Compact fluorescent lights and incandescent bulbs

There is something striking about culture in relation to CFL’s. American society has a long history of technology migrations, and a thorough enough “out with the old, in with the new” that working 16mm film projectors, for

¹⁰⁸ “A Quote from Drums of Autumn,” Goodreads (Goodreads), accessed September 16, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/371279-an-englishman-thinks-a-hundred-miles-is-a-long-way>.

instance, now fetch a price because we have so thoroughly gotten rid of them in favor of video. People who use them now aren't using them as the normal way to see video; they may want to see old film canisters and maybe even digitize them (so they can be seen without the use of a film projector).

Compare American use of 16mm film projectors with other countries such as Lebanon which have no real concept of being obsolete; they have a mix of old and new technologies, and they get rid of an old piece of technology, not because it is old, but because it is worn out.

The fact that we are transitioning to CFL's for most purposes is not striking; transitions happen all the time. One could trace "If you have a phone, it's a landline," to "You can have a two pound car phone, but it's expensive," to "You can have a cell phone that fits in your hand, but it's expensive," to "You can have a cell phone, which is much cheaper now," to "You can have a cell phone that does really painful Internet access," to "You can have a cell phone with graceful Internet access." There have been many successions like this, all because the adopters thought the new technology was an improvement on the old.

CFL's are striking and disturbing because, while there may be a few people who think that slightly reduced electricity usage (much smaller than a major household appliance) justifies the public handling fragile mercury containers, by and large the adoption is not of a snazzier successor to incandescent bulbs. Not only must they be handled like live grenades, but the light is inferior. The human race grew up on full-spectrum light, such as the sun provides. Edison may not have been aiming for a full-spectrum light, but his light bulb does provide light across

the spectrum; that is an effect of an incandescent light that produces light that looks at all near a proper spectrum. This is a strange technology migration, and a rather ominous omen. As Jerry Mander wrote in *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*:¹⁰⁹

Artificial light from any source—whether incandescent or fluorescent—leaves out many segments of the spectral range found in natural light, and it delivers an entirely different mix of spectral ingredients. Incandescent light, for example, emphasizes the portion of the spectrum near the infrared while minimizing or leaving out others. Artificial light is quite literally *not* the same thing as natural light. To use the same term for both is to destroy understanding...

The plant literally takes light into its cells and converts it into nourishment. For a plant, light is a form of food. Ott has shown that changing the light source so that a plant ingests one set of spectral ingredients rather than another changes the nourishment and therefore the cellular and growth patterns of the plant. If you grow your own plants at home, you also know this to be true. You may not have a microscope with which to watch it, but if you move a plant nearer to the window (or farther away), it changes. Plant stores now

¹⁰⁹ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 176.

sell special bulbs which help plants grow. When you move the plant or buy the bulb, what you are doing is changing the amount and spectral character of the light the plant receives. You are changing its diet.

When most bulbs available now are CFL's,¹¹⁰ there were better and worse choices. Some bulbs have been made with a filter outside the glass so they give off light that looks yellow rather than blue. I wouldn't look for that in and of itself. But some gave a full spectrum, even if it is a bluish full spectrum, and that is better. There were also lights sold that were slightly more shatter resistant, which is commendable, and there are some bulbs that are both full spectrum and shatter resistant. I'd buy the last kind if possible, or else a full spectrum CFL, at a hardware store if possible and online if not.

But I would momentarily like to turn attention from the extinction of regular use of incandescent bulbs to their introduction. Candles have been used since time immemorial, but they're not a dimmer version of a light bulb. Even if you have candlesticks and candles lit, the candle is something of a snooze button or a minor concession: societies that used candles still had people active more or less during daylight hours. (Daylight Saving Time was an attempt to enable people to use productive daylight hours which they were effectively losing.) People who used candles were still effectively tied to the cycle of

¹¹⁰ This was written before good LED light bulbs were commonly available. I do not know if they emit a proper light spectrum; I know that old-fashioned, plain vanilla LEDs emitted light at exactly one spectrum.

day and night. Light bulbs caused a shock because they let you operate as early or as late as you wanted. Candles allowed you to wrap up a few loose ends when night had really fallen. Light bulbs made nighttime optional. And it caused people future shock.

I have mentioned a couple of different responses to CFL's: the first is to buy full spectrum and preferably shatter resistant (and even then handle the mercury containers like a live grenade), the second is turning to the rhythm of day and light and getting sunlight where you can. Note that inside most buildings, even with windows, sunlight is not nearly as strong as what the human person optimally needs. Let me mention one other complication from this.

There is a medical diagnosis called 'SAD' for 'Seasonal Affective Disorder', whose patients have lower mood during the winter months when we see very little light. The diagnosis seems to me a bit like the fad diagnosis of YTD, or Youthful Tendency Disorder, discussed in *The Onion*.¹¹¹¹¹ If you read about it and are half-asleep, it sounds like a description of a frightening syndrome. If you are awake, you will recognize a description of perfectly normal human tendencies. And the SAD diagnosis of some degree of depression when one is consistently deprived of bright light sounds rather normal to me. (Remember that while humans now live in all kinds of places, our human race is believed to have originated in Africa, with bright twelve hour days and dark twelve hour nights, spreading out to

¹¹¹¹¹ The Onion, "More U.S. Children Being Diagnosed with Youthful Tendency Disorder," *The Onion* (The Onion, October 18, 2017), <https://www.theonion.com/more-u-s-children-being-diagnosed-with-youthful-tenden-1819565754>.

other parts of the world in scarcely more than an eyeblink of the time humans have been around.)¹¹² For that reason, that the diagnosis of SAD sounds like a perfectly normal response to deprivation of light not experienced in most of the time our ancestors have been around, I think that some of the best lighting you can get is with something from the same manufacturer of the Sunbox DL SAD Light Box Light Therapy Desk Lamp. That manufacturer is one I trust; I am a little wary of some of their cheaper competitors.

Meanwhile, I may note that circumstances have changed significantly, and society has moved from CFL's to LED lights, which can have a real spectrum matching some set temperature color. And this occurred as a natural shift; that is, the U.S. government did not interfere to ham-handedly phase out or shut down the sale of CFL's; CFL's are no longer really available as a mainstream option because they can't compete with LED lights in the market.¹¹³

Children's toys

Charles Baudelaire, in his "*la Morale du Joujou*" ("the moral of the toy") talks about toys and the fact that the best toys leave something to the imagination. Children at play will imagine that a bar of soap is a car; girls playing with dolls will play the same imagined drama with rag dolls as they will with dolls worth hundreds of dollars. There has

¹¹² "Recent African Origin of Modern Humans," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, September 1, 2022), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recent_African_origin_of_modern_humans.

¹¹³ See, for instance, "LED Light Bulb Brightness Scale & Color Charts: Bulb Guide," LED Light Bulb Brightness Scale & Color Charts | Bulb Guide, accessed September 16, 2022, <https://www.energyearth.com/general/categories/lighting/learn-more>.

been a paradigm shift, where Lego sets have shifted from providing raw material to being a specific model, made of specialized pieces, that the child is not supposed to imagine, only to assemble. Lego sets are perhaps the preferred childhood toy of professional engineers everywhere; some of them may have patronized Lego's competitors, but the interesting thing about Legos that are not "you assemble it" models is that you have to supply something to what you're building. Lego the company might make pieces of different sizes and shapes and made them able to stick together without an adhesive; I wouldn't downplay that achievement on the part of the manufacturer, but the child playing with Legos supplies half of the end result. But this is not just in assembly; with older models, the Legos didn't look exactly like what they were supposed to be. Once, I saw a commercial for a miniature track where some kind of car or truck would transport a payload (a ball bearing, perhaps), until it came to a certain point and the payload fell through the car/track through a chute to a car below. When I asked my parents to buy it for me and they refused, I built it out of Legos. Of course it did not look anything like what I was emulating, but I had several tracks on several levels and a boxy square of a vehicle would carry a marble along the track until it dropped its payload onto a car in the level below. With a bit of imagination it was a consolation for my parents not getting the (probably expensive) toy I had asked for, and with a bit of imagination a short broom is a horse you can ride, a taut cord with a sheet hung over it is an outdoor tent, and a shaky box assembled from sofa cushions is a fort. Not, perhaps, that children should not be given toys, or that a square peg should be pounded into a round hole by giving everyone old-style Lego kits, but half of a

children's toy normally resides in the imagination, and the present fashion in toys is to do all the imagining for the child.

There is a second issue in what is imagined for children. I have not looked at toys recently, but from what I understand dragons and monsters are offered to them. I have looked rather deeply into what is offered to children for reading. The more innocuous part is bookstores clearing the classics section of the children's area for Disney Princess books. That's replacing nutritious food with junk food. The more serious matter is with *Dealing with Dragons* and other Unman's Tales.¹¹⁴ That is giving a poisoned cup of a fairy-tale once one has realized that little girls are *sexist way too romantic*, and their thirst for fairy tales cannot simply be deleted.

The Cloud

Cloud computing is powerful, and it originated as a power tool in supercomputing, and has now come down to personal use in software like Evernote, a note-taking software system that synchronizes across all computers and devices which have it installed.

Cloud computing, besides being very powerful, is one more step in abstraction in the world of computing. It means that you use computers you have never even seen. Not that this is new; it is a rare use case for someone using the Web to own any of the servers for the sites he is visiting. But none the less, the older pattern is for people to have their own computers, with programs they have downloaded

114 C.J.S. Hayward, "Un-Man's Tales: C.S. Lewis's Perelandra, Fairy Tales, and Feminism," CJS Hayward, April 3, 2022, <https://cjsheyward.com/unman/>.

and/or purchased, and their own documents. The present trend to offload more and more of our work to the cloud is a step in the direction of vulnerability to the damned backswing.¹¹⁵ The more stuff you have in the cloud, the more of your computer investment can be taken away at the flick of a switch, or collapse because some intervening piece of the puzzle has failed. Not that computers are self-sufficient, but the move to the cloud is a way of being less self-sufficient.

My website is hosted on a cloud virtual private server, no longer with one or two “hot spares” that I have direct physical access to. There are some reasons the physical machine, which has been flaky for far longer than a computer should be allowed to be flaky (and which keeps not getting fixed), is one I keep as a hot spare.

Contraception and Splenda

There was one mostly Catholic mailing list where I was getting annoyed at the degree of attention given to one particular topic: I wrote,

Number of posts in this past month about
faith: 6

Number of posts in this past month about the
Bible: 8

Number of posts in this past month about the

¹¹⁵ The “damed backswing” is a recurring theme where society has something that is desirable, and then they migrate to something that gives them more of that something desirable, but then when the inner logic works out, it deletes both the new and old possession of that something desirable. See C.J.S. Hayward, “The Damned Backswing,” CJS Hayward, March 4, 2020, <https://cjsheyward.com/backswing/>.

Eucharist: 9

Number of posts in this past month extolling
the many wonders of Natural Family

Planning: 13

The Catholic Church's teaching on Natural Family Planning is not, "Natural Family Planning, done correctly, is a 97% effective way to simulate contraception." The Catholic Church's teaching on children is that they are the crown and glory of sexual love, and way down on page 509 there is a footnote saying that Natural Family Planning can be permissible under certain circumstances."

And if I had known it, I would have used a quotation from Augustine I cited in "Contraception, Orthodoxy, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article:"¹¹⁶

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

116 C.J.S. Hayward, "Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article," CJS Hayward, June 12, 2021, <https://cjsheyward.com/contraception/>.

children. Therefore whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, forbids marriage, and makes the woman not a wife, but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion. Where there is a wife there must be marriage. But there is no marriage where motherhood is not in view; therefore neither is there a wife. In this way you forbid marriage. Nor can you defend yourselves successfully from this charge, long ago brought against you prophetically by the Holy Spirit (the Blessed Augustine is referring to I Tim 4:1-3).¹¹⁷

Thus spoke the Catholic Church's favorite ancient theologian on contraception;¹¹⁸ and to this it may be added that the term 'Natural Family Planning' is deceptive and perhaps treacherous in how it frames things. There is

117 "Orthodox Church Fathers: Patristic Christian Theology Classics Search Engine," Augustine: on the Morals of the Manicheans, accessed September 16, 2022, <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/npnf104/npnf1046.htm>.

118 Blessed Augustine is a saint and a Church Father to Orthodox, and "Blessed" here does not mean lesser sanctity any more than it does for holy fools like Blessed Xenia of St. Petersburg. However, to Romans, Augustine is not one Church Father among others; he is a polestar among Church Fathers in a way that evokes C.S. Lewis's "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only do I see it, but because by it I see everything else." ("A Quote by C.S. Lewis," Goodreads (Goodreads), accessed September 16, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/660-i-believe-in-christianity-as-i-believe-that-the-sun>.) Among Orthodox, if your only friend among the Fathers is Blessed Augustine, you should beware of standing on shaky ground.

nothing particularly natural about artificially abstaining from sexual intercourse precisely when a woman is capable of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response.

The chief good of the marriage act is that it brings into being new people made in the image of God; “a baby is God’s opinion that the world should go on.”¹¹⁹ The chief good of eating is that it nourishes the body. Now there are also pleasures, but it is an act of confusion to see them as pleasure delivery systems and an act of greater confusion to frustrate the greater purpose of sex or eating so that one may, as much as possible, use them just as pleasure delivery systems.

There are other strange effects of this approach. For starters, Splenda use correlates to increased weight gain.¹²⁰ Perhaps this is not strange: if you teach someone, “You can eat as much candy and drink as many soft drinks as you like,” the lesson is “You can consume more without worrying about your waistline,” and you will consume more: not only more foods containing Splenda, but more foods not containing Splenda.

There is an interesting history, as far as “Natural” Family Planning goes, about how in ancient times Church Fathers were skeptical at best of the appropriateness of sex during the infertile period, then people came to allow sex during the infertile period despite the fact that it was shooting blanks. Then the West came to a point where

¹¹⁹ “A Quote by Carl Sandburg,” Goodreads (Goodreads), accessed September 16, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/18066-a-baby-is-god-s-opinion-that-the-world-should-go>.

¹²⁰ See multiple results at Splenda+use+weight+gain at duckduckgo, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://duckduckgo.com/?q=splenda%2Buse%2Bweight%2Bgain&t=newext&atb=v307-1&ia=web>.

priests hearing confessions were to insinuate “Natural” Family Planning to couples who were using more perverse methods to have sex without children.¹²¹ Finally the adulation was realized where Natural Family Planning is honored to the gateway to the culture of life.

Contraception and Splenda are twins, and with Splenda I include not only other artificial sweeteners, but so-called “natural” sweeteners like Agave and Stevia which happen not to be manufactured in a chemical factory, but whose entire use is to do Splenda’s job of adding sweetness without calories. What exists in the case of contraception and Splenda alike is neutralizing a greater good in order to have as much of the pleasure associated with that good as possible. It says that the primary purpose of food and sex, important enough to justify neutralizing other effects as a detriment to focusing on the pleasure, is to be a pleasure delivery system.

About pleasure delivery systems, I would refer you to: The Pleasure-Pain Syndrome¹²²

The dialectic between pleasure and pain is a recurrent theme among the Fathers, and it is something of a philosophical error to pursue pleasure and hope that no pain will come. If you want to see real discontent with one’s sexual experiences, look for those who are using Viagra and its kin to try to find the ultimate sexual thrill. What they will find is that sex becomes a disappointment: first, sex without drugged enhancement becomes underwhelming, and then

¹²¹ The whole process is catalogued in the magisterial John Thomas Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* / John T. Noonan Jr (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1986).

¹²² C.J.S. Hayward, “The Pleasure-Pain Syndrome,” CJS Hayward, November 5, 2019, <https://cjsheyward.com/pleasure/>.

Viagra or Cialis fail to deliver the evanescent ultimate sexual thrill.

The “Damned Backswing”

There is a phenomenon where something appears to offer great improvements, but it has a “damned backswing.” For one example in economics, in the 1950’s the U.S. had an unprecedentedly high standard of living (meaning more appliances in houses—not really the best measure of living), and for decades it just seemed like, It’s Getting Better All the Time. But now the U.S. economy is being destroyed, and even with another regime, we would still have all the debts we incurred making things better all the time.

Another instance of the damned backswing is how medieval belief in the rationality of God gave rise to the heroic labors of science under the belief that a rational God would create a rational and ordered world, which gave way to modernism and positivism which might as well have put science on steroids, which in turn is giving way to a postmodernism and subjectivism that, even as some of it arose from the philosophy of science, is fundamentally toxic to objectivist science.

I invite you to read more about the “damned backswing.”¹²³

Email, texting, and “Instant Messages” (IMs)

“Email is for old people,” one youngster said, and email is largely the wave of the past. Like landlines and desktop computers, it will probably not disappear completely; it will probably remain the communication

123 C.J.S. Hayward, “The Damned Backswing,” CJS Hayward, March 4, 2020, <https://cjsheyward.com/backswing/>.

channel of corporate notifications and organizational official remarks. But social communication via email is the wave of the past: an article in A List Apart said that the website had originated as a mailing list, and added, “Kids,go ask your parents.”¹²⁴

When texting first caught on, it was neither on the iPhone nor the Droid. If you wanted to say, “hello”, you would probably have to key in, “443355555666”. But even then texting was a sticky technology, and so far, it is the only common technology I know of that is illegal to use when driving. It draws attention in a dangerous way and is treated like alcohol in terms of something that can impair driving. It is a strong technological drug.

The marketing proposition of texting is an intravenous drip of noise. IMs are similar, if not always as mobile as cell phones, and email is a weaker form of the drug that youth are abandoning for a stronger version. Now, it should also be said that they are useful, and the proper ascetical use is to take advantage of them because they are useful (or not; I have a phone plan without texting and I text rarely enough that the default \$.20 per text makes sense and is probably cheaper than the basic plan).

Fasting and fasting from technologies

And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes to look upon and beautiful to contemplate, and having taken of its fruit she ate, and she gave to

¹²⁴ Jeffrey Zeldman et al., “Ten Years,” A List Apart, October 8, 2008, <https://alistapart.com/article/tenyears/>.

her husband also with her, and they ate.¹²⁵

The healing of this comes in partly by eating, in the Holy Mysteries where we eat from the Tree of Life. But this is no imitation of Eve's sin, or Adam's. They lived in the garden of paradise, and there is no record of them fasting before taking from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Before we take communion, we answer the question "Where are you?", the question in which God invited Adam and Eve to come clean, and expose their wound to the Healer; we prepare for confession and answer the question Adam and Eve dodged: "Where are you?" We do not live in a garden of delights, but our own surroundings, and we turn away from sensual pleasures. Adam and Eve hid from God; we pray to him, and do not stop praying because of our own sordid unworthiness. And, having prepared, we eat from the Tree of Life.

"You shall not surely die," and "Your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods," are some of the oldest marketing propositions, but they are remarkably alive in the realm of technology. Witness the triumph of hope over experience in the artificial intelligence project. Witness a society like the meticulously groomed technology of a Buddha who saw an old man, a sick man, and a dead man, and wondered whatever on earth they can mean. Mortality may be as total in our generation as any other, but we've done a good job of hiding it. Perhaps doctors might feel inadequate in the face of real suffering, but modern medicine can do a lot. In many areas of the third world, it might be painful, but it is not surprising to play with a child who was doing well two weeks ago and be told that he is

125 Genesis 3:6, Classic Orthodox Bible

dead. Death is not something one expects in homes; it is out of sight and half out of mind in hospitals and hospices. All of this is to say that those of us in the first world have a death-denying society, and if we have not ultimately falsified “You will surely die,” we’ve done a pretty good job of being in denial about it. And “You shall be as gods” is the marketing proposition of luxury cars, computers, smartphones, and ten thousand other propositions. My aunt, on discovering Facebook, said, “It feels like I am walking on water,” and Facebook offers at least a tacit marketing proposition of, “You shall be as gods.” Information technology in general, and particularly the more “sexy” forms of information technology, offer the marketing proposition of, “Your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods.”

There was one time, as an undergraduate, when I tried to see what it would be like to live as blind for a day, and so I was blindfolded and had a fascinating day which I wrote up for my psychology class. Now I would be careful in saying based on one day’s experience would let me understand the life experience of being blind, any more than a few days spent in Ontario entitle me to say that I understand Canadian culture. However, the experience was an interesting challenge, and it had something to do with fasting, even if it were more adventuresome than fasting normally is.

Fasting is first and foremost fasting from food, but there are other things one can fast from. Some Orthodox bid Facebook a temporary farewell for fasting seasons. On fasting days, we are bidden to cut back on sensory pleasures, which can mean cutting back on luxury technologies that give us pleasure.

I'm not sure how much fasting from technologies should form a part of one's rule; it is commonplace to discuss with one's priest or spiritual father how one will keep one's fast, and with what *oikonomia* if such is needed. But one of the rules of fasting is that one attempts a greater and greater challenge. Far from being a spiritual backwater, Lent is the central season of the Christian year. And so I will present twenty-one things you might do to fast from technology:

1. **Sleep in a sleeping bag on the floor.**
(Monks mention sleeping on the floor as a discipline; the attenuated fast of sleeping on a sleeping bag on the floor may help.)
2. **Leave your smartphone** at home for a day.
3. **Leave all consumer electronics** at home for a day.
4. **Only check for email, Facebook, etc. once every hour,** instead of all the time. Or, better, just once a day.
5. **Don't check your email;** just write letters with a pen or lead pencil.
6. **Camp out** in your back yard.
7. **Read a book outside,** using sunscreen if you need it.

8. **Organize some outdoor activity** with your friends or family.

9. **Don't use your computer or smartphone** while you are preparing for the Eucharist.

10. **Basic:** If you have games and entertainment apps or application, don't play them when you are fasting.
Harder: If you have games and entertainment applications, delete them.

11. **Basic:** Spend an hour outside with a book or an ebook Kindle, doing nothing but read and observe the trees, the wind, and the grass growing. (You are welcome to use my ebooks.)
Harder: Spend an hour outside, but not with a book, just observing the trees, the wind, and the grass growing.

12. **Don't use your car for a week.** It's OK to get rides, and it may be a pleasure speaking with your friends, but experience being, in part, dependent, and you may be surprised how some of your driving suddenly seems superfluous.

13. **Shut off power for an hour.** If you keep your fridge and freezer doors shut, you shouldn't lose food, and sometimes power loss has meant adventure.

14. **Turn off your computer's network access**

but still see what you can do with it for a day.
(This work is written largely on a computer that doesn't have internet access for the majority of the time it is being used to write this.)

15. **Especially if you have a beautiful screensaver**, set your computer to just display a blank screen, and have a single color or otherwise dull wallpaper for a time, perhaps for a fasting season.
16. **Switch your computer's resolution to 800x600** or the tiniest it can go. That will take away much of its status as a luxury.
17. **Make a list of interesting things** to do that do not involve a computer, tablet, or smartphone.
18. **Do some of the vibrant things on the list you just made** that do not involve a computer, tablet, or smartphone.
19. **Use computers or whatever other technologies**, not for what you can get from them, but what you can give through them.
20. **Bear a little more pain.** If you can deal with a slightly warmer room in the summer, turn down the air conditioning. If you can deal with a slightly cooler room in the winter, turn down the heat.

21. **Visit a monastery.** A monastery is not thought of in terms of being Luddite, but monasteries tend to be lower in level than technology, and a good monastery shows the vibrancy of life not centered about technology. And this suggestion is different. All the other suggestions say, “I would suggest.” The suggestion about the monastery says, “God has given.”

Food

There is some ambiguity, or better yet a double meaning, when the New Testament uses the term “breaking bread.” On one level, breaking bread means a shared meal around the table. On another, it means celebrating the Eucharist.

You can say that there is one sacrament, or that there are seven, or that there are a million sacraments. A great many things in life have a sacramental dimension, even if the man on the street would not consider these to be religious matters. There is something sacramental about friendship. There is something sacramental about a meal around a table, even if the sacramental character of a meal is vanishing.

In Proverbs it is written, “Better is an entertainment of herbs with friendliness and kindness, than a feast of calves, with enmity.”¹²⁶ Today one may draw forth an implication: “Better is a dinner of really bad fast food with love than the most exquisite Weston A. Price Foundation or Paleo meal where there is hatred.”

However, there are ways that the sacramental

¹²⁶ Proverbs 15:17, Classic Orthodox Bible.

character of meals is falling away. Many foods are not intended to be eaten around a table with family or friends: think of microwave dinners and the 100 calorie snack pack. Read *Nourishing Traditions*,¹²⁷ and *The Paleo Solution*,¹²⁸ which tell how far our industrial diet has diverged from meals that taste delicious precisely because they are nutritionally solid.

But besides the plastic-like foods of the industrial diet, there is another concern with munching or inhaling. The Holy Eucharist can legitimately be served, in an extreme case, with foods available to prisoners in Marxist concentration camps.¹²⁹ For that matter it is normal for it to be made with white flour, and white flour is high on the list of foods that should be limited. (Although ceremonial Orthodox consumption of carbohydrates is a limited consumption that stays within Paleo guidelines.)¹³⁰ It would be a mistake to insist on whole wheat flour because it is overall healthier. But with extreme exceptions such as grave illness, the Holy Mysteries are not to be consumed by oneself off in a corner. They are part of the unhurried

¹²⁷ Sally Fallon et al., *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook That Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats* (Washington, DC: NewTrends Publishing, Inc., 2005).

¹²⁸ Robb Wolf and Loren Cordain, *The Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet* (Las Vegas: Victory Belt Publishing, 2017).

¹²⁹ See, for instance, every time the Eucharist is mentioned in a concentration camp setting in Alexander and Vera Bouteneff, *Father Arseny, 1893-1973: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father: Being the Narratives Compiled by the Servant of God Alexander Concerning His Spiritual Father* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002).

¹³⁰ Robb Wolf and Loren Cordain, *The Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet* (Las Vegas: Victory Belt Publishing, 2017), 195. "Two to six ounces of protein and twenty to seventy-five grams of carbohydrates [for a post-workout meal] bracket the needs of most athletes."

unfolding of the Divine Liturgy, which ideally unfolds rather naturally into the unhurried unfolding of a common meal.

Both eating snacks continually to always have the pleasure of the palate, and the solo meal that is inhaled so it can be crammed into an over-busy schedule, fall short of the (broadly) sacramental quality of a common meal around a table.

In Alaska there are many people but not so many priests, and therefore many parishes rarely celebrate the Divine Liturgy. And a bishop, giving advice, gave two pastoral directions to the faithful: first that they should pray together, and second that they should eat together.

Let us try harder to eat with others.

GPS

GPS is in general an example of something that has a double effect. Traditionally, advertising helps people to covet what a company has to offer, and the behavior stimulated by the advertising is to advance the company's interest, even though the company never says "We are making this so that we will acquire more money or market share." As in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*,¹³¹ the prime actor is attempting to pursue his or her own interests, while it is presented entirely as being to the advantage of the other party on the other party's terms.

Apple didn't just change the game by making the first smartphone done right, in which regard the iPhone is commonly considered more significant than the Macintosh. The company that invented and still sells the Macintosh has established something more important than owning a

¹³¹ Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (S.I.: Vermilion, 2022).

Macintosh: owning an iPhone or iPad, which unlike the Macintosh generate a steady subscription income stream. The strict monetary price for my laptop was 100% up front: now that I've made the one-time purchase, I do not have any further financial obligations that will filter to the manufacturer. A previous iPhone, on the other hand, had a subscription and contract; part of my hefty baseline phone bill went to Apple. And if I were to purchase an iPad, I would have two subscriptions. (The main reason I have not seriously moved towards buying an iPad is not what I would pay up front; it is adding another subscription.)

The GPS also has a double effect. It is what science fiction writers called a "tracking device." Now it is a terrifically useful traffic advice; part of the marketing proposition offered for Sila on the iPhone 4 S is that it makes terrifically resourceful use of a GPS. ("I feel like a latte."—and it is the GPS that Sila uses to find nearby locations where one might find a latte.) On a more pedestrian level GPS for driving (or biking, or walking) has become so entrenched that people don't know what they'd do without it to reach unfamiliar locations. I have never heard someone question the utility of a GPS for this or other purposes, and I've heard of interesting-sounding hobbies like geocaching, where you navigate to specified coordinates and then search out and find some hidden attraction in the area indicated by the GPS.

But for all of these things, GPS, as well as cell phones in general, provide one more means for Big Brother (and possibly more than one Big Brother) to know exactly where you go, when you go there, what the patterns are, and other things where Big Brother *will* keep closer tabs on your whereabouts and activities than either your spouse or

parent. IBM published a book on “Why IBM for Big Data?” and made it very clear that Big Brother analysis of data isn’t just for No Such Agency. It’s also for the corporate world. One author told the seemingly attractive story of having made repeated negative posts on his FaceBook wall, slamming an airline after repeated problems, and the airline reached out to him and gave him a service upgrade. This was presented in the most positive light, but it was very clear that business were being invited to use IBM’s expertise to do Big Data Big Brother analysis on social networks.

Guns and modern weapons (for fantasy swords, see Teleporters)

Let me give a perhaps controversial preamble before directly talking about weapons.

I have spoken both with NRA types and anti-gun advocates, and there is a telling difference. The anti-gun advocates point to hard-hitting, emotional news stories where a walking arsenal opens fire in a school and kills many people. The NRA types may briefly talk about selective truth-telling and mention an incident where someone walked into a church armed to kill a bear, and an off-duty security guard who was carrying a gun legally and with the explicit permission of church leadership, “stopped the crime.” But that is something of a tit-for-tat sideline to the main NRA argument, which is whenever I have met it in person by gun advocates, to appeal to statistical studies that show that legal gun ownership does not increase crime.

I have a strong math background and I am usually wary of statistics. However, I find it very striking that anti-gun advocates have never in my experience appealed to statistics to show that legal gun ownership increases crime,

but only give hard-hitting emotional images, while the bread-and-butter of NRA argument is an appeal to research and statistics. I've never personally investigated those statistics, but there is something suspicious and fishy when only one side of a debate seriously appeals to research and statistics.

With that preamble mentioned, learning to really use a gun is a form of discipline and stillness, and I tried to capture it in the telescope scene in "Within the Steel Orb."¹³² Hunting can be a way to be close to your food, and I approve of hunting for meat but not hunting for taxidermy. However, sacramental shopping for weapons is as bad as any other sacramental shopping. I would tentatively say that if you want skill with a weapon, and will train to the point that it becomes something of a spiritual discipline, then buying a weapon makes sense. If you want to buy a gun because all the cool guys in action-adventure movies have one, or you are not thinking of the work it takes to handle a gun safely and use it accurately, I would question the appropriateness of buying a gun. Owning a gun because that is part of your culture is one thing; buying a gun because they are glamorized in movies is another thing entirely.

Heating and air conditioning

A college roommate commented that middle class Americans had basically as much creature comforts as were available. Not that Americans can buy everything one would want; but there is a certain point beyond which money cannot purchase necessities, but only luxuries. Then a

¹³² C.J.S. Hayward, "Within the Steel Orb," CJS Hayward, March 4, 2020, <https://cjsheyward.com/steel/>.

certain point after that where money cannot purchase luxuries, but only status symbols. Then there is a point beyond that where money cannot purchase any more meaningful status symbols, but only power. Middle class Americans may well not be able to purchase every status symbol they want, but really there is not much more creature comfort that would come with ten times one's salary.

Heating and air conditioning are one such area, and monastics wear pretty much the same clothing in summer and winter. One Athonite monk talked about a story about how several Russian sailors made a fire and stood close, and still did not feel warm, while islanders who were barely clad stood some distance off and were wincing because of the heat. We lose some degree of spiritual strength if we insist on having cool buildings in the summer and warm buildings in the winter. Even just cutting back a bit, so that buildings are warm but not hot in the summer and cool but not cold in the winter would constitute a spiritual victory. Usually this sort of thing is argued for environmental reasons; I am not making the argument that the lowered utility usage is good for the environment but that the lowered utility usage is constructive and, in the old phrase, "builds character." Indoor tracks exist, but in the summer I see bicyclists and runners exercising hard in the summer. These people are not super-heroes, and exercising in the heat really does not seem to be much of a deterrent to getting one's artificially added exercise. The human body and spirit together are capable of a great deal more sturdiness, when instead of always seeking comfort, we learn that we can function perfectly well after adjusting to discomfort. This is not just with heating and air conditioning; it is true with a lot of

things.

Hospitality

There is an ancient code of hospitality that recently has been influenced by consumer culture. What commercial marketing does, or at least did, to make a gesture of friendship and welcome, was from offering a selection of choices carefully fitted to the demographics being targeted. Starbucks not only established that you could market an experience that would command a much higher price than a bottomless cup of coffee at a regular diner; they sold not one coffee but many coffees. You had a broad selection of consumer choices. Starbucks was doubtlessly more successful than some frozen yogurt places I visited in grad school, which offered something like fifty or more flavors and varieties of yogurts and had staff who were mystified when customers said, “But I just want some frozen yogurt!” As a nuance, Starbucks offers guidance and suggestions for the undecided—and a large number of choices for the decided.

And in light of the hospitality industry, hosts offer guests choices, and sometimes mystify them by the offering: a guest, according to the older (unwritten) code, did not have the responsibility of choosing what would be offered. Now perhaps I need to clarify that if you have a severe peanut allergy and your host offers you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, you are not duty bound to accept it. But even then, social graces come to play. I remembered one time, at a feast although not strictly a host/guest relationship, when I offered a friend a glass of port and he kindly reminded me that he was a recovering alcoholic. I apologized profusely, and he stopped me and said, “I appreciate the offer, I just

can't drink it." So then I offered him something he could consume, and he took it and thanked me for it. Social graces apply.

But this is something of a footnote. There is a story of a staretz or monastic spiritual father who was going with one of a monk's disciples, and they visited a monastery that was feasting with bread, and the elder and disciple both shared in that informal communion, and then the two of them resumed their journey. The disciple asked the master if he could drink water, and to his astonishment was told no. The master, in answering his question, said, "That was love's bread. But let us keep the fast."¹³³ The Fathers are very clear: as a prior parish priest said from the pulpit, "Hospitality trumps fasting." And the assumption there is that fasting is important enough. This piece originated with the title, "Fasting from technologies." But hospitality is even more important.

The ancient rule of hospitality, although this is never thought of in these terms with today's understanding of authority, is that the host has a profound authority over the guest which the guest will obey, even to the point of trumping fasting. However, this is not what we may think of as despotism; the entire purpose and focus of the host's role in hospitality is to extend the warmest welcome to the guest. I remember one time when a friend visited from Nigeria, and although I set some choices before them, when I said, "We can do A, B, and C; I would recommend B," in keeping with hospitality they seemed to always treat my pick as tacit authority and went along with me. It was a wonderful visit; my friend made a comment about being treated like royalty, but my thought was not about how well I was treating them.

¹³³ Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 142.

My thought was that this would probably be the last time I saw my friend and her immediate family face to face, and that I'd better make it count.

I might comment that this is tied to our inability today to understand a husband's authority over his wife and the wife's submission. The role is somewhat like that of host and guest. A liberal source speaking on the Ephesians *haustafel* as it dealt with husbands and wives said that it did not portray marriage in terms of the husband's authority, while a conservative source understood authority at a deeper level: it said that nowhere here (or anywhere else in the Bible) are husbands urged, "Exercise your authority!", but the text that says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord," also says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it." If the wife's role is to submit herself to her husband as to the Lord, the husband's role is to give up his life as Christ was crucified for the Church.

And all of this seems dead to us, as we have grown dead to it. The role of hospitality, including authority, is infinitely less important than marriage, yet we see a husband's authority as external and domineering, when it is less external than the host's authority. I am drawn to memories of visiting one very traditional couple where both of them exuded freedom and comfort and dealing with them felt like a foot sliding into a well-fitting shoe. If we see a husband having authority over a wife as a foreign imposition, and nothing like the implicit authority we do not even recognize between host and guest (where the host's authority consists in making every decision to show as much kindness as possible to the guest), this is not a defect in marriage, but in our deafened ears.

An intravenous drip of noise

“Silence is the language of the age to come,” as others have said.¹³⁴ Hesychasm is a discipline of stillness, of silence, of “Be still and know that I am God.”¹³⁵ Whether spiritual silence is greater than other virtues, I do not wish to treat here; suffice it to say that all virtues are great health, and all vices are serious spiritual diseases, and all are worth attention.

There are a number of technologies whose marketing proposition is as a noise delivery system. The humble radio offers itself as a source of noise. True, there are other uses, such as listening to a news radio station for weather and traffic, but just having a radio on in the background is noise. Other sources of noise include television, iPods, smartphones, the web, and top sites like FaceBook, Google Plus, and the like. Right use of these tends to be going in and out for a task, even if the task lasts five hours, versus having noise as a drone in the background.

In terms of social appropriateness, there is such a thing as politely handling something that is basically rude. For one example, I was visiting a friend’s house and wanted to fix his printer, and apologetically said I was going to call my brother and called him to ask his opinion as a computer troubleshooter. I handled the call as something that was basically rude even though the express purpose was to help with something he had asked about and it was a short call. And it was handled politely because I handled it as

¹³⁴ Fr. Stephen Freeman, “The Sounds of Silence,” *Glory to God for All Things*, May 21, 2009, <https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/glory2godforallthings/2009/05/21/the-sounds-of-silence/>.

¹³⁵ Psalm 45:10, *Classic Orthodox Bible*.

something that is basically rude. And other people I know with good manners do sometimes make or receive a cell phone call when you otherwise have their attention, but they do so apologetically, which suggests that just ignoring the other person and making a phone call is rude. In other words, they politely handle the interruption by treating it as something that is basically rude, even if (as in the case I mentioned) the entire intention of the call was to help me help the friend I was visiting.

Something like this applies to our use of technology. There are things that are entirely appropriate if we handle them as something that is basically “rude,” or, perhaps, “noisy.” The equivalent of making a long phone call when you are with someone, without offering any apology or otherwise treating it as basically rude, is laying the reins on the horse’s neck and allowing technologies to function as a noise delivery system. What we need is to unplug our intravenous drip of noise.

Silence can be uncomfortable if you are used to the ersatz companionship of noise. If you have been in a building and step outside into the sunlight at noon, you may be dazzled. Most spiritual disciplines stretch us into something that is uncomfortable at first: the point is to be stretched more each time. The *Philokalia* talks about how people hold on to sin because they think it adorns them: to this may be added that after you repent and fear a shining part of you may be lost forever, you realize, “I was holding on to a piece of Hell.” Silence is like this; we want a noise delivery system as a drone, and once we begin to get used to its absence, there is a deeper joy. It may take time; it takes something like a year for a recovering alcoholic’s brain chemistry to reset. But once we have got rid of the drug,

once we have repented and sought to bear fruit worthy of repentance, we may find ourselves (to adapt the title of a book) blindsided by joy.

Killing time

“You cannot kill time,” the saying goes, “without injuring eternity.”

At least one breakdown of mobile users has said that they fall into three groups: “Urgent now,” people who have some degree of emergency and need directions, advice, contingency plans, and the like, “Repeat now,” people who are monitoring information like whether or how their stocks are doing, and “Bored now,” people who are caught and have some time to kill, and look for a diversion.

“Bored now” use of cell phones is simply not constructive spiritually; it offers a virtual escape for the here and now God has given us, and it is the exact opposite of the saying, “Your cell [as a monk] will teach you everything you need to know.”

The lead pencil

The lead pencil is a symbol of an alternative to an overly technologized world; one organization of people who have made a conscious decision to avoid the encroachment of technology chose the lead pencil as their emblem and formed the Lead Pencil Club.

But the lead pencil is a work of technology, and one that exists during the less than 1% of the time humans have lived for which we have recorded demographic data.¹³⁶ And

¹³⁶ Kaneda, “How Many People Have Ever Lived on Earth?,” How Many People Have Ever Lived on Earth? | Corrections Environmental Scan, May 18, 2021, <https://info.nicic.gov/ces/global/population->

even such a seemingly humble technology comes about in an impressive fashion; one economist wrote a compelling case that only God knows how pencils are made.

Sitting down and writing letters is a valuable discipline, but the norm that has been lived by 99% of the human race is oral culture; anthropologists have increasingly realized that the opposite of “written” culture is not “illiterate” culture but “oral” culture.¹³⁷ And the weapon that slides through the chink in oral culture’s armor is the writing implement, such as the lead pencil. It is not the computer, but the lead pencil and its kin, that serve as a disease vector to destroy age-old orality of culture.

This is not to say that you cannot try to use computer keyboards less and pens and pencils more. But understand that you’re not turning the clock all the way back by writing handwritten letters, however commendable the love in handwritten letters may be. The lead pencil is a technology and to those societies that embrace it, it is the death knell to an old way.

The long tail

Let me briefly outline the long tail. It is a phenomenon seen with Amazon and YouTube, where the majority of sales do not come from a statistical curve’s top sellers, but a long tail of a slowly decreasing curve where a large number of items sold in the tail of the curve adds up to more than a few top sellers.

[demographics/how-many-people-have-ever-lived-earth.](#)
¹³⁷ “Why Teachers Need to Understand the Differences between Oral and Literate Cultures.,” ETEC540 Text Technologies RSS, accessed September 20, 2022,
<https://blogs.ubc.ca/etec540sept09/2009/10/05/cultural-relevance/>.

A retail bookstore needs to sell one copy of a book in a year's time, or else that book is losing them money. Shelf space is an expensive commodity. This leads to a form of implicit censorship, not because bookstores want to stamp out certain books, but because if it's not a quick seller or a safe bet, it's a liability.

By contrast, Amazon has large volumes of shelf space; their warehouses might comfortably store a city. It costs them some money to acquire books, but the price of keeping books available is insignificant compared to a brick-and-mortar bookstore. What that means, and not just on Amazon, is that the economic censorship is lifted. People used to wonder who would be able to fill hundreds or more cable channels; now Youtube would be hard pressed to reduce itself down to a thousand channels. And so a much larger portion of Amazon's profits comes from having an enormous inventory of items that occasionally make a sale.

There is specialization implicit in the long tail; if you want to know how to make something, chances are pretty good that some blog explains how. And the proper ascetical use of technology, or Luddite if you prefer, uses things differently than the mainstream. Nobody in a phone store is going to tell you that an intravenous drip of noise in terms of text messages that go on even when you are trying to sleep does not make you happier than if you use texting when there is a special need. Some of the best resources you will find for ascetical use of technology are to be found in the long tail.

However, there is something else that comes with it. The temptation is to be off in our own customized worlds, with everything around our interests. And that is a form of spiritual poverty. Part of an age-old ascesis has been

learning how to deal with the people who are around you, localist style, instead of pursuing your own nooks and crannies. The monoculture of retail stores in America was first a problem, not because it had no long tail effects, but because it supplanted at least an implicit localism. Local cultures gave way to plastic commercial culture.

And we can use the long tail to our profit, if we don't lay the reins on the horse's neck. Shopping on the Internet for things that won't be local stores is one thing; shopping on the Internet so you don't have to get out of your pyjamas is another.

The long tail can be your best friend, or an insidious enemy.

The long tail can be a gold mine, but it is subject to the "damned backswing."

Marketing proposition

There was one CIA official who said, being interviewed by a journalist, that he would never knowingly hire someone who was attracted by the romance of cloak and dagger work. Now this was quite obviously someone who did want to hire people who would be a good fit, but someone who wants to join a cloak and dagger agency as a gateway to have life feel like a James Bond movie is off on the wrong foot.

I doubt if any major intelligence agency has promoted James Bond movies because they think it's a good way to draw the right recruits, but James Bond movies function as highly effective advertisements. They may not lead people to be able to stick out the daily grind and level of bureaucracy in a three-letter government agency, but they give a strong sense that spying is cool, and cool in a

way that probably has only the most accidental resemblance to life in one of those bureaucratic organizations.

Cop shows likewise show police officers pulling their guns out much more than in real life; it is a frequent occurrence on the cop shows I've seen, while only 27% of sworn officers have used a gun on the job (outside of training or the range).¹³⁸

Advertisement is produced as a service to the companies whose goods and services are being advertised, but the real message they sell is if anything further from the truth than the "accidental advertisement" of James Bond movies advertising a romantic version of bureaucratic intelligence agencies and cop shows making a dramatization that effectively ignores the day-to-day work of police officers because it just doesn't make good drama. (What would happen to the ratings of a cop show if they accurately portrayed the proportion of time that police officers spend filling out paperwork?)

Advertising sells claims that are further out. Two examples discussed in a class I attended in college showed a family that moved, and what was juxtaposed as cementing this bonding time was a vacuum cleaner. In another commercial, racial harmony was achieved by eating a hamburger. The commercials that stuck with me from childhood were in one case kids jumping around with rotating camera angles because they were wearing a particular brand of shoes: When I asked my parents for those shoes, they explained to me that the commercial was

¹³⁸ Rich Morin and Andrew Mercer, "A Closer Look at Police Officers Who Have Fired Their Weapon on Duty," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, August 18, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/08/a-closer-look-at-police-officers-who-have-fired-their-weapon-on-duty/>.

made to make me want them, and I took a marker and colored the patterns on the bottom of the shoes on the add on to my shoes. Another one showed a game of Laser Tag that was end to end acrobatics. Now I have never played Laser Tag, and I get the impression people like it, but I doubt that its gear confers the ability to do theatrically delivered acrobatics.

Marketing is usually more subtle and seductive than I have portrayed it here. The vacuum cleaner did not offer any words connecting the appliance with family connectedness; it's just that this family was going through a major experience and the vacuum cleaner appeared with perfect timing just at the center of that memory. The marketing message that is portrayed is seductive and false, and it is never the right basis on which to judge the product. The product may be the right thing to buy, and it may well be worth buying, but only after one has rejected the mystique so masterfully built up in the marketing proposition. If it is right for me to study ninjutsu (it isn't), it will only be right after I have rejected the ninja mystique, something which the nearest dojo does in fact do: they refer to the martial art they teach as "toshindo", nor "ninjutsu", even though they refer to essentially the same thing in Japanese.

I have said earlier, or rather repeated, the words, "Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need."¹³⁹ They bear repeating, but is there anything else to add? I would add three things:

¹³⁹ Richard J. Foster, *In Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth: Special Anniversary Edition Featuring Two New Essays*, n.d., 90.

1. Reject sacramental shopping.
2. Reject the mystique advertising has sold you this product on.
3. Wait until your heart becomes clear about what is the best choice, and then make the best choice.

The best choice, in the third world, may be to buy a Mercedes-Benz instead of a Ford because you cannot afford to replace a Ford in six years.

But take care of the spiritual housecleaning first.

Martial arts

There have been two times in my life that I have studied martial arts, and both of them have been times of exceptional spiritual dryness. I have not felt any particular dryness when learning how to use a bow and arrow, or a .22, but there is something different about Asian martial arts. Practicing them, like Orthodox Christianity, is walking along a way. It would seem to create confusion to try to pursue one of these ways along with the Orthodox way.

I am careful of declaring this in the absolute; the literature is ambivalent but there are soldiers who bear the cross of St. George, and many of them have training in Asian martial arts.

I am tempted to train in ninjutsu: partly for technique, partly because the whole of the training includes stealth, and partly for practical self-defense. But I am treating that desire as a temptation, on the understanding that God can impress things on my conscience if he wants me to enter training.

MMO's (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, like World of Warcraft)

“Do You Want to Date My Avatar?” was designed and created as a viral video, and something about it really stuck.

There are common threads between many of the things there, and an MMO is a cross between the MUDs I played in high school, and SecondLife. MUDs, short for “multi-user dungeons” or “multi-user dimensions,” are a text-based precursor to graphical Massive Multiplayer Online games. The MUDs were handled from pure text, leaving imagery in the player’s imagination; MMO’s provide their own imagery. Another form of escape.

Money and financial instruments

The Fathers commenting on St. Job also illustrate another principle of such wealth as existed then. St. Job is reported as having thousands of herd animals and thousands of beasts of burden, the wealthiest of the men of the East. But there are somewhat pointed remarks that wealthy Job is not reported to possess gold or silver. His wealth was productive wealth, living wealth, not a vault of dead metal coins. In modern terms he did not live off an endowment of stocks and bonds, but owned and ran a productive business.

Endowments are a means of being independently wealthy, and at least one Sunday school teacher says this ultimately means “independent from God.” Now the wealthiest are really as dependent on God as the poorest. Let us remember the parable of the rich fool, in which a man congratulates himself for amassing everything he would need. That night the angels demanded his soul from

him. The ending is much sadder than St. Job's story.

Those of us in the world usually possess some amount of money, but there is something that makes me uncomfortable about the stock market overall, even moreso for the more abstract financial instruments. What one attempts to do is gain the most money from one's existing money as much as possible, given the amount of risk you want, and possibly including such outliers as ethical index funds which only index stocks deemed to meet an ethical standard. The question I have is, "What are we producing for what we get out of the stock market?" Working in a job delivers tangible value, or at least can. Investing in the stock market may be connected with helping businesses to function, but more and more abstract forms of wealth have the foul smell that heralds the coming of the "damned backswing." And I would point that American society today has moved to more abstract forms of wealth, and is facing a depression. We live in a time when it is easy for a person to get an app or a book to market without involving a traditional publisher, but it is a time where, really, technology (and abstract wealth) are part of our poverty.¹⁴⁰

I would suggest as a right use of wealth: acquire tools that help you work, and be generous even or especially if money is tight, and explicitly depend on God.

Movies

When movies had arrived on the scene and were starting to have a societal effect, at least one Luddite portrayed a character moving from one movie to another in

¹⁴⁰ C.J.S. Hayward, "Technology Is Part of Our Poverty," CJS Hayward, September 7, 2022, <https://cjshayward.com/technology-is-part-of-our-poverty/>.

escapism. The premise may seem quaint now, but a little bit of that keeps on happening with new technologies.

One fellow parishioner talked about how in Japan, anime shows aired with a certain animation technique, and all of the sudden emergency rooms were asking why they were being inundated with people having epileptic seizures. When they saw the connection, Japan stopped cold in its use of that animation technique.¹⁴¹ My friend said that that underscored to him the power of television and movies.

I don't quite agree with him, any more than I would agree with findings that extremely high levels of artificial light—fluorescent, LED, or incandescent—cause problems, and we should therefore be very wary of lighting. For most sedentary people, even with artificial light (fluorescent or incandescent), the level of exposure to light is materially lower than natural exposure to the sun, and people who spend their time indoors tend to see less light, significantly less light, than people living outdoors. I didn't accept his conclusion, but he followed with another insight that I can less easily contest.

He asked if I saw movies infrequently (we had not discussed the topic, but he knew me well enough to guess where I might stand), and I told him that I usually don't watch movies. He asked me if I had ever observed that an hour after seeing a movie, I felt depressed. I had not made any connection of that sort, even if now it seems predictable from the pleasure-pain syndrome. Now I very rarely see movies, precisely because the special effects and other such tweaks are stronger than I am accustomed to seeing; they go like a stiff drink to the head of the teetotaler. The little

¹⁴¹ See CNN (Cable News Network), accessed September 20, 2022, <http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9712/17/video.seizures.update/>.

pleasures of life are lost on someone used to a rising standard of special effects, and the little pleasures of life are more wholesome than special effects.

Multitasking

As I discussed in “‘Religion And Science’ Is Not Just Intelligent Design Vs. Evolution,”¹⁴² one of the forms of name-dropping in academic theology is to misuse “a term from science”; the claim to represent “a term from science” is endemic in academic theology at Fordham, but I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I’ve read “a term from science” that was used correctly.

One book read during my studies, in a paper I no longer have, said it was going to introduce “a term from computer science,” *toggling*, which meant switching rapidly between several applications. The moral of this story was that we should switch rapidly between multiple activities in our daily lives.

What I would have said earlier is, “While that moral might be true, what it is not is a lesson from computer science.” What I would say now is, “Never mind if that is a lesson from computer science. The moral is fundamentally flawed.” Switching between activities quickly takes a heavy and unnecessary cognitive toll, and multitasking is an unproductive and inefficient way to work.¹⁴³

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:22, Christ says, “If thine eye be,” and then a word that doesn’t come

¹⁴² C.J.S. Hayward, “‘Religion and Science’ Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution,” CJS Hayward, April 23, 2021, <https://cjshayward.com/religion-science/>.

¹⁴³ Kendra Cherry, “Cognitive and Productive Costs of Multitasking,” Verywell Mind (Verywell Mind, July 30, 2021), <https://www.verywellmind.com/multitasking-2795003>.

across in translation very well. It is rendered “healthy” (NIV), “clear” (NASB), “sound” (RSV), and “good” (NKJV, NLT), Only the King James Version properly renders the primary sense of haplous as “single.” This may be a less user-friendly translation but it captures something the other translations miss. The context of the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body is about choosing whether to have a single focus in serving God, or try to multitask between serving God and money. Haplous does have “healthy”, “clear”, “sound”, and “good” as secondary meanings, but the primary meaning is the less accessible one that I have only found in the Greek and in the King James. If the eye is the lamp of the body, and it is important that the eye be single, then by extension the whole person is to be single, and as one aspect of this single eye, give a whole and single attention to one thing at a time. Now this is not necessarily a central, foreground focus in the Sermon on the Mount, but as its logic unfurls, even as spiritual silence unfurls, a single eye gives its whole and undivided attention to one thing at a time. (And study after study has shown that increased productivity through multitasking is an illusion; divided attention is divided attention and hurts all manner of actions.)

Nutriceuticals

The term “nutriceuticals” is itself an ambiguous and ambivalent term.

On the one hand, ‘nutriceuticals’ can refer to the diet advanced by the *Nourishing Traditions*¹⁴⁴ and Paleo

¹⁴⁴ Sally Fallon et al., *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook That Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats* (Washington, DC: NewTrends Publishing, Inc., 2005).

schools, and while nutrition should not be considered on its own without reference to the big picture of exercise, work, light, almsgiving, fasting, prayer, and the Holy Mysteries, there is something to the recipes and type of diet advocated in *Nourishing Traditions* or better, Paleo. On eating either instead of fast food, our bodies are healthier and our minds are clearer.

However, it seems that everybody selling certain things wants to be selling “nutriceuticals”, and there are people selling “synthetic testosterone” as a “nutriceutical.” Friends, I really hope that the offer of “synthetic testosterone” is false advertising, because if it is false advertising they are probably delivering a better product than if it’s truth in advertising. Testosterone is a steroid, the chief of the anabolic steroids used to get muscles so big they gross girls out. Now testosterone does have legitimate medical uses, but using steroids to build disgustingly huge muscles can use up to a hundred times what legitimate medical use prescribes, and it does really nasty things to body, mind, and soul.¹⁴⁵

I get the impression that most things sold as nutriceuticals are shady; to authorities, illegal nutriceuticals are probably like a water balloon, where you step on it one place and it just slides over a bit to the side. It used to be that there were perhaps a dozen major street drugs on the scene; now there is a vast bazaar where some “nutriceuticals” are squeaky-clean, and some “neutriceuticals” are similar in effect to illegal narcotics but not technically illegal, and some of them are selling

¹⁴⁵ Steroid abuse in today’s society, accessed September 20, 2022, <https://deaddiversion.usdoj.gov/pubs/brochures/steroids/professionals/>.

testosterone without medical supervision, or worse.

So, buyer beware. There's some good stuff out there (I haven't talked about goji berries), but if you want a healthy diet to go with healthy living, read and cook from *Nourishing Traditions*¹⁴⁶ or better Paleo.

Old Technologies

There is a Foxtrot cartoon where the mother is standing outside with Jason and saying something like, "This is how you throw a frisbee." "This is how you play catch." "This is how you play tennis." And Jason answers, "Enough with the historical re-enactments. I want to play some games!"

Old technologies are usually things that caused changes, and moved people away from what might be called more natural forms of life. However, they represent a lower "drug dose" than newer technologies. The humble lead pencil may be historically be the kind of technology that converted cultures away from being oral; however, a handwritten letter to an old friend is profoundly different from a stream of texts. In my technological soliloquy above, two of the three technologies I mentioned represent an old tradition. Being familiar with some of the best of older technologies may be helpful, and in general they do not have the layers on layers of fragile character that have been baked into new technologies. A Swiss Army Knife is still a portable toolchest if something messes up with the Internet. Bicycles are not a replacement for cars—you can't go as fast or as far, or stock up on groceries—but many people prefer

¹⁴⁶ Sally Fallon et al., *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook That Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats* (Washington, DC: NewTrends Publishing, Inc., 2005).

bicycles when they are a live option, and a good bicycle has far fewer points of failure than a new car.

I noted when I was growing up that a power failure meant, “Office work stops.” Now more recently an internet or network failure means, “Office work stops,” and there is someone who said, “Systems integration is when your computer doesn’t work because of a problem on a computer you never knew existed.” Older technologies are in general not so fragile, and have more of a buffer zone before you get in to the damned backswing.

Online forums (“fora,” for the more precise)

Online forums are something of a mixed blessing. They can allow discussion of obscure topics, and have many of the benefits of the long tail. I happily referred someone who was learning Linux to unix.stackexchange.com. But the blessing is mixed, and when I talked with my priest about rough stuff on an Orthodox forum, he said, “People love to talk about Orthodoxy. The real challenge is to do it.”

Online forums may be more wisely used to consult for information and knowhow, but maybe not the best place to find friends, or perhaps a good place to find friends, but not a good place to use for friendship.

Planned obsolescence, fashion, and being built NOT to last

When I made one visit to the Dominican Republic, one thing that surprised me was that a substantial number of the vehicles I saw were Mercedes-Benz or other luxury brands by U.S. standards, while there were no or almost no U.S. cars. The reason for this is that you can keep a German engineered car up and running for 30 years if you take care

of it; with a U.S. car you are doing well to have a car still running after 10 years. German cars, among others, are engineered and built to last; U.S. cars are engineered and built NOT to last. And in the Dominican Republic economy, buying a car that may well run for 30 years is something people can afford; buying a car that may only last 5-7 years is a luxury people cannot afford. An old but well-cared-for Mercedes Benz, Saab, Volvo, or BMW will probably last longer than a new car which is “imported from Detroit.”

One of the features of an industrial economy is that the economy needs to have machines in production and people buying things. If we ask the question, “Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?” the decisive answer of industrial economy is, “Man was made for economic wealth.” There are artificial measures taken to manipulate culture so as to maximize production and consumption of economic wealth, three of which are planned obsolescence, fashion, and being built NOT to last.

Planned obsolescence socially enforces repeat purchases by making goods that will have a better version available soon; in computers relatively little exploration is done to make a computer that will last a long time, because computers usually only need to last until they’re obsolete, and that level of quality is “good enough for government work.” I have an iPhone 4 and am glad not to be using my needlessly snail-like AT&T-serviced iPhone 1, but I am bombarded by advertisements telling me that I need an iPhone 4S, implying that my iPhone 4 just doesn’t cut it any more. As a matter of fact, my iPhone 4 works quite nicely, and I ignored a link advertising a free port of the iPhone 4’s distinctive feature Sila. I’m sure that if I forked out and

bought an iPhone 4S, it would not be long before I saw advertisements breeding discontent about my spiffy iPhone 4S, and giving me a next hot feature to covet.

In the Middle Ages, fashion changed in clothing about once per generation, if even that.¹⁴⁷ In our culture, we have shifting fashions that create a manufactured social need to purchase new clothing frequently, more like once per year. People do not buy clothing nearly so often because it is worn out and too threadbare to keep using, but because fashion shifted and such-and-such is in. Now people may be spending less on fashion-driven purchases than before, but it is still not a mainstream practice to throw a garment out because further attempts to mend it will not really help.

And lastly, there is the factor of things being made to break down. There are exceptions; it is possible for things to be built to last. I kept one Swiss Army Knife for twenty years, with few repairs beyond WD-40 and the like—and at the end of those twenty years, I gave it as a fully functional hand-me-down to someone who appreciated it. There is a wide stripe of products where engineers tried to engineer something to last and last, and not just German engineers. However, this is an exception and not the rule in the U.S. economy. I was incredulous when a teacher told me that the engineering positions some of us would occupy would have an assignment to make something that would last for a while and then break down. But it's true. Clothing, for instance, can be built to last. However, if you buy expensive new clothing, it will probably wear out. Goodwill and other

¹⁴⁷ Dolores Monet, "Fashion History of the High and Late Middle Ages: Medieval Clothing," Bellatory (Bellatory, January 25, 2011), <https://bellatory.com/fashion-industry/FashionHistoryoftheHighandLateMiddleAgesClothingo-the11th-15thCentury>.

second-hand stores sometimes have things that are old enough to be built to last, but I haven't found things to be that much sturdier: your mileage may vary. And culturally speaking, at least before present economic difficulties, when an appliance breaks you do not really take it in for repairs. You replace it with a newer model.

All of these things keep purchases coming so the gears of factories will continue. Dorothy Sayers' "The Other Six Deadly Sins" talks about how a craftsman will want to make as good an article as possible, while mechanized industry will want to make whatever will keep the machines' gears turning.¹⁴⁸ That means goods that are made to break down, even when it is technologically feasible for factories to turn out things that are built to last.

All of these answer the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?" with a resounding, "Man was made for economic wealth."

Porn and things connected to porn

There is a story about a philosopher who was standing in a river when someone came to him. The philosopher asked the visitor, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under the water for a little while, and asked him the second time, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under water for what seemed an interminable time, and let him up and asked, "What do you want?" The visitor gasped and said, "Air!" The philosopher said, "When you want Truth the way

¹⁴⁸ See extended quotation of the essay at C.J.S. Hayward, "Branding Is the New Root of All Evil," CJS Hayward, July 3, 2021, <https://cjsheyward.com/branding-is-the-new-root-of-all-evil/>.

you want air, you will find it.”

The same thing goes for freedom from the ever-darker chain called pornography, along with masturbation and the use of “ED” drugs to heighten thrills (which can cause nasty street drug-like effects even in marriage). To quote the Sermon on the Mount:¹⁴⁹

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery:’ but I say unto you, Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell.

The Church Fathers are clear enough that this must not be taken literally; canon law forbids self-castration. But if you want to be free from addiction to pornography, if you want such freedom the way you want air, then you will do whatever it takes to remove the addiction.

What are your options? I’m not going to imitate the Dilbert strip’s mentioning, “How to lose weight by eating less food,” but there are some real and concrete steps you can take. If you shut off your internet service, and only

¹⁴⁹ Matthew 5:27-30, Classic Orthodox Bible.

check email and conduct internet business in public places with libraries, that might be the price for purity. If you are married, you might use one of many internet filters, set up with a password that is only known to your wife. You could join a men's sexual addiction support group; that may be the price of freedom from porn, and it is entirely worth it. The general rule of thumb in confession is not to go into too much detail in confessing sexual sins, but going to confession (perhaps frequently, if your priest or spiritual father allows it) can have a powerful "I don't want to confess this sin" effect. Another way to use the Internet is only go to use it when you have a defined purpose, and avoid free association browsing which often goes downhill. You could ask prayers of the saints, especially St. Mary of Egypt and St. John the Long-Suffering of the Kiev Near Caves. You could read and pray "The Canon of Repentance to Our Lord Jesus Christ" in the Jordanville prayer book,¹⁵⁰ if your priest so blesses.

Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe: first it drains wonder and beauty out of everything else, and then it drains wonder and beauty out of itself: the only goal of lust is more lust. It works like a street drug. St. Basil the Great compared lust to a dog licking a saw: the dog keeps licking it because it likes the taste it produces, but it does not know that it is tasting its own woundedness, and the longer it keeps up at this, the deeper the wounds become.

And what comes after lusting at porn? Another act, one that offers a final exploitation of an unhappy model or two's miserable, toxic performance. All you are using her performance is for really, only one act...

Furthermore, an account of fighting sexual sin is

¹⁵⁰ *Prayer Book* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 2011).

incomplete if we do not discuss gluttony. What is above the belt is very close to what is below the belt, and the Fathers saw a tight connection between gluttony and lust. Gluttony is the gateway drug to lust. “Sear your loins with fasting,” the Fathers in the *Philokalia* tells us; the demon of lust goes out with prayer and fasting.

Sacramental shopping

I remember when I had one great struggle before surrendering, letting go of buying a computer for my studies, and then an instant later feeling compelled to buy it. The only difference was that one was sacramental shopping to get something I really needed, and the other was just getting what I needed with the “sacramental shopping” taken out.

In American culture and perhaps others, the whole advertising industry and the shape of the economy gives a great place to “sacramental shopping”, or shopping as an ersatz sacrament that one purchases not because it is useful or any other legitimate concern, but because it delivers a sense of well-being. Consider Starbucks, for instance. Some have argued that today’s brand economy is doing the job of spiritual disciplines: hence a teacher asks students, “Imagine your future successful self. With what brands do you imagine yourself associating?” and getting no puzzled looks or other body language indicating that students found the question strange. I’ve mentioned brands I consume both prestigious and otherwise; perhaps this piece would be better if I omitted mention of brands. However, even if one rejects the ersatz spirituality of brands, not all brands are created equal; my previous laptop was an IBM Thinkpad I used for years before it stopped working, and the one before

that was an Acer that demonstrated “You get what you pay for.” Investing in something good, paid for in cash, without incurring further debt, can be appropriate. Buying for the mystique is spiritual junk food.

“Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need,” is a rejection of brand economy as a spiritual discipline. Buy things on their merits and not because of the prestige of the brand. And learn to ignore the mystique that fuels a culture of discontent. Buy new clothes because your older clothing is wearing out, not because it is out of fashion. (It makes sense to buy classic rather than trendy.)

SecondLife

Most of the other technologies mentioned here are technologies I have dealt with myself, most often at some length. SecondLife by contrast is the one and only of the technologies on this list I have not even installed due to overwhelming bad intuitions when I have tried to convince myself it was something I should be doing.

It may be, some time later, that SecondLife is no longer called SecondWife, and it is a routine communication technology, used as an audio/visual successor to (purely audio) phone conversations. The web was once escape, one better than the Hitch-hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy,¹⁵¹ and now the web can be explored but it is quite often used for common nuts and bolts. No technology is permanently exotic: perhaps sometime the world of SecondLife will seem ordinary. But for now at least, it is an escape into building an alternative reality, and might as well be occult, for the degree of creating a new alternate reality it

¹⁵¹ In the book of the same title, Douglas Adams, *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (New York: Del Rey, 2021).

involves.

Smartphones, tablets, netbooks, laptops, and desktop computers

Jakob Nielsen made a distinction between computers that are *movable*, meaning laptops and netbooks which can be moved with far less difficulty and hassle than a desktop system, and *mobile*, meaning that they are the sort of thing a person can easily carry. Netbooks cross an important line compared to full-sized laptops; a regular laptop weighs enough on the shoulder that you are most likely to take a laptop in its carrying case for a reason, not just carry it like one more thing in a pocket. Netbooks, which weigh in at something like two pounds, are much lighter on the shoulder and they lend themselves more readily to keeping in a backpack, large purse, or bag of holding, without stopping to consider, “Do I really want to carry this extra weight?” Not that this is unique to netbooks; tablets are also light enough to just carry with you. Smartphones cross another important line: they are small enough to keep tucked in your pocket (or on your belt).

I was first astonished when I read that one iPhone user had completely displaced her use of the desktop computer. It surprised me for at least three reasons. First, the iPhone’s screen is tiny compared to even a small desktop screen; one thing programmers tend to learn is the more screen space they have, the better, and if they have any say in the matter, or if they have savvy management, programmers have two screens or one huge screen. Second, especially when I had an iPhone 1 that came with painfully slow and artificially limited bandwidth, the niche for it that I saw was as an emergency surrogate for a real computer

that you use when, say, you're driving to meet someone and something goes wrong. A bandwidth-throttled iPhone 1 may be painfully slow, but it is much better than nothing. Lastly, for someone used to high-speed touch typing on a regular keyboard, the iPhone, as the original Droid commercials stomped on the sore spot, "iDon't have a real keyboard." You don't get better over time at touch typing an iPhone keyboard because the keyboard is one you have to look at; you cannot by touch move over two keys to the left to type your next letter. What I did not appreciate then was that you give the iPhone keyboard more focus and attention than touch-typing a regular keyboard calls for; the "virtual keyboard" is amazing and it works well when you are looking at it and typing with both thumbs. And once that conceptual jolt is past, it works well.

What I didn't appreciate when that woman said she had stopped using her computer was that the desktop computer is wherever you have to go to use the desktop computer, while the iPhone is in one's pocket or purse. There is an incumbency advantage to the iPhone that is in your pocket or purse. It's not just that you can only use your home computer when you are at home; if you are in one room and the computer is in another, it is less effort to jot a brief email from the phone than go to the other room and use the computer.

Laziness is a factor here: I have used my iPhone over my computer due to laziness. But more broadly, a desktop or even laptop computer is in something of a sanctuary with fewer distractions; the smartphone is wherever you are, and that may be a place with very few distractions, and it may be a place with many distractions.

Smartphones, tablets, netbooks, laptops, and

desktops are all computers. The difference between them is how anchored or how portable they work out to be in practice. The more mobile a computer is, the more effectively it will be as a noise delivery system. The ascetical challenge they represent, and the need to see that we and not the technologies hold the reins, is sharper for the newer and more mobile models.

Social networks

I personally tend not to get sucked in to Facebook; I will go to a social networking site for a very particular reason, and tend not to linger even if I want something to do. There is a reason for this: I had an inoculation. While in high school I served as a student system administrator, on a system whose primary function in actual use was a social network, with messages, chatting, forums, and so on and so forth. I drank my fill of that, so to speak, and while it was nowhere near so user-friendly as Facebook, it was a drug from the same family.

Having been through that, I would say that this is not what friendship is meant to be. It may be that friends who become physically separated will maintain correspondence, and in that case a thoughtful email is not much different from a handwritten letter. As I wrote in “Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Ascesis:”¹⁵²

“Social networking” is indeed about people, but there is something about social networking’s promise that is like an ambitious

¹⁵² C.J.S. Hayward, “Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Ascesis,” CJS Hayward, March 4, 2020, <https://cjsheyward.com/technonomicon/>.

program to provide a tofu “virtual chicken” in every pot: there is something unambiguously social about social media, but there is also something as different from what “social” has meant for well over 99% of people as a chunk of tofu is from real chicken’s meat.

There is a timeless way of relating to other people, and this timeless way is a large part of ascesis. This is a way of relating to people in which one learns to relate primarily to people one did not choose. Friendship had more permanency than many today now give marriage, in which one was dependent on others (that is, interdependent with others), in which people did not by choice say goodbye to everyone they knew at once, as one does by moving in America, and a social interaction was largely through giving one’s immediate presence.

“Social networking” is a very different beast. You choose whom to relate to, and you can set the terms; it is both easy and common to block users, nor is this considered a drastic measure. Anonymity is possible and largely encouraged; relationships can be transactional, which is one step beyond disposable, and many people never meet others they communicate with face-to-face, and for that matter, arranging a face-to-face meeting is special because of its exceptional character.

Social networking can have a place. Tofu can have a place. However, we would do well to take a cue to attend to cultures that have found a proper traditional place for tofu. Asian cuisines may be unashamed about using tofu, but they consume it in moderation—and never use it to replace meat.

We need traditional social “meat.” The members of the youngest generation who have the most tofu in their diet may need “meat” the most.

“Teleporters”

I use the term “teleporters” because I do not know of a standard name, besides perhaps the name of one of the eight capital vices, for a class of technologies and other things that are in ways very different from each other but all have the same marketing proposition: escape. Not that one needs technologies to do this; metaphysics in the occult sense is another means to the same end. But all of them deliver escape.

A collection of swords is not usually amassed for defense: the owner may be delighted at the chance to learn how to handle a medieval sword, but even if the swords are “battle ready” the point is not self-defense. It’s a little bit of something that transports us to another place. Same thing for movies and video games. Same thing for historical re-enactments. Same thing, for that matter, for romances that teach women to covet a relationship with a man that could never happen, and spurn men and possibilities where a genuinely happy marriage can happen.

There are many things whose marketing proposition is escape, and they all peter out and leave us coveting more. They are spiritual poison if they are used for escape. There may be other uses and legitimate reasons—iPhones are, besides being “avoid spiritual work” systems, incredibly useful—but the right use of these things is not found in the marketing proposition they offer you.

Television

Television has been partially ousted with Facebook; TV is stickier than ever, “sticky” meaning that a technology, website, app, show, etc. hooks you in to continued use once you have started using it, but it still can’t compete with the web’s stickiest sites.¹⁵³

However, a couple of Far Side cartoons on television are worth pondering; if they were written today, they might mention more than TV.

In one cartoon, the caption reads, “In the days before television,” and a whole family is staring blankly at a blank spot on a wall, curled around it as if it were a television. The irony, of course, is that this is not what things were like before television began sucking the life out of everything. The days before television were that much more dynamic and vibrant; Gary Larson’s caption, with a cartoon that simply subtracts television from the eighties, is dripping with ironic clarity about precisely what the days before television were not.

In another cartoon, an aboriginal tribesman stands at the edge of a chasm, a vine bridge having just been cut and fallen into the chasm and making the chasm impassible. The tribesman was holding a television. On the other side were a group of angry middle-class suburbanites. The caption read, “And so Mbogo stood, the angry suburbanites standing on the other side of the chasm. Their idol was now his, as well as its curse.”

Some years back, an advertising executive wrote, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*¹⁵⁴ (one

¹⁵³ Paul Graham, “The Acceleration of Addictiveness,” The acceleration of addictiveness, accessed September 15, 2022, <http://www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers,

friend said in mock puzzlement, “The author could only think of four?”), and though the book is decades old, it speaks today. All other technologies that have been stealing television’s audiences do what television did, only more effectively and with more power.

I said at one point that the television is the most expensive appliance you can own. The reasoning was simple. For a toaster or a vacuum cleaner, if it doesn’t break, it costs you the up front purchase price, along with electricity, gas, or any other utilities it uses. And beyond those two, there is no further cost as long as it works. But with television, there was the most powerful propaganda engine yet running, advertising that will leave you keeping up with the Joneses, or, as some have argued after comparing 1950’s kitchen appliances with 1990’s kitchen appliances, keeping up with the Trumps. In this ongoing stream, the programming is the packaging and the advertising is the real content. The packaging is designed not to steal the show from the content. Today, television rules less vast of a realm, but megasites deliver the same principle: the reason you go to the website is a bit of wrapping, and the product being sold, is *you*.

Our economy is in a rough state, but welcome to keeping up with the Trumps version 2.0. The subscription fees for smartphones and tablets are just the beginning.

The timeless way of relating

Christopher Alexander saw that computers were going to be the next building, and he was the champion who introduced computer-aided design to the field of architecture. Then he came to a second realization, that

computer-aided design may make some things easier and faster, but it does not automatically make a building better: computer aided design makes it easier to architect good and bad buildings alike, and if you ask computers to make better buildings, you're barking up the wrong fire hydrant.

But this time his work, *The Timeless Way of Building*,¹⁵⁵ fell on deaf ears in the architectural community... only to be picked up by software developers and be considered an important part of object-oriented software design. The overused term, MVC ("model-view-controller"), which appears in job descriptions when people need a candidate who solves problems well, whether or not that meant using MVC, is part of the outflow of object-oriented programming seeing something deep in patterns. Some programmers have taken a profound lesson from *The Timeless Way of Building*¹⁵⁶ even if good programmers in an interview have to conceal an allergic reaction when MVC is presented as a core competency for almost any kind of project.

There really is A Timeless Way of Building, and Alexander finds it in some of ancient and recent architecture alike. In the same vein there is a timeless way of relating. In part, we may see it as one more piece of it is dismantled by one more technology migration, but there is a real and live timeless relating, and not just through rejecting technologies.

C.S. Lewis, in a passage in *That Hideous Strength*,¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979).

¹⁵⁶ Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979).

¹⁵⁷ C.S. Lewis, "That Hideous Strength," Internet Archive, January 1, 1970,

talks about how everything is coming to a clearer and sharper point. Abraham was not wrong for his polygamy as we would be for polygamy, but there is some sense that he didn't profit from it. Merlin was not something from the sixth century, but the last survival in the sixth century of something much older. Things that have been gray, perhaps not beneficial even if they are not forbidden, are more starkly turning to black or white.

This is one of the least convincing passages for Lewis's effort to speak of "mere Christianity." I am inclined to think that something of the exact opposite is true, that things that have been black and white in ages past have more leniency, more grey. Not necessarily that leniency equals confusion; Orthodoxy has two seemingly antithetical but both necessary principles of *akgravia* (striving for strict excellence) and *oikonomia* (the principle of mercifully relaxing the letter of the law). We seem to live in a time of *oikonomia* from the custom which has the weight of canon law, where (for instance) the ancient upper class did far less physical exertion than the ancient lower class and slaves, but middle class fitness nuts today exercise less than the ancient upper class. Three hours of aerobic exercise is a lot. While we pride ourselves on abolishing legal slavery, we wear not only clothing from sweatshops made at the expense of preventable human misery, but large wardrobes and appliances and other consumer goods that bear a price tag in human misery. Many Orthodox Christians have rejected the position of the Fathers on contraception from time immemorial, and the Church has been secularized enough for many to get their bearings from

one article.¹⁵⁸

But two things are worth mentioning here. The first is that this is a time that invites prophets. Read the Old Testament prophets: prophets, named “the called ones” in the Old Testament, never come when things are going well to say “Keep it up. Carry on your good work!” They come in darker days.

Second, while we live in a time where mere gloom is called light and we rely on much more oikonomia than others, oikonomia is real Orthodoxy in proper working order, and in ways Orthodoxy with oikonomia is much greater than rigidly rejecting oikonomia. The people who call themselves “True Orthodox”, or now that “True Orthodox” sounds fishy, call themselves “Genuine Orthodox” to avoid the troubles they have created for the name of “True Orthodox.” Despite observing the letter of canons more scrupulously than even the most straight-laced of normal Orthodox Christians, these people are people who don’t get Orthodoxy, and would do well to receive the penance of eating a thick steak on a strict fast day.

And despite having so many slices taken out, the timeless way of relating is alive and well. It is present at a meal around table with friends. It is present when a man and wife remain together “’til death do us part.” It is present when Catholics adore the Eucharist, or Evangelicals don’t miss a Sunday’s church for years and keep up with their quiet times and Bible studies. “Conversation is like texting

¹⁵⁸ Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90, discussed in C.J.S. Hayward, "Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article," CJS Hayward, June 12, 2021, <https://cjsheyward.com/contraception/>.

for adults,” said our deacon, and the timeless way of relating is there when people use texting to arrange a face-to-face visit. The timeless way of relating is always close at hand.

Vaccines

In time past, DDT stopped an insect-borne epidemic cold in its tracks, and then had another coup: in Vietnam, over 50% of the casualties were caused by malaria, while with spraying DDT, malaria was stopped cold, leaving soldiers free to pay attention to other matters. It was not without reason that people thought of how to deal with insect pests in DDT-shaped terms.

Today we live after vaccination has wiped certain childhood diseases almost completely off the planet, and we have vaccine-shaped expectations for how we can deal with COVID-19. With DDT there was fish kill, and the frogs were not singing when they should have been, and vaccination has had deadly results (a pulmonary embolism here,¹⁵⁹ terminal cancer there, maybe in Israel many people suffering from a new AIDS when their immune systems have been destroyed by vaccines). We still hope for a vaccine, and read with apparent pleasure that new vaccines will target the whole family of viruses SARS and COVID belong to.

Orthodox Christians do not have business receiving a blood-stained vaccine,¹⁶⁰ and if they have already received

¹⁵⁹ Suffered by Yours Truly, after a first dose only of Pfizer-Biotech. Undetected or untreated, it would have killed me before I could write this.

¹⁶⁰ See Frankie Vaughan, “Covid-19 Vaccines Developed with Human Embryonic Cells - Expert Reaction ,” Science Media Centre, February 11, 2021,

some vaccination (I had a first dose when I caved to pressure), do not have business having further blood-stained vaccine.

The “vaccines” are deadly and may amount to a genocide of all kinds of innocent people in one of our day’s Holocausts that, if it has not killed more Jews than Hitler, is well on its way.

This may sound conspiracy-ish, to which I protest that my sources are all on mainstream sources and recall the famous joke:

Q: What’s the difference between a conspiracy theory and news?

A: About two months.

I was told, on an infamous OTSA factsheet mailed to my parish mailing list in support of my heirarch who had chosen to be publicly vaccinated, which opened just below its first header, “Vaccines are a safe way to prevent viral infections.” They are not. They can have deadly effects, and they can destroy a woman’s capacity to reproduce. (And telling e.g. about a woman whose body had ejected a good part of her uterine wall after receiving an injection, was part of how feminist Christiane Northrup managed to go from being one of the 100 most trusted people in America to being on a disinformation dozen.)¹⁶¹ And none of the

<https://www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/2020/08/27/covid-19-vaccines-developed-with-human-embryonic-cells-expert-reaction/>. Taking a vaccine creates demand for vaccines that were created with the moral cost of bloodguilt.

¹⁶¹ Christiane Northrup, “Could Their Shot Be Harming You?,” Rumble, accessed September 20, 2022, <https://rumble.com/vfzodp-could->

vaccine backers I have heard of have backed off in the least on evidence that people are being killed and harmed by the vaccine once it is in use.

Video games

I was introduced to the computer game rogue and while in school wanted to play Rogue / UltraRogue for as long as I could. When I decided in grad school that I wanted to learn to program, I wrote a crufty and difficult-to-understand Roguelike game implemented in 60,000 lines of C.

Those many hours I played in that fantasy land were my version of time lost in television. There are things I could have done that I didn't: create something, explore outside, write letters. As primitive and humble as Rogue may be, it stems from the same root as World of Warcraft. It is one of several technologies I have tasted in an egg: Rogue, UltraRogue, The Minstrel's Song, and different MUDs; or a command-line computer doing the work of a social network. These are precursors to MMO's and Facebook. The newer games and social network may connect more dots and do some of your imagining for you. The core remains: you sit in front of a computer, transported to a fantasy land,

[their-shot-be-harming-you.html](#). The gathering of dissidents includes some crackpots, but remember that people who innovate in scientific discovery are often considered crackpots until their views are accepted. Hence a rough English translation of a German original in Phillip Lopate, "One Hundred Authors Against Einstein," Amazon (Anchor, 2021), <https://www.amazon.com/One-Hundred-Authors-Against-Einstein/dp/B09PHH7KC8>.

Einstein's response: "If I were wrong, then one [author] would have been enough!" (Albert Einstein and Alice Calaprice, *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 170).

and not exploring the here and now that you have been placed in, in all its richness.

The Web

When I was a boy and when I was a youth, it was a sheer delight to go to Honey Rock Camp. I don't want to elaborate on all of my fond memories but I would like to point to one memory in particular: the web.

Resourceful people had taken a World War II surplus piece of netting, attached it to the edges of a simple building, and pulled the center up by a rope. The result was everything a child wants from a waterbed, and I remember, for instance, kids gathering on the far side of the web, my climbing up the rope, and then letting go and dropping five or ten feet into the web, sending little children flying. As with my other macho ways of connecting with children, if I did this once I was almost certainly asked to do it again. (The same goes, for some extent, with throwing children into the web.)

I speak of that web in the past tense, because after decades of being a cherished attraction, the web was falling apart and it was no longer a safe attraction. The people in charge made every effort to replace it, and found to everyone's dismay that they couldn't. Nobody makes those nets; and apparently nobody has one of those nets available, or at least not for sale. In that regard, the web is a characteristic example of how technologies are handled in the U.S. ("Out with the old, in with the new!"). Old things are discarded, so the easily available technologies are just the newer one.

Software is fragile; most technological advances in both software and hardware are more fragile than what they

replace. Someone said, “If builders built buildings the way programmers write programs, the first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization.” The web is a tremendous resource, but it will not last forever, and there are many pieces of our complex interlocking mesh of technologies that could limit or shut off the web. Don’t assume that because the web is available today it will equally well be available indefinitely.

Wittgenstein’s “Forms of life”

I’m not Wittgenstein’s biggest fan, and I wince when people speak of “after Wittgenstein.” But his concept of “forms of life” is relevant here. A form of life is something that is structural to how people live, and normally tacit; my philosophy professor was searching for an example of “forms of life” to give to his class, and after a couple of minutes of silence I said, “You are trying to a difficult thing. You are trying to find something that is basically tacit and not consciously realized, but that people will recognize once it is pointed out. I guess that you have thought of a few possibilities and rejected them because they fall around on one of those criteria.” He searched a bit more, and gave the example of, “It used to be that procreation was seen as necessary for human flourishing. Now people think that limiting procreation is seen as necessary for human flourishing.”

Arguably a Luddite’s Guide to Forms of Life would be more useful than “The Luddite’s Guide to Technology,” but in the discussion of different technologies there is always a concern for what Wittgenstein would call “forms of life.” It is possible to turn on the television for 10 minutes a day for weather information, and that retains the same form of life

as not using television at all. Watching television for hours a day is, and shapes, a distinct form of life. And in some sense the basic question addressed in this work is not, “What technologies are you using?” but “What forms of life do you have, given your technology usage?”

Conclusion

This work has involved, perhaps, too much opinion and too much of the word “I”; true Orthodox theology rarely speaks of me, “myself, and I,” and in the rare case when it is really expedient to speak of oneself, the author usually refers to himself in the third person.

The reason I have referred to myself is that I am trying to make a map that many of us are trying to make sense of. There is a very simple answer given in monasticism, where renunciation of property includes technology even if obediences may include working with it. The words “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth”¹⁶² offer another simple answer. Those of us who live in the world are bound not to be attached to possessions, even if they own them. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* offers a paragraph addressed to married people and a book addressed to monastics, but it has been read with great profit by all manner of people, married as well as monastic.

Somewhere amidst these great landmarks I have tried to situate my writing. I do not say that it is one of these landmarks; it may be that the greatest gift is a work that will spur a much greater Orthodox Christian to do a much better job.

My godfather offered me many valuable corrections when I entered the Orthodox Church, but there is one and

¹⁶² Matthew 6:19, Classic Orthodox Bible.

only one I would take issue with. He spoke of the oddity of writing something like “the theology of the hammer”; and my own interest in different sources, stemming from reading technological determinist authors like Neil Postman. Even if a stopped clock is right twice a day, their Marxism is a toxic brew.

However, I write less from the seductive effects of those books. My writing is not because they have written XYZ but because I have experienced certain things in mystical experience. I have a combined experience of decades helping run a Unix box that served as a social network, and playing MUDs, and sampling their newer counterparts. My experience in Orthodox Christianity has found great mystical truth and depth in the words, “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”¹⁶³ Part of that pruning has been the involuntary removal of my skills as a mathematics student; much of it has been in relation to technology. The Bible has enough to say about wealth and property as it existed millenia ago; it would be strange to say that “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth” speaks to livestock and owning precious metals but has nothing to do with iPads.

One saint said that the end will come when one person no longer makes a path to visit another. With social media, we now have the technology to do that.

Let our technology be used ascetically, or not at all.

¹⁶³ John 15:2, Classic Orthodox Bible.

Questions for self-examination, study, and discussion regarding “A Guide to Technology’s Hidden Price Tags:”

1. What technology or issue strikes you as most salient of those that are raised?
2. Is there any technology that you are never going to look at the same way again? If so, what is it and why?
3. What hidden price tags do the technologies you use cost you?
4. Have you considered, speaking literally, that it may be easier not to eat a cookie than to burn it off in the gym? If so, how?
5. Have you considered, speaking figuratively, that it may be easier not to eat a cookie than to

burn it off in the gym?

6. What would you like to partially abstain from now?
7. What would you like to completely abstain from now?
8. If you are in the trap of using porn, what can you do to want sexual purity like you want air?
9. What is the biggest thing you realize you need to take to confession, whether or not you are ashamed of it or not?
10. Do you need what you can afford?
11. What can you afford that you don't really and truly need?

Introduction to *The Consolation of Theology*

This work is an intentional variation on Boethius's little gem of a classic: *The Consolation of Philosophy*, C.S. Lewis's favorite old book. It is the most endearing text I have read in neo-Platonism and possibly the most endearing text in all philosophy.

As many others besides C.S. Lewis note, *The Consolation of Philosophy* constitutes a Christian making perfectly legitimate Christian use of the best pagan philosophy of classical antiquity.¹⁶⁴ Many people ask why

¹⁶⁴I would make a brief digression and note that the patristic engagement with philosophy adopted quite a lot, really, of ancient philosophy: but beware of texts and people who speak glibly about patristic use of "the best philosophical resources of the day." Neo-Platonism was to the Greek Fathers at once the air they breathed and something they struggled and rebelled against, with some truly bad neighborhoods. The Fathers strove for what would today be called a *critical reception* of the philosophy of the day, and I have never once heard the glib phrase "the best philosophical resources of the day" followed by a critique of postmodernism's bad neighborhoods.

Boethius wrote of the consolation of **philosophy** instead of the consolation of **theology**. This book is written with full recognition that Boethius's project is a landmark success, and an attempt to write the book people are mystified Boethius didn't write *instead*.

This book is meant both to stand on its own and to take a road less traveled for the reader already acquainted with Boethius. For that matter, it is also intended in the tradition of another, lesser author following *How Shall We Then Live?*, following it with *How Now Shall We Live?*, and another author following *Leviathan* with *Behemoth*, and indeed how *The Consolation of Philosophy* has already been followed with *The Consolations of Philosophy*.

One reader commented about how *The Consolation of Philosophy* speaks the languages of theology and technology with equal ease, earning its place in this collection.

Song I.**The Author's Complaint.**

The Gospel was new,
 When one saint stopped his ears,
 And said, "Good God!
 That thou hast allowed me,
 To live at such a time."
 Jihadists act not in aught of vacuum:
 Atheislam welcometh captors;
 Founded by the greatest Christian heresiarch,
 Who tore Incarnation and icons away from all things
 Christian,
 The dragon next to whom,
 Arius, father of heretics,
 Is but a fangless worm.
 Their "surrender" is practically furthest as could be,
 From, "God and the Son of God,
 Became Man and the Son of Man,
 That men and the sons of men,
 Might become Gods and the Sons of God,"
 By contrast, eviscerating the reality of man.
 The wonder of holy marriage,
 Tortured and torn from limb to limb,
 In progressive installments old and new,
 Technology a secular occult is made,
 Well I wrote a volume,
The Luddite's Guide to Technology,
 And in once-hallowed halls of learning,
 Is taught a "theology,"
 Such as one would seek of Monty Python.
 And of my own life; what of it?

A monk still I try to be;
Many things have I tried in life,
And betimes met spectacular success,
And betimes found doors slammed in my face.
Even in work in technology,
Though the time be an economic boom for the work,
Still the boom shut me out or knocked me out,
And not only in the Church's teaching,
In tale as ancient as Cain and Abel,
Of The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab.
And why I must now accomplish so little,
To pale next to glorious days,
When a-fighting cancer,
I switched discipline to theology,
And first at Cambridge then at Fordham,
Wished to form priests,
But a wish that never came true?

I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Patriarch were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue of liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the Greek letters X, and A. I crossed myself thrice, wary of devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, "Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?":

A novice said to a master, "I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere,

drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people's minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?"

The master said, "Inside your heart."

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

"Thou seemest on paper to live thy conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but lacking the true strength that is behind that position. Hast thou not read my *Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself*?¹⁶⁵ How the three children, my son, in a pagan court, with every lechery around them, were graced not to defile themselves in what they ate, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an idol beyond monstrous stature? And the angel bedewed them in external victory after they let all else go in internal and eternal triumph?"

"It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross

165 St. John Chrysostom, "Orthodox Church Fathers: Patristic Christian Theology Classics Search Engine," John Chrysostom: The Treatise to Prove that No One Can Harm the Man who Does Not Injure Himself (Orthodox Church Fathers), accessed September 22, 2022, <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/npnf109/npnf1037.htm>.

Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art already a monk. Keep on seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossest the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

“Perhaps it is that God has given thee such good things as were lawful for God to give but unlawful and immature for thou to seek for thyself. Thou hast acquired a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and a heresiologist’s formation, but thou writest for the common man. Canst not thou imagine that this may excel such narrow writing, read by so few, in the confines of scholarship? And that as thou hast been graced to walk the long narrow road of affliction, thou art free now to sit in thy parents’ splendid house, given a roof when thou art homeless before the law whilst thou seekest monasticism, and writest for as long as thou art able? That wert wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing as much as it were wrong and immature to seek years’ training in academic theology and heresy and give not a day’s tribute to the professorial ascesis of pride and vainglory (thou hadst enough of thine own). Though this be not an issue of morality apart from ascesis, thou knewest the settled judgement that real publication is traditional publication and vanity press is what self-publication is. Yet without knowing, without choosing, without even guessing, thou wert again & time again in the right place, at the right time, amongst the manifold shifts of technology, and now, though thou profitest not in great measure from thy books,

yet have ye written many more creative works than thou couldst bogging with editors. Thou knowest far better to say, ‘Wisdom is justified of her children,’¹⁶⁶ of thyself in stead of saying such of God, but none the less thou hadst impact. Yet God hath granted thee the three, unsought and unwanted though thou mayest have found them.”

I stood in silence, all abashed.

Song II.

His Despondency.

The Saint spoke thus:

“What then? How is this man,
 A second rich young ruler become?
 He who bore not a watch on principle,
 Even before he’d scarce more than
 Heard of Holy Orthodoxy,
 Weareth a watch built to stand out,
 Even among later Apple Watches.
 He who declined a mobile phone,
 Has carried out an iPhone,
 And is displeased to accept,
 A less fancy phone,
 From a state program to provide,
 Cell phones to those at poverty.
 Up! Out! This will not do,
 Not that he hath lost an item of luxury,
 But that when it happened, he were sad.
 For the rich young ruler lied,
 When said he that he had kept,

¹⁶⁶ Matthew 11:19, Classic Orthodox Bible.

All commandments from his youth,
For unless he were an idolater,
The loss of possessions itself,
Could not suffice to make him sad.
This man hast lost a cellphone,
And for that alone he grieveth.
Knoweth he not that money maketh not one glad?
Would that he would recall,
The heights from which he hath fallen,
Even from outside the Orthodox Church.”

II.

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

“Thou wert surprised to learn, and that outside the Orthodox Church, that when the Apostle bade you to put on the whole armour of Christ, the armour of Christ wert not merely armour owned by Christ, or armour given by Christ:

it were such armour as God himself wears to war: the prophet Isaiah tells us that the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation are God's own armour which he weareth to war.

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

Song III.

A Clearer Eye.

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

III.

Then said I, “I see much truth in thy words, but my fortunes have not been those of success. I went to

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

Ere he answered me, "Whence askest thou the future? It is wondrous. And why speakest thou of thy fortune? Of a troth, no man hath ever had fortune. It were an impossibility."

I sat a-right, a-listening.

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

"Thou seekedst a better fit than as a computer programmer, and triedst, and God hath provided other than

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

“There is no such thing as fortune, only an often-mysterious Providence. God has a care each and all over men, and for that matter over stones, and naught that happeneth in the world escapeth God’s cunning net. As thou hast quoted the Philokalia:¹⁶⁷

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

1. Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.

¹⁶⁷ St. Peter of Damaskos, “Orthodox Church Fathers: Patristic Christian Theology Classics Search Engine,” Book I: A Treasury of Divine Knowledge, accessed September 22, 2022, <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/philokalia/st-peter-of-damaskos-book-i-a-treasury-of-divine-knowledge.html>.

2. Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
3. Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgement and establish virtue.
4. Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
5. Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
6. Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
7. Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire virtue.
8. Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
9. 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.
10. 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.

11. 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:¹⁶⁸

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

¹⁶⁸ “Orthodox Church Fathers: Patristic Christian Theology Classics Search Engine,” St Symeon Metaphrastis: Paraphrase of the Homilies of St Makarios of Egypt: VI: The Freedom of the Intellect, accessed September 22, 2022, <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/philokalia/st-symeon-metaphrastis-paraphrase-of-the-homilies-of-st-makarios-of-egypt-vi-the.html>.

time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God's will. 'My son,' says Scripture, 'if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure' (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each

soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

Hemp, unless it is well beaten, cannot be worked into fine yarn, whilst the more it is beaten and carded the finer and more serviceable it becomes. And a freshly moulded pot that has not been fired is of no use to man. And a child not yet proficient in worldly skills cannot build, plant, sow seed or perform any other worldly task. In a similar manner it often happens through the Lord's goodness that souls, on account of their childlike innocence, participate in divine grace and are filled with the sweetness and repose of the Spirit; but because they have not yet been tested, and have not been tried by the various afflictions of the evil spirits, they are still immature and not yet fit for the kingdom of heaven. As the apostle says: 'If you have not been disciplined you are bastards and not sons' (Heb. 12 : 8). Thus trials and afflictions are laid upon a man in the way that is best for him, so as to make his soul stronger and more mature; and if the soul endures them to the end with hope in the Lord it cannot fail to attain the promised reward of the Spirit and deliverance from the evil passions.

“Thou hast earned scores in math contests, yea even scores of math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now thou hast suffered various

things and hast not the limelight which thou hadst, or believest thou hadst, which be much the same thing. Again, what of it? God hath provided for thee, and if thou hast been fruitless in a secular arena, thou seekest virtue, and hast borne some fruit. Moreover thou graspest, in part, virtue that thou knewest not to seek when thou barest the ascesis of a mathematician or a member of the Ultranet. Thou seekest without end that thou mayest become humble, and knowest not that to earnestly seek humility is nobler than being the chiefest among mathematicians in history?

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

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

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

I am your God, the circumstances of your life are in My hands; you did not end up in your position by chance; this is precisely the position I have appointed for you. Weren't you asking Me to teach you humility? And there –

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

even if their care slay thee.

“What of it? Thy purity of conscience is in no manner contingent on what others decide in their dealings with thee. It may be that the change in thy medicaments be less dangerous than it beseemeth thee. It may be unlawful to the utmost degree for thou to seek thine own demise: yet it is full lawful, and possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give thee a life complete and full even if it were cut short to the morrow.

“Never mind that thou seest not what the Lord may provide; thou hast been often enough surprised by the boons God hath granted thee. Thou hast written ‘Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret,’¹⁶⁹ and thou knowest that repentance itself eclipseth the pleasure of sin. Know also that grievous men, and the devil himself, are all ever used by God according to his design, by the God who worketh all for all.

“We do *not* live in the best of all possible worlds.’¹⁷⁰ Far from it. However, we live under the care of the best of all possible Gods, and it is a more profound truth, a more vibrant truth, a truth that goes much deeper into the heart of root of all things to say that we may not live in the best of all possible worlds, but we live under the care of the best of all possible Gods.

“Know and remember also that happiness comes from within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build strength within. Wittest thou not that thou art a man,

¹⁶⁹ C.J.S. Hayward, “Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret,” CJS Hayward, February 4, 2022, <https://cjshayward.com/repentance/>.

¹⁷⁰ C.J.S. Hayward, “God the Spiritual Father,” CJS Hayward, February 4, 2022, <https://cjshayward.com/father/>.

and as man art constituted by the image of God? If therefore thou art constituted in the divine image, why lookest thou half to things soulless and dead for thy happiness?"

Song IV.

Virtue Unconquerable.

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

IV.

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

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

"Happiness is of particular concern to you and to many, and if words in the eighteenth century spoke of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;' now there are many

people who make the pursuit of happiness all but a full-time occupation.

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

“But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study to understand men.

“One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls ‘flow’ as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the Pleasant Life, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the Engaged Life, or the life of flow, called optimal experience, and the Meaningful Life, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.¹⁷¹

“He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice

¹⁷¹ Martin Seligman, “The New Era of Positive Psychology,” Martin Seligman: The new era of positive psychology | TED Talk, accessed September 22, 2022, https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_seligman_the_new_era_of_positive_psychology.

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

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

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

“Flow, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso's entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of

which most of us are aware when we are awake.

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

“And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was par excellence the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if

anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

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

“And remember how thou wast admonished by a monk, perhaps in echo of St. James, the Brother of God, who said, ‘Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the

flower of the grass, he shall pass away.’¹⁷² For thou wert in the trapeza, with the monk and with a janitorial lady, and he told the janitorial lady that she was fortunate, for her manual labour left her free to pray with her mind, and thou, a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

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

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

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. “If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society’s possibles et

¹⁷² James 1:9-10, Classic Orthodox Bible.

pensables, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals, and people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

“Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.

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

“But the other text was different in many ways. It was entitled ‘Love Without Boundaries,’ and it was a text about love written by the father of a severely autistic son. This latter text did not come close to calling for agitation or plans for a better future: far from it; on these points it is silent.

What it did do, however, was take an approach in asceticism: 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. Isaac¹⁷³ exhorts us to acquire, and the love the father expressed rendered him Godlike, in a humble, everyday, ordinary fashion.

“And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called the Physics Envy Declaration: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

“It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less-than-human: a near-universal feature of psychological experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between fellow men.¹⁷⁴ (Though the enterprise may be named

¹⁷³ “A Quote by Isaac the Syrian,” Goodreads (Goodreads), accessed September 22, 2022, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/513393-make-peace-with-yourself-and-both-heaven-and-earth-will>.

¹⁷⁴ This much I observed in repeated readings of the conditions of psychological experiment. There are exceptions, such as Pavlov's work with dogs, but if you read of experiments with human subjects, you will read of some hypothesis or condition the experiment is designed to test, and then a framing so that the accuracy or inaccuracy of the condition's premises may be visible in the results, but without ever telling the subjects what the experiment is to test beforehand, and the experiment is designed to prevent the subjects from seeing what it was that their responses were intended to test.

‘psychology,’ the name were oafishly or treacherously applied; for the name be drawn from the Greek for the study that understands the psyche or soul, a psyche or soul is precisely what the discipline will not countenance in man.) Forsooth! Men running experiments think and make decisions; subjects in experiments are governed by laws. Moreover, since physics hath worked long and hard to de-anthropomorphise what it studies, Physics Envy biddeth psychology to seek well a de-anthropomorphised theory of ανθρωπος (anthropos), man.

“It hath been noted, as psychology reinvent more of religion, that classical clinical psychology can raise a person suffering from some mental illness to be as normal, but nought more.¹⁷⁵ And so positive psychology chaseth after means of enhancement and excellence, to best make use of giftedness. Meanwhilst, whilst this invention is brand new, it is well over a millennium since monasticism was at one stroke a hospital for repentant sinners and an academy for excellence.

“The point primarily to be held is that psychology is not the ultimate real way, but one among many ways, of understanding how people work, and one that hath stopped its ear to our being created in the image of God. All great Christian doctrines are rendered untranslatable. The article

See, for instance, the Asch conformity experiment, in Kendra Cherry, “Asch's Seminal Experiments Showed the Power of Conformity,” Verywell Mind (Verywell Mind, May 10, 2022), <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-asch-conformity-experiments-2794996>.

¹⁷⁵ Martin Seligman, “The New Era of Positive Psychology,” Martin Seligman: The new era of positive psychology | TED Talk, accessed September 22, 2022, https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_seligman_the_new_era_of_positive_psychology.

form of what is also thine advisor's thesis hath as its subtitle 'From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,' and it discusseth the formation of psychology as an emergent secular realm which hath displaced older candidates. But in the West before the reign of psychology there were pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and thou knowest that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asketh its converts to learn is 'passion:' and if the passions thine advisor hath discussed are not point-for-point identical to the passions repented of in Eastern Orthodoxy, still they be by far closer than any of the several emergent framings and meanings of 'emotion' as pushed for in the discipline of psychology.

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

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

wondrous and amazing were to enlarge it until it grew to become true marriage.

“Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from Buddhism’s Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of a quotation misattributed to G.K. Chesterton: “When a man stops believing in God he doesn’t then believe in nothing, he believes anything.”¹⁷⁶ But put this aside and take psychology’s claim of secularity at face value. The *Philokalia* is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the main concerned with pleasure or joy, but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one’s inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul’s purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

“And if I may speak to thee of TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, ‘The Trouble with TED,’ for they exacerbate this problem of people who do not believe in God believing anything. As thou knowest, one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and the

¹⁷⁶ Ted & Rachel Schluenderfritz, “When Man Ceases to Worship God,” Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton, November 17, 2018, <https://www.chesterton.org/ceases-to-worship/>.

lamented consequence arising that our youth in particular reach record levels of narcissism. Well might be announced that if thou spryest fuel around and throwest lighted matches on the fuel, sooner or sooner thou wilt have a blaze about thee.

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

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

His All Holiness answered me and said, “All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one uses up, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries theven; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, ‘No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable.’ Easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called ‘Christian feminism,’ which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of women. For an ensauple, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing

women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of 'feminism,' but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is not feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, 'all the central terms are up for grabs.' Meanwhilst, remember thy superior when thou wast an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest have a care that they are heterodox, but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion. If they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but that something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

"Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years, and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political! Forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

"But let us return to psychology, or rather treat psychology and TED talks, for psychology hath of ages hoped for a Newton who would lead them into the Promised Land full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Forsooth! The problems in psychology are not so

much where psychology has failed to understand Man on the ensauple of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have succeeded.

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

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

Song V.

O Holy Mother!

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst'ry?
Art Thou the Myst'ry untold?
For I have written much,
And spent much care.
In *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*,

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

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

V.

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

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

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

“Shortly after, thou realizedst three things: firstly,

that the boy in fact had not struck his head on the kitchen ceiling, even though you had advanced well into the kitchen area; secondly, that the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling; and thirdly and finally, that he was laughing and laughing, full of joy.

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

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

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

“Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. The psychologist did not comment or offer comparison between knowing thou hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment was this: the boy was guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour.

Wherewith thou hadst no question of ‘Does he enjoy what I

am doing with him, or is he just being polite?’ Just being polite was off the table.

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

“Which wast subsumed under a general troth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who be truly happy is enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount, and enshrined again as the shorthand version of that great Sermon chanted in the Divine Liturgy:¹⁷⁷

"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.

¹⁷⁷ Matthew 5:3-12, Classic Orthodox Bible

"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 re-
ward in Heaven: for so persecuted they the
prophets which were before you.

“The word translated, ‘blessed,’ μακαριος
(*makarios*), hath what we would count as at least two
meanings in English: ‘blessed,’ and ‘happy.’ Among English
Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations
which render the word as ‘happy,’ including Young’s Literal
Translation:¹⁷⁸

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

¹⁷⁸178 Matthew 5:3-12, YLT.

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

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

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

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

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

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

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

“In English this is usually, but not always, found in more free translations; the Amplified Bible naturally shines in cases like these as an deliberately unusual translation

style intended to render two or more faces of an ambiguity or a phrase bearing multiple meanings. Other languages can be different; in French, for instance, there are separate words *béni* and *heureux* which respectively mean ‘blessed’ and “happy,” but *heureux* appears to be the term of choice in French translation of the Beatitudes.

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

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

greatest economic profit. Thou hast borrowed an answer, to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thee of this purported truth.

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

motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment was posed, that a man who gives to the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

Song VI.

Crossing the Great Threshold.

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

VI.

I said myself then, "O John! O glorious Saint John!"

Canst thou lead me on a path into the The Sermon on the Mount? For I have trod the path of self-direction, and it well nigh destroyed me.”

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

“That which you ask wast a work of years or lifetimes; let me chase a humbler quarry, unfolding the first verse only of that great Sermon, which declareth the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to thee of the riches of poverty, but not the heights of humility, though they be one and the same. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them that which declared the blessedness of poverty that wast one and the same. And I tell thee, through thine interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal. Kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch aught possession, not solely money, in stead of grasping as did the rich young ruler.¹⁷⁹ But poverty be the unstopping of yon Sermon, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fount eclipseth flowing fount.

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

¹⁷⁹ Mark 10:17-22.

idiorrhythmic self-direction for a coenobetic monastery, and to speak even more plainly, the direction of an abbot.

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

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

“It has from ancient times been reckoned that if thou givest to the poor, God is thy Debtor, and under what you would call third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave to their children brothers rather than things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belong only in marriage, in a condition monks renounce. Thou hast read of

those who suggest that you ask not, 'Can I afford what I need?' but 'Do I need what I can afford?'

"It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not only by force, but even with words, showing the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty not to struggle again over any temporal matter. It is poverty of spirit not to have plans, nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times, Christians who were martyred, answered when asked their names, none other than 'Christian.' 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. Monks who renounce property sometimes have something to say beyond 'Good riddance!' The force of the rejection, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and thundering announcement: 'I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!'

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

Song VII.

I Sing a Song to my Apple.

Betimes my salad days were right begun,
I programmed an Apple][,
In gradeschool adventure games and a 4D maze,
Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.
My father a computer scientist,
Who shared with me his joy,
And in high school a Unix system administrator I became.
My family got, and still hath the carcass,
Of one original “fat Mac,”
So named because it had an available maximum 512k of
RAM.
My calculator in high school,
On which I programmed computer-generated art,
And a simple video game, had as much.
Ere my salad days were dwindled,
I remained a Unix programmer,
And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.
Later I had iPhones,
And for the first time in my life,
Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.
Along the way I got an Apple Watch.
My desire increased as I read about it,
And vanished when I learned it were.
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.
I gave it to my brother,
Who later gave it back before it broke.
I sing a song to my Apple,
A peerless 17” MacBook Pro,
Which through minor design flaw,
Burned through video cards oft enough,
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without

frequent \$500 repairs.
And along the way,
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,
Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of
Unix.
When I asked about one cardinally important open source
project,
I was told that Apple had removed parts of the operating
system,
That the project needed to run,
But information technology work in my Linux virtual
machine,
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,
For when I asked a question,
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,
It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,
Before a Genius knew that Macs have a command line.
I purchased a computer meant to last many years.
I sing a song to my late iPhone,
Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,
Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,
That Find My iPhone was now rendered useless.
I went to see an Apple Store,
And received a followup call,
Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,
And found out also that Macs were as useless,
As my computer booted into Windows,
To Find My iPhone.
Once I had one from each four,

Offerings for Apple computers:
A laptop one, an iPad one,
An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;
And ere I wast negotiating,
For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,
I said that there were many Android devices within my
budget,
And whilst in bed realized,
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.
Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows,
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android,
For surely no iPhone killer before Android even came close.
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.
But even if one may argue, legitimately,
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different,
I was not poisoned by technical merits:
I was poisoned by the corporate mindset,
That all but killed my prospects,
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained
completely.
And when I called my iPhone to perchance find it in my car,
I went to voicemail immediately:
My iPhone's battery wast already dead.
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss:
Screaming and abusive,
To employees he had every reason to cherish,
And after a technical fumble,
Publicly fired an Apple technician,
At an employee motivational event.
And I believed it.

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

But 'tis guesswork; devils can well enough be wrong.
 St. Nilus's alleged prophecies are dubious at present,
 But we may not yet be in the clear.
 And if the U.S. has been called 'One nation under
 surveillance,'
 Where No Such Agency has received every email,
 It is now clear and open knowledge,
 To those that will reflect,
 That among most Americans,
 "Every breath and step Americans take,"
 Is monitored by Big Brother,
 But perhaps it is not just human agencies,
 That reap the information collected.

++ungood

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

VII.

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

55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.

2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.

14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.

28. Face reality.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.

41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.

54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.

55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

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

I answered, “Of a troth.”

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

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

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

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

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

I said, “Nay.”

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

strengthening. Wherefore whether the devils have more information than in ages past, thou wert still best to live:

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

Song VIII.

A Hymn to Arrogance.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
 "There be no war in Heaven,
 Not now, at very least,
 And not ere wast created,
 The royal race of mankind.
 Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
 And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
 There wast war in Heaven but ever brief.
 The Archangel Saint Michael,
 Commander of the bodiless hosts,
 Said but his name, 'Michael,'
 Which is, being interpreted,
 'Who is like God?'
 With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
 Sore losers one and all.
 They remain to sharpen the faithful.
 God useth them to train and make strength.
 Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?
 Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?
 As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,
 As if the staff should lift up itself,
 As if it were no wood.
 Therefore be not dismayed,

If one book of Holy Scripture state,
That the Devil incited King David to a census,
And another sayeth that God did so,
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal.
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,
To know that God is greater than can be thought,
And hath neither equal nor opposite.
The Devil is if anything the opposite.
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wast as a little boy,
Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,
Because that wast the greatest harm,
That he saweth how to do.
The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,
"The feeble audacity of the demons."
Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
The Devil and the devils aren't much,
Without the divine permission,
And truth be told,
Ain't much with it either:
God alloweth temptations to strengthen;
St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
Asked the Abbot what he should do:

‘It is just the demons.
 Pay it no mind,’ came the answer.
 Every devil is on a leash,
 And the devout are immune to magic.
 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
 The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under
 foot.
 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
 Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,
 But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the Devil
 himself:
 ‘Blow, and spit on him.’”

VIII.

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

He said, “Doth that surprise thee?”

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

He said, “How readest thou that parable?”

I said, “In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, ‘I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse,’ which were, ‘You can’t take it with you,’ save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over

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

The Saint told me, “Thou hast read part of *Prayers by the Lake*, in which St. Nikolai says that birth and death are an inch apart, but the ticker tape goeth on forever.¹⁸⁰

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

I said, “May I comment something? Which soundeth as a vaunting boast?”

He said, “Speak on.”

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

¹⁸⁰ Velimirović Nikolaj, *Prayers by the Lake*, 2018, 48.

grasped each one the lesser alone.”

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

I said, “Yes.”

He said, “What thou sayest resoundeth not as boasting in my ears, but many people have wished for the remembrance of death and not reached it, no, not in monasticism even.”

I asked, “Will I reach monasticism?”

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

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

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

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

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

“Knowest thou not that every saint and angel, the Mother of God and Christ enthroned on high, all cheer ye

who still run the course, each and every one?

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

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

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

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

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

I broke down a-weeping until I realized I was the happiest I had been in my life.

Questions for self-examination, study, and discussion regarding “The Consolation of Theology:”

1. Are you consoled in this piece? If so, how?
2. What other consolations might you draw from this?
3. What difficulties have you been having that you realize are unworthy of you?
4. Is St. John Chrysostom of pastoral help today, and if so, why?
5. Would you be interested in reading St. John Chrysostom?¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ St. John’s complete works may be found at “The Complete Works of St. John Chrysostom: Cross-Linked to the Bible with Linked Footnotes - Kindle Edition by Chrysostom, St. John, Schaff, Philip.

6. If you have read St. John Chrysostom, what is your favorite work of his?
7. Would you read *The Consolation of Philosophy*?¹⁸²
8. If you have read both *The Consolation of Philosophy* and *The Consolation of Theology*, how are they alike and different?
9. How can you best move forward now that you've read *The Consolation of Theology* and you can read *The Consolation of Philosophy*?
10. Are there any other ways where you are experiencing suffering that you do not need to experience?

Religion & Spirituality Kindle Ebooks @ Amazon.com.,” The Complete Works of St. John Chrysostom: Cross-linked to the Bible with linked footnotes - Kindle edition by Chrysostom, St. John, Schaff, Philip. Religion & Spirituality Kindle eBooks @ Amazon.com., accessed September 23, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/st-john-chrysostom>.

¹⁸² “The Consolation of Philosophy (Penguin Classics): Boethius, Ancius, Watts, Victor, Watts, Victor, Watts, Victor: 9780140447804: Amazon.com: Books,” The Consolation of Philosophy (Penguin Classics): Boethius, Ancius, Watts, Victor, Watts, Victor, Watts, Victor: 9780140447804: Amazon.com: Books, accessed September 23, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/the-consolation-of-philosophy> to purchase, “The Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius,” The Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius, by Boethius, trans. H.R. James., accessed September 23, 2022, <https://cjschayward.com/wp-content/raw/the-consolation-of-philosophy.html> for the online translation originally read.

Introduction to “The Angelic Letters”

C.S. Lewis famously wrote *The Screwtape Letters*, in which a senior devil advises and mentors a junior devil in the futile effort to oversee the destruction of a man’s soul. The title is his most famous.

In response to reader conversation, he envisioned another work, in which angels oversee the salvation of a man’s soul, but did not feel himself able to write it.

Once such attempt is provided here. God, the Saints, and the angels are as much for today as ever in history, and having opened this book with a wide lens, then given narrower concentration to technology and its social implications, I wish to return to a broader view of the one question about our lives that really matters: that of the eternal salvation that begins in this life.

The Angelic Letters

My dearly beloved son Eukairos;

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

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

offer what help you can.

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

My dear son Eukairos;

I would see it fitting to offer a word about medicating experience and medicating existence. There is a thread of escape that men reach for when they cannot tolerate silence.

When one of the race of men medicates experience by means of wine, that is called drunkenness. When by means of the pleasures of the palate, that is called gluttony. When by means of other pleasures, it is called lust. When by means of possessions and getting things, it is called avarice. Escapism is an ancient vice and a root of all manner of evils; ancient Christians were warned strongly against attempting to escape this world by medicating experience.

Not that pleasure is the only way; medicating experience by mental gymnastics is called metaphysics in the occult sense, and medicating experience by means of technology is a serious danger.

Not all technologies, and perhaps not any technology, is automatically a problem to use. But when technologies become a drone, they are a problem. Turning on a radio for traffic and weather news, and then turning it off, is not a drone. Listening to the radio at a particular time to devote your attention to a concert is not a drone. Turning on a radio in the background while you work is a drone; even *Zen and the Art of the Motorcycle Maintenance* discusses what is wrong with mechanics having the radio on in the background. And texting to get specific information or coordinate with someone is not a drone, but a stream of text messages that is always on is a drone. Technology has its uses, but when technology is a drone, noise in the background that prevents silence from getting too uncomfortable. It is a spiritual problem, a tool to medicate

experience. And there are some technologies, like video games, that exist to medicate experience.

(Of course, technologies are not the only drone; when Mark buckles down to prayer he discovers that his mind is a drone with a stream of thoughts that are a life's work to quiet.)

More could be said about technologies, but my point here is to point out one of the dangers Mark faces. Not the only one, by any means, but he has at his disposal some very powerful tools for doing things that are detrimental. It's not just a steady stream of X-rated spam that puts temptation at his fingertips. He has all the old ways to medicate experience, and quite a few powerful technologies that can help him medicate his experience as well. Because of that, he needs prayer.

But what is to be done? The ways of medicating experience may be in some measure more than many saints have contended with; the answer is the same. Don't find another way to medicate experience, or escape the conditions God has placed you in, trying to escape to Paradise. Don't ask for an easier load, but tougher muscles. Instead of escaping the silence, engage it. Prayerfully engage it. If your dear Mark does this, after repenting and despairing of finding a way to escape and create Paradise, he will find that escape is not needed, and Paradise, like the absent-minded Professor's lost spectacles, were not in any of the strange places he looked but on his nose the whole time.

A man does not usually wean himself of drones in one fell swoop, but pray, and draw your precious charge to cut back, to let go of another way of medicating experience, even if it is very small, and to seek not a lighter load, but a

stronger back. If he weans himself of noise that medicates uncomfortable silence, he might find that silence is not what he fears.

Watch after Mark, and hold him in prayer.

Your Dearly Loving Elder,
Your Fellow-Servant,
But a Wind and a Flame of Fire

My dear, dear Eukairos;

When fingers that are numb from icy cold come into a warm, warm house, it stings.

You say that the precious treasure entrusted to you prayed, in an uncomfortable silence, not for a lighter load but for a stronger back, and that he was fearful and almost despairing in his prayer. And you wonder why he looks down on himself for that. Do not deprive him of his treasure, by showing him how much good he is done.

He has awakened a little, and I would have you do all in your power to show him the silence of Heaven, however little he can receive it yet. You know some theologians speak of a river of fire, where in one image among others, the Light of Heaven and the fire of Hell are the same thing: not because good and evil are one, but because God can only give himself, the uncreated Light, in love to his creatures, and those in Hell are twisted through the rejection of Christ so that the Light of Heaven is to them the fire of Hell. The silence of Heaven is something like this; silence is of Heaven, and there is nothing to replace it, but to those not yet able to bear joy, the silence is an uncomfortable silence. It is a bit like the Light of Heaven as it is experienced by those who reject it.

Help Mark in any way you can to taste the silence of Heaven as joy. Help him to hear the silence that is echoed in the Church's chanting: when he seeks a stronger back to bear silence, strengthen his back, and help him to taste the silence not as bitter but sweet. Where noise and drones would anaesthetize his pain, pull him through his pain to health, wholeness, and joy.

The Physician is at work!

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

Dear blessed Eukairos;

Your charge has had a fall. Do your best that this not be the last word: help him get up. Right now he believes the things of God are not for those like him.

The details of the fall I will not treat here, but suffice it to say that when someone begins to wake up, the devils are furious. They are often given permission to test the awakening man, and often he falls. And you know how the devils are: before a fall, they say that God is easy-going and forgiving, and after a fall, that God is inexorable. Do your best to aid a person being seduced with the lie that God is inexorable.

Mark believes himself unfit for the service of the Kingdom. Very well, and in fact he is, but it is the special delight of the King to work in and through men who have made themselves unfit for his service. Don't brush away a mite of his humility as one fallen, but show him what he cannot believe, that God wishes to work through him now as much as ever And that God wishes for him prayer, liturgy, sacrament...

And open his eyes now, a hint here, a moment of joy there. Open them that eternity is now: eternal life is not something that begins after he dies, but that takes root now, and takes root even (or rather, especially), in those who repent. He considers himself unworthy of both Heaven and earth, and he is; therefore, in God's grace, give him both Heaven and earth. Open up earth as an icon, a window to Heaven, and draw him to share in the uncreated Light and Life.

Open up his repentance; it is a window to Heaven.

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In Light and Life and Love,
Your Brother Angel

My dear fellow-ministering angel;

I would make a few remarks on those windows of Heaven called icons.

To Mark, depending on the sense of the word “window,” a “window” is an opening in a wall with a glass divider, or alternately the “window” is the glass divider separating inside from outside. But this is not the exact understanding when Orthodox say an icon is a window of Heaven; it is more like what he would understand by an open window, where wind blows, and inside and outside meet. (In most of human history, a window fitted with glass was the exception, not the rule.) If an icon is a window of Heaven, it is an opening to Heaven, or an opening between Heaven and earth.

Now Mark does not understand this, and while you may draw him to begin to sense this, that is not the point. In *The Way of the Pilgrim*,¹⁸³ a man speaks who was given the sacred Gospels in an old, hard-to-understand book, and was told by the priest, “Never mind if you do not understand what you are reading. The devils will understand it.”¹⁸⁴ Perhaps, to Mark, icons are still somewhat odd pictures with strange postures and proportions. You may, if you want, help him see that there is perspective in the icons, but instead of the usual perspective of people in their own world, it is reverse perspective whose vanishing point lies behind him because Mark is in the picture. But instead of focusing on correcting his understanding, and certainly

¹⁸³ R. M. French, *The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

¹⁸⁴ R. M. French, *The Way of a Pilgrim and the Pilgrim Continues His Way* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 25.

correcting his understanding all at once, draw him to venerate and look at these openings of Heaven. Never mind if he does not fully grasp the icons he venerates. The devils will understand.

And that is true of a great many things in life; draw Mark to participate in faith and obedience. He expects to understand first, and participate second, but he needs to come to a point of participating first and understanding second. Many things need to start on the outside and work inwards.

Serving Christ,
Whose Incarnation Unfurls in Holy Icons,
Your Fellow

Dear cherished, luminous son;

Your charge is reading a good many books. Most of them are good, but I urge you to spur him to higher things.

It is a seemingly natural expression of love to try to know as much about possible about Orthodoxy. But mature Orthodox Christians usually spend less time trying to understand Orthodoxy through books. This is not because they have learned everything there is to learn. (That would be impossible.) Rather, it is because they've found a deeper place to dig.

God does not want Mark to be educated and have an educated mind. He wants him to have an enlightened mind. The Orthodox Christian man is not supposed to have good thoughts in prayer, but to have no thoughts. The Orthodox settled on the path have a clear mind that is enlightened in hesychastic silence. And it is better to sit in the silence of Heaven than read the Gospel as something to analyze.

Books have a place. Homilies have a place. But they are one shadow of the silence of Heaven. And there are more important things in the faith, such as fasting and almsgiving, repentance and confession, and prayer, the crowning jewel of all asceticism. Give Mark all of these gems.

With Deep Affection,
Your Brother Angel

My dearly beloved, cherished fellow angel Eukairos;

Your charge Mark has been robbed.

Your priceless charge Mark has been robbed, and I am concerned.

He is also concerned about a great many things: his fear now, which is understandable, his concerns about where money may come from, his loss of an expensive smartphone and a beautiful pocketwatch with sentimental as well as financial value to him, and his inconvenience while waiting on new credit cards.

There are more concerns where those came from, but I am concerned because he is concerned about the wrong things. He has well over a week's food in his fridge and he believes that God failed to provide. Mark does not understand that everything that happens to a man is either a temptation God allowed for his strengthening, or a blessing from God. I am concerned that after God has allowed this, among other reasons, so that Mark can get his priorities straight, he is doing everything but seeking in this an opportunity for spiritual growth to greater maturity.

If you were a human employee, this would be the time for you to be punching in lots of overtime. Never mind that he thinks unconsciously that you and God have both deserted him; your strengthening hand has been invisible to him. I do not condemn you for any of this, but this time has been appointed for him to have opportunities for growth and for you to be working with him, and the fact that he does not seek growth in this trial is only reason for you to work all the harder. That he is seeking to get things back the way they were, and suffering anger and fear, is only reason for you to exercise more diligent care. God is working with

him now as much as ever, and I would advise you for now to work to the point of him seeking his spiritual good in this situation, however short he falls of right use of adversity.

Your name, “Eukairos,” comes from “eu”, meaning “good”, and “kairos”, an almost inexhaustible word which means, among other things, “appointed time” and “decisive moment.” You and Mark are alike called to dance the great dance, and though Mark may not see it now, you are God’s agent and son, supporting him in a great and ordered dance where everything is arranged in God’s providence. Right now Mark sees none of this, but as his guardian angel you are charged to work with him in the dance, a dance where God incorporates his being robbed, and will incorporate his spiritual struggles, and, yes, provide when Mark fails to see that the righteous will never be forsaken.

A good goal would be for Mark to pray for those that robbed him, and through those prayers honestly desire their good, or come to that point. But a more immediate goal is his understanding of the struggle he faces. Right now he sees his struggle in terms of money, inconveniences, and the like. Raise his eyes higher, so he can see that it is a spiritual struggle, that God’s providence is not overruled by this tribulation, and that if he seeks first the Kingdom of God, God himself knows Mark’s material needs and will show deepest care for him.

Your Fellow-Servant in Prayer,
But an Angel Who Cannot Struggle Mark’s Struggle on his
Behalf

My dear, esteemed son and fellow-angel Eukairos;

That was a deft move on your part, and I thank you for what you have helped foster in Mark's thoughts.

Mark began to console himself with the deep pit of porn, that poison that is so easily found in his time and place. And he began to pray, on his priest's advice, "Holy Father John, pray to God for me," and "Holy Mother Mary, pray to God for me," Saint John the Much-Suffering and Saint Mary of Egypt being saints to remember when fighting that poison. And you helped him for a moment to see how he was turned in on himself and away from others, and he prayed for help caring about others.

At 10:30 PM that night on the dot, one of his friends was walking in the dark, in torrential rains, and fell in the street, and a car ran over his legs. This friend was someone with tremendous love for others, the kind of person you cannot help but appreciate, and now that he had two broken legs, the flow of love reversed. And Mark unwittingly found himself in an excellent situation to care about something other than himself. He quite forgot about his money worries, and he barely noticed a windfall from an unexpected source. He kept company, and ran errands, for his friend.

What was once only a smouldering ember is now a fire burning brightly. Work as you can to billow it into a blaze.

With an Eternal Love,
Your Respectful Brother Angel

My dear, scintillating son Eukairos;

I would recall to you the chief end of mankind. “To glorify God and enjoy him forever” is not a bad answer; the chief end of mankind is to contemplate God. No matter what you do, Mark will never reach the strictest sense of contemplation such as monastic saints enjoy in their prayer, but that is neither here nor there. He can have a life ordered to contemplation even if he will never reach the spiritual quiet from which strict contemplation is rightly approached. He may never reach beyond the struggle of asceticism, but his purpose, on earth as well as in Heaven, is to contemplate God, and to be deified. The point of human life is to become by grace what Christ is by nature.

Mark is right in one way, and wrong in another, to realize that he has only seen the beginning of deification. He has started, and only started, the chief end of human life, and he is right to pray, go to confession, and see himself as a beginner. But what he is wrong about is imagining that the proof of his fledgling status is that his wishes are not fulfilled in the circumstances of his life: his unconscious and unstated assumption is that if he had real faith like saints who worked miracles, his wishes would be fulfilled and his life would be easier. Those saints had fewer wishes fulfilled, not more, and much harder lives than his.

(And this is beside the point that Mark is not called to perform miracles; he is called to something greater, the most excellent way: love.)

Mark imagines you, as his guardian angel, to be sent by God to see that at least some of his wishes happen, but the truth is closer to saying that you are sent by God to see that some of his wishes do **not** happen so that in the cutting

off of self-will, he may grow in ways that would be impossible if he always had his wishes. There is a French saying, «*On trouve souvent sa destinée par les chemins que l'on prend pour l'éviter.*»: “One often finds his destiny on the paths one takes to avoid it.” Destiny is not an especially Christian idea, but there is a grain of truth here: men often find God’s providence in the situations they hoped His providence would keep them out of.

This cutting off of self-will is part of the self-transcendence that makes deification; it is foundational to monks and the office of spiritual father, but it is not a “monks-only” treasure. Not by half. God answers “No” to prayers to say “Yes” to something greater. But the “Yes” only comes through the “No.”

As Mark has heard, “We pray because we want God to change our circumstances. God wants to use our circumstances to change us.”¹⁸⁵

Mark has had losses, and he will have more to come, but what he does not understand is that the path of God’s sanctification is precisely through the loss of what Mark thinks he needs. God is at work allowing Mark to be robbed. God is at work allowing Mark to use “his” “free” time to serve his friend. And God is at work in the latest challenge you wrote to me about.

Mark has lost his car. A drunk and uninsured driver slammed into it when it was parked; the driver was saved by his airbag, but Mark’s car was destroyed, and Mark has no resources to get another car, not even a beater for now. And

¹⁸⁵ “We Want God to Change Our Circumstances, but God Wants to Use Our Circumstances to Change...: Inspirational Quotes Motivation, Life Quotes Deep, Inspirational Quotes,” Pinterest, November 29, 2015, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/31567425511187799/>.

Mark imagines this as something that pushes him outside of the Lord's providence, not understanding that it is by God's good will that he is now being transported by friendship and generosity, that he is less independent now.

Right now Mark is not ready either to thank God for his circumstances or to forgive the driver. Open his eyes to the good of the friendship and generosity that now transports him. Even if he sees the loss of his car as an example of God failing to provide for him, help him to see the good of his being transported by the love and generosity of his friends. Help him to see God's providence in circumstances he would not choose.

Your Fellow-Servant in the Service of Man,
A Brother Angel

My dear son Eukairos;

Your precious charge, in perfectly good faith, believes strongly in bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.¹⁸⁶ His devotion in trying to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ is really quite impressive, but he is fundamentally confused about what that means, and he is not the only one.

Mark would never say that you can reason your way into Heaven, but he is trying to straighten out his worldview, and he thinks that straightening out one's ideas is what this verse is talking about. And he holds an assumption that if you're reasoning things out, or trying to reason things out, you're probably on the right path.

Trying to reason things out does not really help as much as one might think. Arius, the father of all heretics, was one of many to try to reason things out; people who devise heresies often try harder to reason things out than the Orthodox. And Mark has inherited a greatly overstated emphasis on how important or helpful logical reasoning is.

Mark would be surprised to hear this; his natural question might be, "If bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ is not what you do when you straighten out your worldview, then what on earth is?"

A little bit more of the text discusses unseen warfare and inner purity: "(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all

¹⁸⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:25.

disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.”¹⁸⁷

Men’s thoughts are not just abstract reasoning; they are all sorts of things, some entangled with sinful desire, that are around all the time to a mind that has not learned hesychastic silence. Thoughts that need to be taken captive include thoughts of money entangled with greed, thoughts of imagined success entangled with pride, thoughts of wrongs suffered entangled with anger, thoughts of food compounded with gluttony, thoughts of desired persons compounded with lust, thoughts of imagined future difficulties entangled with worry and doubt about the Lord’s good providence. Such thoughts as these need to be addressed, and not by tinkering with one’s worldview: these thoughts remain a battleground in spiritual warfare even if one’s worldview condemns greed, pride, anger, gluttony, lust, worry, and doubt.

Work with Mark. Guide him and strengthen him in the unseen warfare that includes learning to cut off such thoughts as soon as possible. A fire that is spreading through a house is hard to put out, and what Mark needs to learn is to notice the smoke that goes before fire and extinguish the smouldering that is beginning and not waiting for leaping flames to make doomed efforts to fight it. Help him to see that his thoughts are not only abstract ideas, and help him to be watchful, aware of his inner state. Unseen warfare in thoughts is of inestimable importance, and do what you can to help him see a smouldering smoke when it has not become a raging fire, and to be watchful.

Do what you can to draw him to repeat the Jesus Prayer, to let it grow to a rhythm in him. If the question is, “What should I start thinking when I catch myself?”, the

¹⁸⁷ I Corinthians 10:4-6.

answer is, “The Jesus prayer.”

Keep working with Mark, and offer what support you can. And keep him in your prayers.

With Deepest Affection,
Another Member of the Angel Choirs

Dear fellow-warrior, defender, and son Eukairos;

I wish to write to you concerning devils.

Mark has the wrong picture with a scientific worldview in which temptations are more or less random events that occur as a side-effect of how the world works. Temptations are intelligently coordinated attacks by devils. They are part of unseen warfare such as Mark faces, part of an evil attack, but none the less on a leash. No man could be saved if the devils could give trials and temptations as much as they wished, but the devils are allowed to bring trials and temptations as much as God allows for the strengthening, and the discipleship, of his servants.

Some street drugs are gateway drugs, and some temptations are temptations to gateway sins. Gluttony, greed, and vanity are among the “gateway sins”, although it is the nature of a sin to give way to other sins as well. Gluttony, for instance, opens the door to lust, and it is harder by far to fight lust for a man whose belly is stuffed overfull. A man who would fare better fighting against lust would do well to eat less and fast more. In sin, and also in virtue, he who is faithful in little is faithful in much, and he who is unfaithful in little is also unfaithful in much. You do not need to give Mark what he expects now, help in some great, heroic act of virtue. He needs your help in little, humble, everyday virtues, obedience when obedience doesn’t seem worth the bother.

A troparion speaks of “the feeble audacity of the demons,”¹⁸⁸ and Mark needs to know that that is true, and

¹⁸⁸ “The 1st Day of the Month of August - Arizonaorthodox.com,” accessed September 22, 2022, https://arizonaorthodox.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/08-august_menaion.pdf, 199.

true specifically in his case. What trials God allows are up to God, and the demons are an instrument in the hand of a God who would use even the devils' rebellion to strengthen his sons. The only way Mark can fall into the demons' hands is by yielding to temptation: nothing can injure the man who does not injure himself. The trials Mark faces are intended for his glory, and more basically for God's glory, in him, but God chooses glory for himself that glorifies his saints. Doubtless this will conflict with Mark's plans and perceptions of what he needs, but God knows better, and loves Mark better than to give Mark everything he thinks he needs.

Do your best to strengthen Mark, especially as regards forgiveness to those who have wronged him and in the whole science of unseen warfare. Where he cannot see himself that events are led by an invisible hand, help him to at least have faith, a faith that may someday be able to discern.

And do help him to see that he is in the hands of God, that the words in the Sermon on the Mount about providence are not for the inhabitants of another, perfect world, but intended for him personally as well as others. He has rough things he will have to deal with; help him to trust that he receives providence at the hands of a merciful God who is ever working all things to good for his children.

With Love as Your Fellow-Warrior and Mark's,
Your Fellow-Warrior in the War Unseen

My dear, watchful son Eukairos;

Mark has lost his job, and though he has food before him and a roof over his head, he thinks God's providence has run short.

Yet in all of this, he is showing a sign of growth: even though he does not believe God has provided, there is a deep peace, interrupted at times by worry, and his practice of the virtues allows such peace to enter, even though he assumes that God can only provide through paychecks.

Work on him in this peace. Work on him in the joy of friendship. Even if he does not realize that he has food for today, and clothing for today, and that this is the Providence he is set to ask for, help him to enjoy what he has, and give thanks to God for everything he has been given.

And hold him in your prayers.

As One Who Possesses Nothing,
One Who Receives All He Needs From God

My prayerful, prayerful Eukairos;

Prayer is what Mark needs now more than ever.

Prayer is the silent life of angels, and it is a feast men are bidden to join. At the beginning it is words; in the middle it is desire; at the end it is silence and love. For men, it is the outflow of sacrament, and its full depths are in the sacraments. There are said to be seven sacraments, but what men of Mark's day do not grasp is that seven is the number of perfection, and it would do as well to say that there are ten thousand sacraments, all bearing God's grace.

Help Mark to pray, to forgive others, pray for the well-being of others, pray by being in silence before God. Help him to pray when he is attacked by passion; help him to pray when he is tempted and when he confesses in his heart that he has sinned: O Lord, forgive me for doing this and help me to do better next time, for the glory of thy holy name and for the salvation of my soul.

Work with Mark so that his life is a prayer, not only with the act-prayer of receiving a sacrament, but so that looking at his neighbor with chaste eyes he may pray out of the Lord's love. Work with Mark so that ordinary activity and work are not an interruption to a life of prayer, but simply a part of it. And where there is noise, help him to be straightened out in silence through his prayer.

And if this is a journey of a thousand miles that Mark will never reach on earth, bid him to take a step, and then a step more. For a man to take one step into this journey is still something: the Thief crucified with Christ could only take one step, and he took that one step, and now stands before God in Paradise.

Ever draw Mark into deeper prayer.

With You Before God's Heart that Hears Prayers,
A Praying Angel

My dearly beloved, cherished, esteemed son; my holy angel who sees the face of Christ God; my dear chorister who sings before the eternal throne of God; my angel divine; my fellow-minister;

Your charge has passed through his apprenticeship successfully.

He went to church, and several gunmen entered. One of them pointed a gun at a visitor, and Mark stepped in front of her. He was ordered to move, and he stood firm. He wasn't thinking of being heroic; he wasn't even thinking of showing due respect to a woman. He only thought vaguely of appropriate treatment of a visitor and fear never deterred him from this vague sense of appropriate care for a visitor.

And so death claimed him, to its defeat. "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"¹⁸⁹ Death claimed saintly Mark, to its defeat.

Mark is no longer your charge.

It is my solemn, profound, and grave pleasure to now introduce you to saintly Mark, no longer as the charge under your care, but as a fellow-chorister with angels who will eternally stand with you before the throne of God in Heaven.

Go in peace.

Your Fellow-Minister,

מיכאל • MIXAHA • MICHAEL • Who Is Like God?

¹⁸⁹ I Corinthians 15:55, as quoted in the Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom.

Questions for Self-examination, Study and Discussion regarding, “The Angelic Letters:”

1. Does this piece help you see a larger spiritual picture?
2. Are God, saints, and angels only for the past, or do they remain relevant today?
3. How has God provided for you in the past?
4. What do you want Providence to bring you in the future?
5. Are you open to the possibility that Providence might bring good to you along very different lines?

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6. Can you see the incredibly great and eternal importance of your own life?
7. What can you do to better live in relation to these things?
8. How can you continue growing, right when and where you are right now?

Conclusion¹⁹⁰

We live in times reminiscent of C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*.¹⁹¹ The book is perhaps his most challenging title written for a popular audience, but people who have taken the time to appreciate it appreciate it very much.

My own experience, as America is descending into Hell, is now at a monastery which is very much like St. Anne's. We are tending to a garden where we are now. We have a Ransom, of sorts, in Met. JONAH, and though there are no women, it is as interesting of a household. There may be other parallels as well. St. Anne's sounds like home now, and home now feels like St. Anne's. And Merlin?

To again quote *That Hideous Strength*¹⁹² in part of the introduction:

¹⁹⁰ If you've come to this book and wish there were more, you are welcome to continue with the 750 page magnum opus, C.J.S Hayward, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* (Wheaton, IL: CJS Hayward Publications, 2014).

¹⁹¹ C.S. Lewis, "That Hideous Strength," Internet Archive, January 1, 1970, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.207839/page/n5/mod e/2up>.

¹⁹² C.S. Lewis, "That Hideous Strength," Internet Archive, January 1, 1970, <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.207839/page/n5/mod e/2up>.

“I mean even in Merlin’s time (he came at the extreme tail end of it), though you could still use that kind of [power] in the universe innocently, you couldn’t do it safely. The things weren’t bad in themselves, but they were already bad for us. They sort of withered the man who dealt with him. Not on purpose. They couldn’t help doing it. Merlinus is withered. He’s quite pious and humble and all that, but something has been taken out of him. That quietness of his is just a little bit deadly, like the quiet of a gutted building.”

And I’d like to compare all of us to Merlin. Things not bad in themselves are bad for us. You can use their powers innocently, possibly, apart from e.g. concerns of sweatshop manufacturing in China, but you cannot do it safely. When we aren’t getting our intravenous drip of noise, and perhaps even when they are, there is something that has been taken out of us, like the quiet of a gutted building.

Arthur C. Clarke famously said, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”¹⁹³ Facebook gives new members the sense of walking on water; we have in the Web something much more wondrous than the device for which *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*¹⁹⁴ was named. Furthermore, we have virtual and augmented reality.

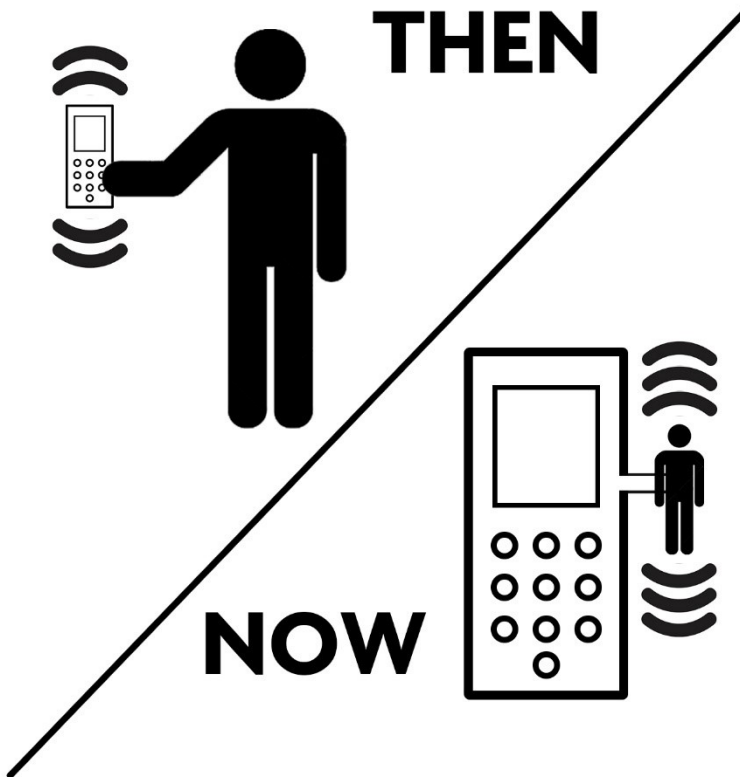
However, I would like to point out one area where the comparison, perhaps, is truer than it may appear at first glance. Magic is classically characterized not just by being able to do things otherwise thought to be impossible (build

¹⁹³ “Clarke’s Three Laws,” Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, September 3, 2022), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarke%27s_three_laws.

¹⁹⁴ Douglas Adams, *The Hitch-Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (New York: Del Rey, 2021).

a publicly visible website or blog, convey people in a flying machine, talk with someone on the other side of the planet, swim underwater like a fish, keep in touch with a group of friends spread across the globe), but it is also characterized by the Sorcerer’s Bargain: “If you give me your soul, I will give you power.” However, this bargain is anything but a true bargain.

It has classically been said that if you give your soul in exchange for power, it really isn’t you that has the power. And on that point I would remind the visitor of the sketch from the introduction to this title:



Phone use today has a sort of Virtual Sorcerer's Bargain.

We may not explicitly tell the devil that he may have our soul if he gives us powers, but it exacts a toll, a toll that is really quite frightening rewiring our brains into tapioca as much as any digital technology yet.¹⁹⁵ When the iPhone 1 hit the scene, phones seemed to place us in "Then," where we are wielding our phones. But now iPhones and pretty much every competitor are really more in "Now," with our phones wielding us. They have wrapped us around their little fingers.

If all this is happening, what can we do? Let me give an answer that *might* be helpful, and an answer that *will* be helpful to people who have learned the lesson.

We might follow in some of the steps of the temperance movement, at the beginning trying to back away from always-on technology use as the temperance movement tried to back away from always-on consumption of alcoholic drinks as the #1 choice for mere hydration. Alcoholism was epidemic, and the American temperance movement appeared at a time when hard cider was consumed "from the crack of dawn to the crack of dawn," when much stronger drink was more accessible and was consumed readily.¹⁹⁶ Compare today, where we have gone from always-on TV's to carrying always-on phones. The temperance movement might provide a useful paradigm. Today prohibition is considered by most to be a bad thing, and most people haven't even heard of a "Temperance Pledge." And the temperance movement was ridiculed in its

¹⁹⁵ 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), 24ff.

¹⁹⁶ "Temperance Movement in the United States," Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, August 22, 2022), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temperance_movement_in_the_United_States.

own day: Ambrose Bierce wrote,

Rum, *n.* Generically, fiery liquors which produce madness in total abstainers.”¹⁹⁷

Nonetheless, the temperance movement took the U.S. from mostly consuming alcohol most of the time, to mostly consuming non-alcoholic beverages most of the time, and much less alcohol being consumed in the U.S. per person per year today than in the 19th century.¹⁹⁸ That is really nothing to sneeze at, and the Temperance movement’s effectiveness in the U.S., starting at a context and a time of heavy over-consumption.

Whether others might follow with a complete abstinence I do not know, though I see it as plausible that some people may say “One lustful viewing of porn is one too many,” just as one bite of enchanted Turkish delight is one too many in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.¹⁹⁹ Not Owning a Smartphone may become a new privilege: the new Not Owning a Television. I imagine some people might try to rein in their cell phone and technology behaviors to be more temperate, while others may go the way of emperors and popes, kings and bishops in ages past and practice a complete abstinence, tapering use down gradually or going cold turkey with social supports, perhaps buying a standalone GPS (together with email, my GPS is the one real use I make of my data plan off of my monastery’s network, and mobile email use is expendable to me), or even using the trucker’s atlas and compass that used to be

¹⁹⁷ Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary: The Complete Edition* (Richmond, Surrey: Alma Classics, 2019), “Rum.”

¹⁹⁸ “History of Alcoholic Drinks,” Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, September 19, 2022), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_alcoholic_drinks.

¹⁹⁹ C. S. Lewis and Pauline Baynes, “Chapter IV: Turkish Delight,” in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York, NY: Harper, 2009).

good enough for us. Donald Knuth, one of the top computer scientists of all time, got rid of his email address. He said, “Email is a wonderful thing for people whose role in life is to be on top of things. But not for me; my role is to be on the bottom of things,”²⁰⁰ I use Facebook and Twitter almost exclusively to post announcements, for a few minutes on a few days. I regard Facebook as treacherous.

But there is something that reaches much farther than the principled scaling back or stopping use of certain technologies. Backing away from addictive use of technology remains a step, but there is something far bigger known from ancient times and hidden right under our nose. What remains to be done is in St. Isaac the Syrian: “Make peace with yourself and Heaven and earth will make peace with you;” and as echoed by St. Seraphim of Sarov, “Save yourself and ten thousand around you will be saved.” Our own decisions, including technology decisions, retain a significant power that all Hell cannot shake.

Our choices matter. Our ascesis matters. Both of these apply to technology as well as other serious arenas. And our greatest interest, our greatest concern now, should be how we are living the short little life we have as mortals on earth, where “birth and death are an inch apart, while the ticker tape goes on forever.” We choose in this life whether we are to be immortal splendors or immortal horrors forever.

Live vibrantly

Fr. Thomas Hopko’s 55 maxims includes, “52. Focus on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.”

Rather than make a focus on what you abstain from, make a focus of what you engage in. This is at its very

²⁰⁰ Donald Knuth, “Email (Let’s Drop the Hyphen),” Knuth versus Email, accessed September 23, 2022, <https://www-cs-faculty.stanford.edu/~knuth/email.html>.

hardest at the first, but you can take up a hobby. Again, see my hobby recommendation engine at <https://cjshayward.com/hobby/>.²⁰¹ Take time to engage with classic books. Search ideas for staycations. Explore the great outdoors. Take a human interest class at your local community college. Visit a monastery. Volunteer or show kindness to a beggar. I haven't read *101 Creative Dates*,²⁰² but I would be awfully surprised if I were to read it and find it only had valuable information specifically for romantic engagement. Most of all, engage with God. Don't make your activity be about a replacement for technologies you limit or abstain from. Instead, make your limiting or abstaining from technologies be about how you are living a fuller life than trawling clickbait.

It is my own experience that how interesting my computer seems to me depends on whether I am using it for something constructive and seeking to produce something, or whether I am seeking only to consume. This goes for my writing, art, or programming; the question is not what skillset I am using, but whether I am giving or trying to get.

If a journey of ten thousand miles begins with a single step, one sensible first step might be to try and improve some of your decisions with your phone.

Would you take one step, today?

²⁰¹ C.J.S. Hayward, "Help Me Find a Hobby!," CJS Hayward, November 6, 2019, <https://cjshayward.com/hobby/>.

²⁰² *101 Creative Dates: Ideas, Tips, and Personal Experiences from the Life of a Hopeless Romantic*, accessed September 26, 2022, <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B079K5YC3Y>.