

CJS Hayward's Early Works

From the "Major Works" series

CJS Hayward

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Preface

The website that would become [Jonathan's Corner](#), once a tiny website off a school computer, began as a way to share a small core of creative works that grew over time.

For those of you interested in seeing the initial seed that would crystallize into the website later, here it is. It is already a motley collection of creative works, and already leaning towards theology.

Enjoy!

A Dream of Light

You pull your arms to your side and glide through the water. On your left is a fountain of bubbles, upside down, beneath a waterfall; the bubbles shoot down and then cascade out and to the surface. To your right swims a school of colorful fish, red and blue with thin black stripes. The water is cool, and you can feel the currents gently pushing and pulling on your body. Ahead of you, seaweed above and long, bright green leaves below wave back and forth, flowing and bending. You pull your arms, again, with a powerful stroke which shoots you forward under the seaweed; your back feels cool in the shade. You kick, and you feel the warmth of the sun again, soaking in and through your skin and muscles. Bands of light dance on the sand beneath you, as the light is bent and turned by the waves.

There is a time of rest and stillness; all is at a deep and serene peace. The slow motion of the waves, the dancing lights below and above, the supple bending of the plants, all form part of a stillness. It is soothing, like the soft, smooth notes of a lullaby.

Your eyes slowly close, and you feel even more the warm sunlight, and the gentle caresses of the sea. And, in your rest, you become more aware of a silent presence. You were not unaware of it before, but you are more aware of it now. It is there:

Being.

Love.

Life.

Healing.

Calm.

Rest.

Reality.

Like a tree with water slowly flowing in, through roots hidden deep within the earth, and filling it from the inside out, you abide in the presence. It is a moment spent, not in time, but in eternity.

You look out of the eternity; your eyes are now open because you have eternity in your heart and your heart in eternity. In the distance, you see dolphins; one of them turns to you, and begins to swim. The others are not far off.

It lets you pet its nose, and nestles against you. You grab onto its dorsal fin, and go speeding off together. The water rushes by at an exhilarating speed; the dolphin jumps out of the water, so that you see waves and sky for a brief moment before splashing through the surface.

The dolphins chase each other, and swim hither and thither, in and out from the shore. After they all seem exhausted, they swim more slowly, until at last you come to a lagoon.

In the center, you see a large mass; swimming closer, you see that it is a sunken ship. You find an opening; inside, all is dark, but you find a passageway.

After some turns, you come up in a different place. You come up through a fountain in a public garden; the bushes and ivy are a deep, rich shade of green, and sheets of water cascade down the yellowed marble of the fountain. It is ornately and intricately sculpted, with bas-relief scenes of a voyage.

As you study the pictures, day turns to night, and all that you see is

bathed in moonlight. You are looking upon a statue: a delicate, slender, elfin nude, whose long hair cascades over her shoulders and about her body. She is reaching up to the sky, as if to touch the moon and stars. She is carved out of white marble, which looks pale blue, almost luminous, in the moonlight. It looks as if she was taken from the moon, and is rising up to touch it again.

The statue is on a tall pedestal of black marble. In the moonlight, the forest has a very deep color, a green that is almost blue or purple; the dark beauty of the night makes the statue seem almost radiant. Off in the distance, you hear a high, melancholy, lilting song; it is played on a harp and sung by a voice of silver. There is something haunting and yet elusive about the melody; it subtly tells of something wanted and searched for, yet not quite reached. And it is beautiful.

You sit, looking at the statue and listening to the song, for a time. They seem to suggest a riddle, a secret - but you know not what.

You walk along; fireflies begin to appear, and you can hear the sound of crickets chirping. There is a gentle breeze. The sky stands above like a high and faroff crystalline dome; the trees and grass below surround you, like little children who see a beloved elder coming, and run clamoring for a kiss. The grass is smooth and cool beneath your feet. There is a sweet, faint fragrance in the air, as of lilacs.

A round little girl, wandering through the forest, sees you and comes running. She is dark, with olive skin, and her black hair flares out behind her. She is wearing a dark green robe, the color of the forest, and her step is almost that of a dance - as if she is from a people where moving and dancing are not two different things. She is holding, in her hand, a simple bouquet of dandelions. "Look, look!" she says, "I have flowers!"

She jumps into your arms, welcoming you. Her touch is soft, and gentle. It is not near the softness of a grown woman; it has rather a ... simplicity. It is hard to find the right word. Then you recognize what it is. It has something of the carefree play of a child, but there is more than even abandon. She is holding you with complete trust. You do not doubt that she could fall asleep in your arms.

She begins to talk to you about many things. She talks about the forest, about people, about the stars, about God. After a time, you realize that she is not merely talking, but singing, as if the first words she heard were the words of a song. After another time, you realize that you have lost her words completely, and are entranced by the song. Presently she stops, and says, "Spin me! Spin me!"

Little children everywhere like to be held by the arms and swung around; this one is no exception. After you are both very dizzy, she takes you by the hand and begins, leading you along a path, to show you little details of the forest that you had never noticed before. Apart from the little details, there is something else which you begin to slowly see in the forest. The song by which she speaks, the dance by which she moves - and not just her, you do not doubt, but her people - seem to be echoed in the forest... and then you realize that rather they are echoes of the forest. Hearing, seeing, feeling that beauty from another person - you still do not doubt that they come from her, but they also help you to see what was always there but you had not noticed. As you walk along, you are lost in thoughts about the genius of all great artists... and begin to think about visiting an art gallery, not so that you can see what is in the gallery, but so that you can see what is not in the gallery.

The path widens out, around a shimmering pool. The golden flames of torches around the pool glimmer when reflected in the pool. There is singing - singing like that of the little girl, but the sound of a whole orchestra as next to the sound of a beginning flute. Men and women together pour fourth a rich harmony. The air is sweet with a delicate fragrance of incense; one of them brings you a cool wooden cup. Inside is a strawberry wine. It is sweet, and sour; the taste brings back memories of earliest childhood.

A circle forms among the people, then another, then another. Soon all of the people are spinning and weaving in a joyful dance. After a time, you realize that you are at the center; they are softly singing, "Welcome, Somebody," and listening intently. Arms and hands reach out, and sweep you into the dance. The dance is ordered, but also free; it draws you in, and, as you move, you feel that you can do no wrong.

How long the dance lasts, you do not know; still filled with its bliss, you find yourself sitting and talking with the people. One of them finds a soft seat of moss for you to sit on; another brings you a plum. Its taste is tart, and it has the texture that only a plum has — and, when you bite into it, you know that it was still on the tree when it was chosen.

The night winds on, and, after a time, you are led into a building woven out of living trees, with a bed of loam. Into it you sink; it is soft and deep...

You find yourself standing at the edge of a forest and a grassy plain. The mouth of a cave descends into the earth, and just before this is an old man sitting on a three-legged wooden stool. He is wearing a coarse grey-green robe, and has a long, flowing white beard. He is staring intently into the forest, with a concentration you have never seen before. It is like a gaze into a lover's eyes — nay, even deeper, a probe into the soul.

He shifts positions a few times, in his sitting, and at last stands up, takes the stool, and begins to walk towards the cavern. When he was looking into the forest, you were absorbed in watching him; now, you notice another man, a young one, approach the former.

"Is it Senex?"

"I am he."

"Senex, the great teacher?"

You see the old man's hand move to cover his mouth, but not quite quickly enough to conceal the faintest crack of a smile. The young man stands attentively, waiting for words to come.

The old man's frame shakes once. A second passes, and then it shakes again and again. Then sounds the laughter that he had been attempting to conceal. Soon, the old man is convulsed with mirth, and making no attempt to conceal it.

After a while, almost doubled over with laughter, he begins to pull himself up. You can see his face from a different angle, and you see a

merry twinkle in his eye. He places his arm over the young man's shoulder.

"Forgive me, brother, but it has been ages since anyone has addressed me as 'teacher' or 'great'. You cannot imagine how funny it sounds to me."

"Are you not Senex, who has traveled the seven seas, who has seen visions and been visited by angels, who has written treatises and instructed many?"

The man chuckles, and says, "Yes, I am all that, and much more. I am the image, likeness, and glory of God. I pray, and in my prayers I touch the stars and shake the foundations of the kingdom of Hell. I am a king and priest. I am a son of God. My name is written in the book of life. I am a god."

"Then why do you find it funny that I address you as 'great', or 'teacher'?"

"Because I am more than a great teacher, as are the children who dance through this field, as are you." Here the old man smiles at the young. "Come, now. Do you doubt that you are God's own son? What teaching, or miracles, or visions, or conquests, or exploits compare with that?"

"But if you are so great, why should you object to being called a great teacher? Surely the title is not false."

"My dear god - and now I am not addressing the Creator, but you yourself - what is wrong with the title is not that it says that I am a great teacher. I am. What is wrong is that the title implies that there are others who are not so great," and here the old man gave a great belly laugh, "when the truth of the matter is that the other people are so much more than a great teacher. I will not mind being called 'teacher' by you, if you agree to address everyone else as 'god' and 'goddess'. But if you will not call them 'god' and 'goddess', then simply call everyone 'brother' or 'sister'."

The young man stands in silent reflection for a time. "I came in search of a man who could share with me profound wisdom; I see now that I have found him. So now I ask you: Give me a profound insight, that I may contemplate it for the rest of my life, and grow wise."

"Do you not know that God is love, that God loves mankind, that we have the new commandment to 'Love one another'?"

"All of this I have believed since I was a little boy."

"Then I give you one more lesson, to contemplate and learn for the rest of your life."

The young man listens, eager with expectation.

The old man bends down, plucks a blade of grass, and holds it in his outstretched hand.

The young man takes it, and waits for an explanation. When, after a time, the old man says nothing, he says, "This blade of grass is like the blade of a sword. Have you given this to me as a sign that I should contemplate spiritual warfare, and be ready with the sword of the Spirit?"

The old man says, "You should, but that is not why."

The young man thinks for a time, then says, "This grass is nourished by the sun, and so tells of it. Grass and sun exist as God's creation, and tell of him. Is this why you have given me the blade of grass?"

The old man says, "What you said is very true, but that is not why, either."

The young man says, "When Christ lived on earth, he lived as a carpenter, and observed and was surrounded by the birds of the air, the grass of the field, the lilies, and ten thousand other things. Have you given me this blade of grass to remind me of Christ's time on earth, or of his humanity, or that this is a place he passed by?"

The old man says, "You are still right, and you are still wrong."

The young man says, "Then what profound truth can you be teaching me? What secret key escapes my grass? I asked if you had given it to me as a symbol of a profound spiritual truth, and you said, 'no'. Then I asked you if you had given it to me that I might deduce by logic what it tells about God, and you still said, 'no'. Then, after that, I asked you if you had given it to me as a historical reminder of what has happened about blades of grass, and your answer is still the everchanging 'no'. What can I possibly be missing? What am I leaving out?"

The old man turns to face the young, and looks deep into his eyes. "This blade of grass I have given you," he said, "because it is a blade of grass."

There is a look of puzzlement on the young man's face, which slowly melts into dawning comprehension. He steps forward and kisses the old man, with a long, full kiss on the lips, and then steps back and bows deeply - and the old man bows to him - and says, "Thank you." When the old man has responded, "You are very much welcome, brother," the young turns, clutching the blade of grass as if it were a diamond - no, more than that, as if it were a blade of grass - and walks back into the forest. There is a smile on his face.

You walk off in the field, and lie down on the grass. The day is growing warm and sultry; a faint breeze blows.

The breeze carries with it a small, white feather of the softest down. It gently falls on the sole of your foot. The breeze blows this way and that; the feather catches here, rolls there on your foot, brushing ever so lightly, up and down, up and down.

You feel a finger, cool as marble, just barely touching the back of your neck. It tingles; you can feel the sensation radiating up and down your spine. The feather brushes against your foot, and the finger just barely touches the back of your neck. It is a slow, lingering, tingling sensation; as time passes, the sensation becomes more and more real, and just won't go away. It tickles so.

A time passes, and you find yourself walking along a beach. It is almost dusk, and the rainbow colors of sunset are beginning to spill

almost dusk, and the rainbow colors of sunset are beginning to spin across the sky. It is autumn, and the many-hued leaves of the trees fall about, twirling this way and that in the wind. There is a smell of mist and brine in the air; the waves run and twirl about your toes.

A bird flies off to the right; its flight is light and agile. It flies to and fro, this way and that, until it disappears into the sunset.

There is a feeling of wistfulness, of a presence departed. To the left, you see a grayed swing, rocking back and forth in the wind; its rusty chain squeaks. It is in the yard of a boarded up house, with a garden long overgrown in weeds.

On a whim, you slowly walk up the path into the yard, and sit down on the swing. You rock back and forth; there is a feeling of emptiness. Images form and swirl in your mind.

A tree is felled; from its trunk are taken the staves of a barrel. Fresh and white, the staves are slowly covered with dust; each time the dust is disturbed or brushed off, the wood underneath is darker, grayer, rougher.

People are born, walk hither and thither, grow old, and die. Generations come and pass, and the earth grows older. People learn how to live - and then die. Vanity of vanities.

Everything is dreary, desolate, fleeting. The walls of your vision grow narrow and dark; your mind and imagination seem to protest the motion. It grows darker and darker.

After a time, you see a light - a little light. As everything around grows darker and more drab, the light does not grow brighter, but neither does it grow dimmer.

A voice sounds in the shadows - you do not doubt that is the voice of the light - says, "Come closer."

You come closer, and you see that she is a flame. A little flame.

A thousand questions form in your mind. They pour forth from you - Why is it all so meaningless? Why do things wither and decay? Why does

Why is it all so meaningless. Why do things matter and decay. Why does evil run rampant?

The flame listens patiently, and then speaks. "Look into me."

You look into the flame, and you see everything you saw before, but it looks different. The boards of the cask are no less grey. But you see that inside the cask is wine - wine which grows rich and well-aged. The people still die - and now you see an even darker death for some. But you also see past the death, past the mourning and grieving, to a birth into life - a richness and a fullness that could not be imagined from before.

"Flame, can I step into you, so that I may be delivered from the unpleasant things?"

"No, dear one. That is not the way of things."

"Then what can you give me?"

"I give you this: that you may always look into me, and that I will never be quenched."

"Flame, what is your name?"

"My name is Hope."

You look into the flame, and again see the outside world. There is still the sadness, but there is an incredible beauty. An ant crawls across your finger; you sit entranced at the wonder as its little body moves. Then you look at a rose bush, quivering in the wind - it is covered with thorns, but at the top of each stem is a flower that is still God's autograph.

You get up and walk further.

You see a little girl on her knees, and standing against her, a man holding an immense sword. The man raises his sword over his head, and brings it down.

Then you see the sword stop in the middle of the air. There is a clanging sound; the man's powerful muscles ripple in his exertion, but

the sword does not move an inch further.

Then you slowly see a shimmer in the air, and there is another sword - a sword that seems to be forged of solid light. A sword that is blocking the first. As you watch, you see an angel beginning to become visible. It is powerful, majestic, and terrifying. The man drops his sword, and runs in blind terror.

You can see the angel's sword here, a hand there, the hem of his luminous robe. But what you see is fleeting, and you cannot see the whole angel.

"Why cannot I see you? I can see the grass, and see the girl. Are you not as real as they?"

You see a little boy, walking on the beach, picking up a pebble here, a shell there, a piece of driftwood every now and then, and putting them into a sack.

Then he comes upon a fallen log. And he grabs one protrusion, and then another, trying to lift it. But it will not budge.

"Some day, you will be able to see God himself. But now, you can not see things that are too real for you to see."

You see a diamond, slowly rotating, in light. One facet after another seems to sparkle.

As you watch, not just what appear to be the facets, but what appears to be the diamond, seems to change form, shift, and sparkle in different ways. The light itself seems to shift color, direction, focus.

Then speaks an almost silent voice: "You are looking upon the one thing which never changes, in a light that has been the same since before the creation of time."

There is a moment of silence, and you feel a surge of power rush about you, and tear through your very being. It is like a blast of wind, throwing you off your feet so violently that wind itself is knocked out of

you. It is like the liquid fire that explodes out of a volcano. It is like a flash of light beyond intense, light that is so much light that you cannot see. It bears like an immeasurable weight and presence on your mind and spirit; its might and force fills you with awe - no, more than awe, fear - no, more than fear: terror. It is a reality which lies beyond imagination.

A booming, thunderous voice commands, "Fear not!" Then a hand reaches out and touches you, and you are filled with strength. It holds and stills you; you dimly realize that you have been quivering as a leaf. You somehow find the strength to stand, and if anything see a greater glory and majestic power than before. This being before you is like a storm in solid form. His feet press into the earth with the weight of a mountain, and shine like the sun in full glory. He wears a robe woven of solid light, and at his side hangs a sword sheathed in fire and lightning. His hands radiate power; they seem by their energy as if they are about to tear apart the fabric of space. You dare not look upon his face. Suddenly, you find yourself falling at his feet.

Again booms the voice: "Do not worship me! I am not God!"

A hand lifts you up, and sets you on your feet. His touch is more intense even than his appearance - you are sure that it will destroy you - yet somehow it makes you more solid.

It is all you can do not to fall down again. Somehow the words come, "Who are you?"

"I am a spirit, formed before the foundation of the world. I am a star, who sang for joy as the world was created. I am a messenger, who stands in the presence of God himself and then flies out of the heavens to wage war against the darkness. I am your servant. I am an angel."

Suddenly, images flash through your mind, images to which it would be merciful to call surreal and bizarre. You see chubby little boys fluttering about on birds' wings. You see voluptuous women, suspended in mid-air, whose clothing is perennially falling off. It is as if you have all your life seen pictures of Don Quixote wearing a wash-basin as a helmet, holding a dull sword and sitting astride poor, plodding Rozinante - and then, suddenly and out of nowhere, find yourself staring the paladin

Roland, with his sword Durendal drawn and the rippling muscles that have torn trees out of the ground, face to face. You find yourself babbling and attempting to explain what you remember, and suddenly see the angel shaking with a booming, resounding laughter.

"What, my dear child, you would wish me tame and safe, like a little pet?"

It would be much easier to face a creature which was safe, which one could predict. It would be a great deal less disquieting, and a great deal less disturbing. Yet, somehow, you feel a feeling deep within you that it would be an immeasurable loss.

He stretches out his hand. "Come, take my hand. I have something to show you."

You extend your hand, and find it engulfed in a force that is like electricity. Yet somehow, you feel something else as well - a touch. The angel spreads out great, glorious, golden, many-hued wings, and with a mighty jump launches into the air.

You speed along, both of you. Colors and forms speed by. Then, suddenly, you are at a place that is absolutely still, absolutely silent, and pitch black. "Where are we?"

"That is not a question that I can answer in terms that you will understand. Only watch."

You begin to see a pair of hands, They are together, and facing outward. Then they slowly move outward - and behind the hands is left a rainbow, in all its colors. The hands turn, move along, complete a perfect circle. It is the most perfect rainbow you have ever seen.

Then the left hand strikes the rainbow, and it shatters into innumerable miniscule fragments. The right hand takes the shards, and with a single motion scatters them across the blackness. Each piece of the rainbow glows with light, a little reflection of the whole, and then you see a faint, pale, crystalline blue glow. The pieces are scattered irregularly, and one looks almost like - here an insight comes like a flash - a

and she looks almost like here an insight comes like a flash a constellation.

There is no horizon, no landscape, no other light. There are stars in every direction and from every view. The view is the most breathtaking view of the sky that you have ever seen.

Then the angel takes your hand again, and says, "Do you understand what you saw?"

"I think I do."

"Good. Then let me show it to you again."

Forms shift and move, and you see a faint, nebulous sea of matter spread about in every direction. It is not still - no, it is moving. You look deeper, and you can see that it is dancing.

Then you see a circle forming, and spinning. And another around it, and another. Soon many circles shift and melt together. The ones on the inside seem to move with more speed, vibrancy, energy. Then you can see a kind of a ball forming.

The swirling matter around it spins inward, more and more tightly, until a fire seems to light inside - and fills the new-formed sphere with radiance. Flashes of light, bursts of glowing forms, like water on a pot boiling, seethe and foment. In your silence and stillness watching it, you begin to realize that spheres are forming, coming to light, becoming stars, all around - and, just as the stars formed out of forms dancing, the stars themselves are forms dancing, in a great, glorious, majestic dance.

The strains of a Christmas carol ring in your ears: "Fall on your knees. O hear the angel voices!" Suddenly you realize that you and your host are not still at all, but swept into the great dance - and, about you, you can see shimmers of... you know not what.

After a long, glorious, blissful time, the angel again takes your hand, and again you find yourself swept away. When you find yourself at rest, you are again in pitch black.

"And why am I here?"

"To see what you have seen, for the third time."

You wait with eager expectation, to see what could be next. Inside you, the images foam and mix. The rainbow, containing each piece and found in each piece, the colors, the moving dance, the energy... You try to push it aside, so that you may attentively perceive whatever changes may be happening...

Time passes, with still the forms fermenting in your mind. You feel serene and at rest; the place is a place of profound peace. After a time the images begin to fade, leaving behind a feeling, a wholeness, a satiety. It is like, after a vivacious dance has ended, sitting down, cooling off - and, then, at rest, finding the joy and the intoxication of the dance still in your heart, and your head floating in the air. It is like, after finishing a meal, sitting with its feeling of fullness.

After a time, you break the silence. "Why has nothing happened here? Why have I seen nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing? Am I here to wait?"

"Has nothing really happened here?"

"Nothing that I can perceive. I haven't seen, or heard, or felt anything."

"Really? You have perceived nothing?"

"Perhaps I have perceived something so subtle and ethereal that I can not notice it. I do not doubt that this place holds something wonderful. But I have not noticed anything."

"Really?"

"Why do you answer my questions with other questions, with riddles, instead of telling me anything?"

"Do I?"

After a time, pondering what this could mean, you ask, "Am I here to wait, for something that will happen? If I am, can you tell me when it will happen? Or at least tell me if you can tell me?"

The angel is silent for a moment, and then says, "When you have seen one of these things, you have seen more than one thing. You have seen the shattering of the rainbow; one of its fragments is the one near your home that shines light on your fields and mountains. But the rainbow is also the one, beautiful, perfect language that was before man took upon himself a second time the quest to become gods."

"But did not the sage say that we are gods?"

"Yes, you are gods, and more than gods, and will become more than you even are now. But the man who would exalt himself to godhood, blasphemes. Would that men could learn to be men, without trying to ascend to godhood or even be heroes."

"Should I not learn to be godlike?"

"Learn to be a god, not in the way of the man who wills to be the highest of gods, but in the way of the God who was willing to be the lowest of men."

After a time, the angel continues on.

"In a way, each shattered piece of the rainbow - including the language that you now speak - contains the pattern and image of the whole. But in another way, it has lost some of the colors. There are things that were in the whole rainbow, that are not in the piece.

"So I will answer your question, about waiting, with a word from another language. The word is not a word which answers the question, but rather which un-asks it. So I answer you with this word: Mu."

"But why do you un-ask the question, instead of simply answering it?"

"That I will tell you, if you first tell me, to use an expression from the

child's' words of your land, if the elephant in your refrigerator is eating peanut butter. Is the elephant in your refrigerator eating peanut butter? Yes, or no?"

Your mind is quite full; it is slow work, pondering and absorbing all that you have seen and heard. Finally you ask, "Before anything happens, may I wait here and ponder, and digest things?"

The angel says, "Yes indeed; that is why you were brought here."

A time passes in the silence, the stillness, the darkness. It is the beginning of the slow growth that makes a newborn experience into a full-grown memory, and brings it into who you are. It is the rest which makes every work perfect.

This lasts you know not how long. After a time, you realize that you are in a different place. You are with a man of sorts - if 'man' is the correct word to use. 'Man' is not a wrong word, but there are many others. He seems to be of no particular age. He is fully what every simple child is; he is fully what every ancient sage is.

After a time, you begin to wonder what his age is, and how long you have been there. You see him smile, and then burst out laughing. "Come," he says, "Let me show you what I see." He places his hand on your head, and suddenly you see an image - of a little child, in a magnificent and wondrous cavern full of rubies, and emeralds, and sapphires, and diamonds. He is off in a corner, picking up lumps of coal.

"This place is full of diamonds; come, enjoy, take and carry off as much as you are ready to carry."

Then you begin to look around, and see that you are indeed in a cavern of sorts. It is filled with a brilliant, powerful light; the walls and ceiling, full of irregular bulges and niches, seem to be gilded and encrusted with glowing gems. The space is full of forms magnificent and wonderful - fountains, statues, pedestals, crystalline spheres, animals. Everything in the room seems to have the breath of life.

You begin to gather gems; each one, luminous, seems to have its own

particular feel, its own particular energy - you can almost hear a music when you touch them. Their cool, crystalline forms seem to be of congealed light.

After you have gathered a great many, you notice a peculiar phenomenon: the more you carry, the easier it seems to be to pick up even more. The gems embrace each other, and begin to form a vast interlocking structure about you. It forms a great, shining suit of armor - a scintillating armor of adornment, a living form that is as light as thought. As even more time passes, the gems begin to melt into you. As each flows into your body, you feel its energy and light, and soon, a high, subtle, ethereal music courses through your veins.

At last you stand, armored with an armor that is flawless. It gives, you do not doubt, a protection against blows that a man of iron would envy. Yet the armor is not dark and cumbersome; it is light and energizing. Your skin is as soft and sensitive as ever, and you feel the unfettered lightness of nudity, free as Adam - no, you realize, a greater lightness, for a nude person is only not fettered by clothing, but this armor fills you with the freedom of which fetters are but a crude attempt to oppose. Carrying this armor leaves you more free to move and dance, and fills you with a positive energy.

You revel in the fullness, the intoxicating lightness. After a time, you realize that the man is looking upon you. He is smiling.

You begin to ask how much you owe for this wonderful treasure, and he breaks forth in peals of merry laughter. "These treasures are not for sale. They are a free gift. Come and fill yourself to overflowing with these treasures as often as you wish."

"Then they cost nothing?"

"No, they are very costly. They are more costly than you can ever imagine. But they are given freely, like water and light and breath, and a thousand thousand other treasures that no money can possibly buy."

"Then why are they given freely? Surely such things are worth a price!"

piece.

The man laughs again. "You are beginning to grow alive - just beginning. When you are truly alive, you will dance so freely that you will need no one to tell you these things, because the answers will be in you."

After a while, he hands you a chalice. "Here, drink this, that you may remain dreaming." You drink it, and have a flash of insight that waking is not the only aroused state. In a moment, you reach out and touch a star.

You find yourself inside a castle of ice. It is cold, elegant, pure. It is night-time, and the deep blue of the starry sky provides the light. You walk about in a magnificent structure, through halls and archways, around pillars and doorways, all the time in a great silence. The place is majestic and massive.

The coldness of the ice fills the palace with a deep peace. There is a rest here. You cannot see, nor feel the presence of, yet you somehow sense a kinship to the resting dead, sleeping, awaiting the dawn when sleepers shall rise.

As you step, as you breathe, you hear your echoes, and then the echoes of your echoes. The silence has a presence.

It is a timeless place. There is no hurry, no rush, no clutter. The sparseness of the architecture is matched only by the stillness of the air. You stand and walk, footfall after footfall penetrating the vastness. For it is vast and large; it is ordered, and yet unknown.

Through the glassy ceiling above you see the stars, and as you look at them, you can begin to hear the faintest tinklings of ethereal music. Your ears listen with a new keenness, flowing from the crystalline armor, and you can hear, not a music breaking the silence, but a music in the silence. It is, like the palace, sparse, and simple. It has an order and structure, and yet not time; it is a music which sounds as if it has always been there.

After a time, you realize that you are singing a song - sparse, simple, crystalline, and beautiful. It would not be quite right to say that you started a song: rather, that you have joined a song - a song that always has been, and always will be, a song which is sung not by you alone, but

has been, and always will be - a song which is sung not by you alone, but by angels and archangels, by the living and the dead, by the rocks and stars and trees themselves. And for the tiniest fraction of an instant, you can almost see the song rising, as incense, in the presence of He Who Is.

As you walk through a corridor, a transformation begins. Tendrils of mist curl about your feet as a shroud slowly rises from the ground. The walls become the walls of tall, narrow buildings lining the sides of the road. They are like ancient, cracked vellum, and ivylike bushes of yellow roses climb the sides.

All is still as you walk the streets; the only motion you can see is that of the mist dancing about you. Every now and then, you catch, out of the corner of your eye, what seems to be the form of a person just disappearing around a corner - but you are never sure.

After a time, you come upon a massive, dark Gothic cathedral. It is carved out of black marble. As you pass through the doors, the air becomes very dry; there is a feeling of imminence.

As you step into the sanctuary, the building itself is rocked by a blast of sound. Your body vibrates as you hear the deep, rich sounds of an organ resound all about you. The song is a fugue, turgid and complex. You hear three parts playing, then four, then six - interwoven, turning about, speaking to each other. It is in the key of E minor.

The song continues for almost an hour, woven with a deep sense of mystery. Like the building, like the city, it is filled with a dark majesty. There is a strain you are listening to hear - and you seem almost to have caught it, now here, now there, but then it vanishes. The song comes to a climax, and then a thunderous resolution. Then the sanctuary becomes as silent as before.

A shaft of light falls, and you see a man walking towards you. He is tall and lean, and wearing a black robe with golden edges. He has black hair, and a thin, close beard. His step is stately and regal, but does not make a single sound. He reaches you, and, bowing deeply, says, "Greetings."

His eyes meet yours, and you see that he has a piercing, probing gaze. It is intense, looking deep into your eyes - no, more, deep into your soul. And there is something else - you can not tell what. You begin to gaze back, and you realize what it is. His gaze is gentle.

He reads the questions on your face, and after a time says, "I cannot tell you everything that you wonder now. If I were to say the answers, answers that I am only beginning to understand, they would sound like trivia, or sound meaningless. And if I could make you understand them all, I would do you a great disservice."

"Why?"

"Because the questions you ask are the right questions, but they are also the wrong questions."

After a time, he begins again.

"But there is something which I can do. I can lead you to the library."

He leads you through a twisted passageway, then down a stairwell. The stairwell alights in a room with shelves upon shelves upon shelves of dust-covered tomes.

"And," the man says, "I can give you this."

He reaches into the folds of his robe, and gives you a black rose.

It is a queer feeling to be alone with that many books. You reach on one of the shelves and pull one out. It is an illuminated manuscript. It tells a story deep, and detailed, and rich, and subtle. What you can read of it is like barely seeing the ripples on the surface of a lake, while untold forms move about below in the depths.

You replace it and look at another. It is a manual of philosophy and theology. It tells something about God - but it is also too subtle and complex to understand. And there is something else... It is like reading a book about arrangements and variations of color - to a man who has been blind from birth.

Then another... You can tell from its form that it has a sort of reason, or structure to it, but you cannot tell what. At first, you find what seem to be logical errors - and it does contradict itself, sharply and in many ways... and yet... you have the feeling that you are like a man, versed in logic and philosophy but devoid of emotion, poring over a joke, trying to understand it as an argument - and having no idea why others read it and then do something called laughing.

Another book, and another. Each time it seems like you understand something, you find yourself more confused than before. After a time, it becomes words upon words - and the more words are added, the less meaning there seems to be.

You sit down, exhausted and bewildered. After a time, you realize that a woman is standing some distance off. She is wearing a robe that is purple and black, with long sleeves and a long, flowing skirt. Her long hair, which falls behind her to a length you cannot tell, is jet black, and yet her skin is almost luminous.

She steps forward, and, embracing you, gives you three kisses on alternate cheeks. "Have you learned anything yet?"

"Nothing. I can't understand anything in the books."

"Have you thought to see what you can learn?"

"I have thought, and I do not doubt that there is a lesson, but it is seven times over too subtle and too complex for me."

"There is a lesson that you are missing, but not because it is too subtle and too complex. You are missing it because it is too simple and too obvious."

"I have read from two and ninety books, and cannot share with you the least shred of wisdom that is found in them. I do not understand. So in what wise am I to claim that I have learned?"

"Is there not even one thing you can claim to have learned?"

It is with frustration that you say, "Only the littlest thing - that I do not understand."

"That is not so little as you think."

She looks at you for a second, and now you can see, as well as a probing gaze, a hint of a smile. "Come; you are fatigued. Let me take you so that you can eat and rest." She places an arm around you - her touch is soft and responsive - and leads you through other passageways into a room with a table.

The table is set with plates of clear glass; the table is set with bread, fish, and white cheeses, and there are two glasses of white wine. She leads you to a chair, which offers a welcome rest, and then sits down opposite you.

After you have eaten a couple of pieces of bread, you see her again gently looking upon you. "I can see the question in your eyes. You are wondering, are you not, why you were not simply told that you do not understand."

"Yes."

"Would you have understood that you do not understand? As you do now?" She pauses, and takes a sip of the wine. "A mouse can only drink its fill from a river, and no man can learn what he is not ready to understand."

The rest of the meal is eaten in silence. It is a calm, peaceful, prayerful silence. The bread is flavorful and dense; the cheese is mild; the wine is dry and cool.

After the meal, you both sit in more silence. It is a time of rest... and also of community. There are no words and there is no touch, and yet you can sense a kind of attention, a welcome, from the lady.

When you feel refreshed, she leads you through another passageway, and out to a door to the street. She gently embraces you, and says, "It is time for you to go, and begin to taste some of the other secrets of this city."

I do not know if we shall meet again, but I suspect that it will come to pass. Fare Thee well."

The street is different from the one you first saw - it also is enshrouded by a cloak of mist, but it is wider, and there are people passing by. Their clothing varies some, but much of it is variation on a dark grey theme, almost seeming to be mist in solid form. A young woman passes by on the other side of the street; a cascade of ebon hair hides part of her face - yet you can still see, in one corner of her mouth, a hint of a smile.

You come across an open square, with an intricate pattern of stone tiles in the center. Two opposite corners have trees - gnarled, angular, and leafless. One of the corners has a fountain; cascading sheets of water fall between many-leveled pools, in which silvery and golden fish swim about. The opposite corner has a statue.

The statue is on a large pedestal of dark grey marble; the statue itself is of blackened bronze. It is of a man, gaunt and haggard, and clad in rags. His arms are raised up to Heaven, as is also his head, and yet his face bears a look of despair. The pedestal bears the inscription, "I am thirsty. Who will give me something to drink?"

You find a jug, and, filling it at the fountain, climb up the statue and pour water into the statue's mouth. You hear sounds of water flowing, and then there is a click. It is followed by a whirr of moving clockwork, and, getting down, you see that one of the sides of the pedestal has turned inwards, revealing a shaft descending into the earth.

A lantern is at your feet; you light it, and begin to climb down the ladder at one side. It descends into a passageway; taking one direction, you come to a four way intersection. The left path turns into a circular room, with a domed roof, and a pool in the center. You test its depths - and find it descends below the floor.

Inside, you find an underwater passageway. You swim through it, and surface in a room with rough walls. Climbing upwards, you find the room to narrow into a shaft, which turns into a low passageway, and then opens into another room

opens into another room.

This room is lit by the glow of torches; it is large and rectangular. At the center is a thick, low stone column, about three feet tall, with some protrusions bulging from the top. When you come closer, you see that it is an intricate clockwork device; working with it, you find a pattern in its motions, and work with it until there is a click, and a segment of the far wall slides into the ground.

The passageway is dark, as was the room and passageway which you traversed without your lantern, and it opens shortly into another room. At first you cannot see; then, as you step in, your eyes slowly adjust to the darkness. Inside this room, you see another statue.

This statue is a male nude. It is an iron statue; it is immense, and the figure is powerfully built. It is in the middle of a stride - a long, powerful stride, one which seems almost to shake the ground. His eyes bear an intense gaze, one which seems to almost flash lightning, and one arm is raised, and hand outstretched, in a gesture of authority. The surface of the statue is rough and unfinished. There is something in this statue that seems to almost radiate power and energy and weight and light.

And yet, when you look closer, you notice something different. The eyes seem sad. And then, looking closer, you suddenly realize that the statue is bound by shackles. The shackles are a monstrosity, a violation; they threaten to wear down his energy and burden his strength. You grab at the shackles to see if you can pull them free, and feel a chill and drain run through the body. You drop them in shock.

As you stand in the room, you seem to even more be able to see - not only the forms, but the absurdity and injustice. The man's great strength - it is straining against the binding chains. Your eyes trace the shackles to where they are engulfed by the floor.

Then you realize that there is another set of shackles, empty, open. You shudder to look at them; the touch of one of the chains sapped your soul; breathing felt as if you had been forcefully struck on the chest. You begin to back out of the room... and you see the statue's eyes.

..... "C

He is not pleading; he is not begging. If anything, his eyes say "Go far away; that these chains imprison me is bad enough, without one more." You do not see pride, of someone unwilling to receive help, or the cowardice of one who dare not ask. It is rather the compassion, of someone who would not wish his worst enemy to feel the misery he feels. You feel a stirring inside your heart. What the man does not ask, conscience and every noble instinct demand. And you walk in.

A chill sweeps through you as you cross the threshold. You can almost see a presence that is unholy. At each step you are jolted. And yet... you have the strength to follow.

You fasten one of the open shackles about your feet; it stings like the sting of a scorpion. The other, and you feel as if you are sinking into the ground. A shackle is fastened around one hand, and it is all you can do not to fall down. You place your other hand in the last, and begin to close it...

The shackles fall from the man's feet, and you see a surge of power ripple through his muscles. He crouches down, and then jumps up with a force that shakes the earth. He raises his hands upward, and there is a blinding flash of light.

Your sight slowly returns, and you find yourself on a grassy knoll bordering a field. A small grove of saplings is to the left, and a field of dandelions is to the right. From somewhere near come the sounds of birds chirping, and a babbling brook.

You see the man who was shackled, standing nearby. He is looking upon you, and smiling. He picks you up and gives you a hug - a crushing, invigorating bear hug that makes you feel very much alive - and a big kiss. Then he sets you down and opens a large leather pouch. He fills two large stone bowls with stew, and draws two draughts of cider from a small barrel. The stew is a piping hot, well-spiced, and hearty beef stew, but the cider is cold and mild - you could drink quite a lot without getting drunk.

He tells you of how he came to be imprisoned - he let a love of probing mysteries become a love of secrecy, and a love of the beauty in natural darkness become a love of evil, so that what was wholesome and

free became perverted and enslaved - and then asks of your story, how you came to rescue him. He listens eagerly and intently.

After a time, he says, "There are many people who knew of my disappearance and do not know that I am free; it is time for me to go and tell them that I am free, and how you rescued me. But before I go, I give you this." He raises one hand to Heaven and places the other on your head, and speaks a blessing. You cannot understand the blessing, but there is something about it that strikes you... and then you see, in an instant, not just one little fragment in the blackness, but the whole radiant rainbow. He is speaking the first language, before it was broken, and - though you cannot understand it - you are moved by its power, its love, its light.

He presses slightly harder on your head, and your spirit surges with joy. Then he runs off into the distance, bounding like a stag.

After a time, you begin to walk along, into the forest. It grows thicker, and the colors richer and deeper. You can feel warmth, and humidity, and wind.

As you walk along, the forest opens into a wide, grassy clearing, with thick, long bluegrass. A few small raindrops sprinkle on your face; thunder rumbles, and soon there is a heavy and torrential rainstorm. The rain is warm, and in it you begin to run and play.

A woman, short and with a full and rounded figure, begins to dance with you, and soon you are swinging around, and dancing in the rain. Sheets and columns of rain fall, and in the lightning flashes you can see the trees, the leaves - the whole forest - dancing and spinning in the wind.

The woman is laughing; you can hear the laughter in her voice and see the laughter in her eyes. On a whim, you reach and pinch her side; she laughs and squirms. She jumps and tackles you - it is half a tackle and half a hug - and knocks you over.

After wrestling around for a few minutes, she turns and walks towards a large, ancient, gnarled oak tree, and sits on a large bulge a little distance above the ground. As she sits, you vaguely realize that the tree's

distance above the ground. As she sits, you vaguely realize that the tree's form has almost the shape to welcome a human - your eyes did not pick it out, but she seemed to have walked to it as naturally as if she were breathing. She is leaning a little to her left; a ledge of wood forms almost a cushion for her to lean on - one might say that her body is curled into the wood.

You begin to look on her, and see how beautiful she really is. Her skin glistens with little drops of water. She is dark, with olive skin and large, soft, welcoming eyes that seem to enfold you, taking you in as the waters of a lagoon take in a swimmer. There is something that draws you about your hands.

Her hands are small, and seem to contain the beauty of her whole body in miniature. They are rounded, curved, and Rubenesque. You can see soft skin gently enfolding the inside of her hands; it has a looseness and amplex so that you do not see vein and bone, only the rich color of skin. Her fingers are tiny and thin, with very mignonne nails and fingertips. The texture of her hands is subtle, yet gives her hands reality; you can see the strata and shapes in the tiny wrinkles on the back of her hand, the dark, faint hairs, and the many sheets of lines that twist and turn over the inside of her hand. Through her fingernails, you can see a glimpse of white, pink color which contrasts brightly with the rest of her hand.

And yet the shape is only half of the beauty that is in her hands, for they are not still, but in motion. It is a slow, still, lyrical motion, an adagio dance. It does not overpower the senses or make a clamoring demand for your attention, but it is yet deeply moving. Her fingers, palm, and thumb slowly move, in a rich harmony. You can see waves in her fingers as they wend back and forth. The motion is extremely simple, and has a periodicity that comes back to a single thing, yet somehow you do not wish it to be more complex, or do something new - at the moment, you would have difficulty understanding why anybody watching this slow undulation would want to see anyone else. It seems that she is speaking in a language with her hands, and you long to understand what her hands are saying, to put it into words. Then you look deeper, and you realize that you do understand what her hands are saying, and you cannot put it into words because it is a truth different from what words express. You

into words because it is a truth different from what words express. You rather feel and sense... peace... rest... stillness... the motion of breath... the beating of a heart... the music that lies in and beyond silence... the ebb and flow of water... day and night and the four seasons turning in cycle... the rhythm of a song that does not pulse, and yet has order... tufts of long, dry grass, resting in a field... the tops of trees, blowing in a wind... a rock, buried deep in the earth, remaining a rock, in the process of not-changing... the light at dusk, and yet not the light of dusk for the sunlight at dusk fades, and this, even in its softness, would not rightly be said to fade.

She begins to walk along a path, leading you, and takes you to a small hovel. You step inside, and as your eyes adjust to the light, you see a very old woman. She is emaciated, and in her face are etched lines of pain. She begins to try to get up, and say something, but the sounds are hardly understandable as words, and the young woman gently places her hand over the old woman's mouth and leads her to lie down. Reaching up to the wall, she brings a flask of wine to the old woman's lips, and helps her drink a little. After that, she goes to a chair, and picks up a wooden recorder, and plays it. It is the same song as her hands danced: soft, still, and beautiful. It has a very soft, woody sound, and the notes themselves are... like the color grey, like a gentle light, like a friend's voice. You are lost in the music, carried away by its beauty. Slowly, the song tapers into silence, into a rest allowing the music heard to sink in. You look at the old woman, and see that she is still, absolutely still. Her eyes vacuously point into space.

The young woman gets up, with infinite gentleness, and with her hand slowly closes the old woman's eyes. She turns to you, and, speaking so softly that you can barely hear her, says the first words you have heard from her: "She was my grandmother." You can see the tears forming in her eyes.

It is dusk, and the last rays of the sun ebb into darkness, into a dark and moonless night.

The next day, you begin to build a pyre in the middle of the field. Some people come by from the wood and help; they are bearing little gifts and each embrace her. There is not what you would understand to

gins, and each embrace her. There is not what you would understand to be a ceremony; they each come and go. After a time, you realize that the animals also come, and pay their respects in their own ways. Dusk comes again, and she takes a lantern and sets it at the bottom of the fire. Flames begin to lick upwards, and then touch the grandmother's body. Then the young woman screams, a piercing, dissonant, discordant scream of which you would not have thought her capable. She begins to sob uncontrollably, and weeps the whole night long.

The woman stands up to greet the coming of the dawn, the tears still streaming down her face. The first rays begin to break over her face, and then you notice something... different. Something that you had not noticed before.

You see pain in her face; it is of no effort to see that a great hole has been torn in her soul. And yet there is something else. She is beaten, but not crushed; wounded, but not destroyed. If she is bleeding, it is because there is living blood coursing through her veins. It would not be quite right to say that she is not too badly hurt because she is a deep person; rather, she is very badly hurt because she is a deep person. And yet... you cannot quite tell what it is.

She turns to you, and sees the puzzlement in your face. She reaches, and with one hand touches your eyes; her lips move in silent prayer. Then she takes her hand back, and you slowly see something else. You see angels all around, and feel the Spirit of God. One of the angels - great, mighty, magnificent - has wrapped his arms around her. The angels are still, and... intent. It would be a gross distortion to say that one of them waves a magic wand and makes the pain go away, and yet...

You cannot quite see, and yet in your spirit you sense, prayers, around and under and in her. You cannot understand all of what is going on. The pain is not taken away, and you share the pain as well. And yet... Though you cannot say what, you can sense someone, and something happening, which is infinitely greater than the pain. And you, again, hear singing.

Sister, let me be your servant. Let me be as Christ to you. I will laugh when you are laughing. When you weep, I'll weep with you.

Pray that I might have the grace to Let you be my servant, too.

When you feel so weak and burdened, When the world is harsh to you, Know that Christ has gone before you, Felt the pain and shed the tears. As Christ has so giv'n to others, So he will also give to you.

And e'en with Christ you're not alone, For we are Christ's body, too. We are all brother and sister. Your burden is our burden, too. As you have so giv'n to others, So we all shall give to you.

A little boy runs up with something clutched in his hand, and kisses her. He says, "I love you. Sorry you hurt bad. Havva big gift. Look!" He opens his hand.

Inside is a blade of grass.

Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength

In chapel, a speaker spoke of a person who was asked "Do you know how to play golf?" and answered "Yes, I learned yesterday." He then went on to speak of one of the simplest of Jesus's lessons, and how to truly learn that lesson is the work of a lifetime. If I were to be asked if I understand what I am talking about, the best and most honest answer I could give would be "No, but I am beginning to." For all of my life, I have been shown and have seen that there is something horrible that occurs when a human life without Christ is extinguished, and believed that, if destruction is something God wishes humans to avoid, then he would not place them in situations where it is unavoidable. It is not God's nature to say "this is to be avoided" and then be unfaithful and not provide a way out: sin is to be avoided and minimized. God always provides a way out. When I sin, it is not because God allowed me to come to a situation where there is no way to act without sin, or even because there was a way out that was beyond my strength, but because I choose to disregard what God in his love and wisdom has provided, and bring pain and destruction to myself and to God. And so I have spent time questioning and studying, and in the past couple of years have stumbled across something that astounds me. At first I saw one means that can work when diplomacy fails, and does not say to any other human being "You are expendable. I will permit you to die." And then, looking deeper, I have seen that it is not only another way to avoid violence, but that it is the imitation of Christ, and a new understanding of what it means to imitate Christ, to suffer for him, to conquer in his name. From time to time, God has given me

him, to conquer in his name. From time to time, God has given me affirmations of what I am doing - showing me other Christians who before me have seen what I have discovered, bringing a new light to the darkness that is in causing suffering to another. I have no delusions of being a master of that of which I speak - while I learn, while I progress, I do not see how I will ever be other than a novice before I am in Heaven and no longer see darkly and through a glass - but, at the same time, God has shown me something that is awesome in the true meaning of the word, and it is something that I cannot keep to myself.

The most dangerous assumption is the one that is not realized as such. An assumption that is realized can be strengthened and improved in detail if it is true, and rejected if it is false. The one that is unstated offers the danger of not showing its full glory if it is true, and not offering itself for rejection if it is false. There is an often unrealized assumption that there are ultimately some situations where violence is the only way out (IE where God can't or won't use any other means), and furthermore that the choice is between violence and inaction (no other alternatives). Stating that it is an assumption neither proves nor disproves it, but does bring it to light - to consider and judge as an assumption.

The idea that the use of physical force is an evil is a presupposition that is carried throughout this work. All agree violence is preferably to be avoided, not a desirable state, and its means, deception and destruction, bear the mark of darkness rather than the mark of light.

I know fully that the sixth commandment, translated as "Thou shalt not kill." in King James, used language that would better be translated "You shall not murder.", a command that left open the possibility of killing in many cases. This does not mean that that moral avenue is still open. The ninth commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" was written in language that specifically spoke of lying in court. This does not mean that a court of law is the only place that a Christian is not permitted to lie. There are many things that were made complete when Christ came, one of which was shifting from inwardly attempting to maintain purity to outwardly evangelizing. In the Old Testament, the prophet had a role calling back the lost sheep of Israel, but to the Gentiles there was no real sense of the Great Commission. Christ's coming changed that, so that one of the primary responsibilities

Christ's coming changed that, so that one of the primary responsibilities given to Christians is to win souls. It is with knowledge of this that Paul spoke of becoming a servant to all, ending with "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (I Cor 9:22)

Each person in this world is either ready to die or not ready to die. A person who is ready to die will not be serving someone who needs to be stopped. I know that there are many soldiers who would rather not fight, who would rather die than kill, and who bear no hatred towards their enemies. At the same, if you would kill, I have this question for you: Can you consider it to be the best possible form of evangelism to look an enemy soldier in the eyes, say "Jesus loves you. He died so that you may be forgiven of your sins and go to Heaven. I love you." and then, pulling a trigger, send that soldier to Hell?

The early Christian church (before Constantine's vision) had a strong aversion to the shedding of blood, as reflected by people such as Athenagorus, who said in 180 AD "We [Christians] cannot endure even to see a man put to death, though justly." When the Emperor attempted to create a Christian state, a part of the compromise that was introduced was the concept of just war theory: killing is undesirable and an evil under all circumstances, but there are some circumstances when it is not the greatest evil, and inaction and the damage it will cause is a greater evil. This thought is at the center of misunderstanding of pacifism: that a pacifist sits back and does nothing, that pacifism is passivism. I will attempt here to outline the difference between pacifism and passivism. If I succeed, it is only by God's grace.

If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had prescribed to the idea that it would be possible to know in advance what is the greater evil and what is the lesser evil, and to choose between, then certainly the lesser of the two evils would have been to bow down once and continue with their many other ministries. The story, however, glorifies their refusal to commit even the smallest evil, and reflects God's disregard for what is and isn't humanly possible. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.", says the Lord. Zech. 4:6

The new law is to love your enemy as yourself, and to forgive the one who iniures you seven times seventy as per Matthew 18:22

who injures you seven times seventy, as per Matthew 18:22.

Oftentimes people ask me "Well, God commanded not only defensive wars and even conquest but genocide in the Old Testament; what about those?" Please be assured that, were I to be born before Christ came, I would believe that violence is sometimes allowed. If I were to be born before Christ came, I would probably be an active member of the military, because that is what God commanded of many people and something that my gifts would be suited for. Jesus, however, said "You have heard that it was said: 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect." (Matt. 5:43,44,48) Before this command, it would have been not only acceptable but a moral duty to strike at some enemies, just as it was not only acceptable but a moral duty to repay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex. 21:23-25). With Christ, however, things were completely changed: "You have heard that it was said: 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:38-39) Any action taken in a war must be reconcilable with complete and absolute love for the enemies attacked: loving ("Love does no harm to its neighbor", Rom 13:10), doing good towards, praying for, blessing.

If you wish to become a warrior, then you will study and try to learn tactics and strategy. An attack that is lacking in planning will fall to a defense that is strategic, even if the attackers have better soldiers and better weapons.

If you wish to use the means of peace (whether or not you believe that they are always sufficient), then just as a warrior must study, you must study the concepts and principles of the means of peacemaking. You must study the tactics and strategy of making peace before even considering to declare it an insufficient tool for a situation where violence is necessary.

Once the men of a village came, running, and told Gandhi that they had run away while the police were raping and pillaging. When they told

him that this was because of his instruction to be nonviolent, he hung his head in shame. He would not have been angry with them if they had defended their families by the power of a sword. He would have approved had they stood in harm's way, calling all injury to themselves without seeking to strike or to harm, to the point of death. But to run away like that and passively leave those who could not run was an act of great and terrible cowardice, the darkest possible answer to the problem. Gandhi - because the Hindu religion sees grey and dark_er_ and light_er_ courses of action (every action falling onto a spectrum) believed that violence was necessary in many situations, in any event infinitely superior to cowardice. I do not believe that God presents a situation that does not have some way out that is free of sin and evil, and so I believe that violence is completely unnecessary to the Christian. The point of this example still stands, however - that cowardice is diametrically opposed to peacemaking.

Random violence for its own sake is not farther from a just war than sitting back and doing nothing is from pacifism. Cowardice is the direct opposite of peacemaking, and a coward CANNOT learn to be a peacemaker without first learning bravery.

Long before one person _ever_ strikes another in a corporeal manner, peace has been breached. The first principle of peace is something that lies much stronger and much deeper than the absence of physical conflict. The Hebrew word "shalom" has come to have the meaning that peace should have - if you have not encountered the word shalom, take "harmony" or "accord" to be a rough English equivalent. When there is truly peace between two people, they love each other to the point of being ready to forfeit wealth, honor, and life. Such peace leaves no room for prejudice and misunderstanding, which scatter as cockroaches scatter at the appearance of light. To establish peace, you do not merely ensure a lack of physical violence (particularly not through intimidation at your own superior capability for violence - "peace through strength" destroys what it wishes to establish), but rather work to remove all traces of hatred and injustice. Peace is not an absence, but the presence of love.

"The greatest of these is love." I Cor 13:13 Establish love and there

will be peace.

Just as a warrior must be ready to sacrifice the life of another by killing, so also, to live by peace you must be ready to sacrifice yourself by dying. This is the heart of the difference between passivism and pacifism. A passivist sits back and does nothing. A pacifist goes out on the battlefield, ready to die. To go out into a battle to kill, with the knowledge that you may die, requires great courage. To go out into a battle, not to kill, but to die, requires greater courage still.

It is obvious that there is a certain power which, in order to harness, it is necessary to take up arms and be ready to kill if need be. What is not so obvious is that there is another power for which it is necessary to put down arms and be ready to die if need be.

It is easy to return love to one who loves. It is not easy to give love to one who hates. And yet to do this impossible task is possible by the grace of God: "I can do everything in Christ who gives me strength." Phil. 4:13

Christ did not conquer us by threats of fire and brimstone. His message was not centered around "If you do not follow me, you will go to Hell." (although that is true) He did not torture us until we said "Ok, Ok, I believe." (although he has the power, the authority, and the right to do so) He rather said "Look how much I love you. Look at what I did for you. Look at what I want to do for you." He loved us who were his mortal enemies, and conquered us from the inside out: not by force, not by threat, but by love that knew no bounds. When we evangelize - conquering those who are God's mortal enemies - we do not threaten with Hell or use torture. We show our love, and by the power of the Holy Spirit conquer from the inside out, making an ally of an enemy and bringing blessing where God wills. This nature, this love, this manner of conquering is the heart of peacemaking.

In the midst of a world where darkness has its dominion, the powers of light are not overcome. This is not because the power of Satan is weak, but because the power of God is stronger. If you master an enemy by violence, your victory is temporary. If you master an enemy by love, your victory is eternal.

In the study of war and peace, look not only at troubled individuals and nations in the time of war, but also when there is peace - and know, as much as what went wrong when there were battles, what went right when there was love. Formal elaboration of some principles of peacemaking are rare, but its practice is more common than you might think. When you use your body to shield another person from injury, when you place yourself in the path of harm - take the example of the king of Denmark shielding Jews from Hitler - that is peacemaking.

Brother Andrew, while speaking at a chapel here, recounted an excellent example of peacemaking. He was talking with the leader of a terrorist liberation front who was holding hostages. He reasoned with the leader for a while, talking about how he could not rest if a single brother or sister of his in Christ was in captivity, but did not succeed. Diplomacy failed, as it sometimes will. He did not break into a fistfight, or try to grab one of the guns in the room. What he did do was to ask, "Will you take me in his place? Will you let him go free, and chain me to the central radiator?" The leader was astonished, not believing at first that he actually realized (let alone meant) what he said, and then that Andrew's house was in order, and that he really was ready to be a hostage. That is acting in Christ's love.

Love is not weakened or limited by hostility of the ones loved. It would be hollow and worthless if it were only an effective means of dealing with people who love you and take you seriously. Christ came down and died, died not for perfect people who were worthy of salvation (such people would need no such thing), but for people who were walking in the darkness and hated the light. His manifest power is revealed in the ones who have been conquered and transformed by its strength, and so Billy Graham, Jeffrey Dahmer, and myself who were all repulsive in his sight and fully worthy of Hell have come to be forgiven and made anew. We were God's enemies, conquered not by a show of force on God's part (which would have been easy - God could kill me as easily as I lift a finger), but by costly love. He came down in human form and, when he had shown his love in all other ways, showed his love by dying. And, as God conquered us who were his enemies by the power of his love, and made us to be his reconciled sons and daughters, so we must conquer those who are our enemies by the power of his love manifest in us, and

make them to be our reconciled brothers and sisters.

Jesus said "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:39) This is not a command to act as if you have no rights and passively let yourself be regarded as subhuman, but rather an insistence on the fact that you do have rights. In the society of that time, a slap on the cheek was not intended as a physical injury but rather as an insult, putting an inferior back in his or her place. The strength of that insult depended greatly upon which hand dealt it: as the left hand was seen as unclean, a slap with the left hand was the insult far greater than one dealt with the right hand. This was reflected in the legal penalties for an inappropriate slap: the penalty for slapping a peer with your left hand was a fine one hundred times the penalty for slapping a peer with your right hand; the penalty for slapping a better with your right hand was a fine while the penalty for slapping a better with your left hand was death. The people Jesus was speaking to most directly were, by and large, slaves and the downtrodden. A slap on the right cheek was dealt with the left hand. To turn the other cheek would leave the master with two options. The first would be to slap the slave again, but this time with the right hand (therefore declaring the slave a peer). The second would be not to slap the slave again (therefore effectively rescinding the first slap). Now, such impudence and sauciness would often tend to bring punishment, but it none the less says "Hey, I'm a human. I have rights. You can't treat me like this." It is not an action without suffering for oneself, nor does it inflict suffering on the "enemy": but it does say and do something in a powerful way.

If you are to be a peacemaker, you must act against any evil - no matter how small it may appear (by human measure - there is no small evil by God's measure) - whenever you see it. Even if it is not a breach of peace in the military sense, it is a breach of shalom, and should be stopped as soon as possible, so that it does not grow and multiply. If this is done, it will be rare if ever that violent intervention is even a question.

The power of violence is in what it can compel of the body. The power of peacemaking is what it can compel of the soul. If someone commands you to do what is morally repugnant to you, and you use the force of arms to stop that person, then you will probably slay some, and

you will certainly make enmity. If instead you use the force of peacemaking - by noncompliance, being disobedient and taking whatever the consequences must be, and by choosing your own suffering over the convenience of obedience - you will not see results as quickly, but your actions will command respect rather than enmity.

If you are to gain the power to successfully intervene with violence, then you must devote resources to equipment and time to training. Time and money thus spent are not spent on humanitarian ends. This is not to say that military technology and research does not have civilian spinoffs, or to say that the precision and discipline within military bodies is not something that can be very useful. Both of these benefits do exist, and are worth taking note (and advantage) of. At the same time, it is necessary to think: Is this really the most powerful and best way to spend this money? Love and active peacemaking are not limited to the well financed. Its power does not come from the investment of scarce monetary resources, but rather through the Holy Spirit, which is anything but a scarce resource. Money is freed to other ends.

Everyone in this discussion agrees that it is better to voluntarily suffer than to inflict suffering on others.

Diplomacy is a powerful thing. It becomes even more powerful if you study the positions of all parties involved, study both their stated desires and what is unstated: their culture, their experience, the motivation behind stating the desires and intentions that they state. Oftentimes goals that appear diametrically opposed will, when examined at the root, reveal a mutually beneficial way of resolution. The power of diplomacy is not, however, absolute, and it depends to an extent on the goodwill of both parties. It is then that either one side must turn back, or that the desires be accomplished at the price of suffering. The usual method of waging wars uses physical force to conquer. The method of peacemaking - to stand in the way of the evil being done against you, and not dodge or resist the blows aimed at you - uses spiritual force which opens a hardened heart.

Love is not the exclusive domain or power of one group. Any individual can bring surprise by an act of love. The power of love, when

applied to all ways so that there are no charges of incompleteness or hypocrisy, is overwhelming.

Love wishes nothing that it would not accord to another. Greed, the placement of self at the center of the universe, is diametrically opposed to love.

Christ's resistance and even revulsion at our evil did not cause him to force that evil from us. He rather showed us the better way, and left us to choose between the paths of light and those of darkness. So it is with love that makes peace: it is not forced upon those who believe violence to be the greatest interventive power.

Proclaim Christ at all times, and use words if need be.

Morally, there is not a difference between directly and indirectly causing an action. The one who commissions an assassination is no less guilty than the one who murders in person. Be sure that the actions you support are as pure as the actions you would take in person.

Just as Jesus said not to murder either in body (by breaking the sixth commandment) or in mind (by harboring hatred), peacemaking and love must penetrate both the actions of the body and the actions of the mind completely.

If you oppose someone with peacemaking, you will call to yourself the love and respect of others. Your power is not dependent on the extent of your military might (which is dependent on the extent to which you sacrifice humanitarian ends), but only on the extent to which you love and to which the Holy Spirit has power. In other words, if it fails, it is because God sees more good in that momentary failure than its success.

Peacemaking is more the opposite of inaction than it is of violence. Violence consists of seeing an evil and trying to act to rectify it; the means are imperfect. Cowardice and inaction make no hint of an effort to rectify the situation, and in my view are more reproachable than well meant violence. I have no respect for cowards - including those who dodge military conscription because they are afraid to die or be maimed in battle - but do hold respect for soldiers who have the courage and the

...but do hold respect for soldiers who have the courage and the desire to rectify which is the heart of peacemaking.

The power of love to conquer a hostile person without harm is a mystery; I would be a great liar if I said that I have always treated others in love. I will say that, when I have acted in a manner that says "You are expendable", there is a seed of evil and poison, however small, that starts to grow. When I have acted in a manner that does not see the least (by the world's measure) as expendable, God's love acting in me has shown power that is beyond my comprehension.

At the heart of violent intervention is a presupposition that you know the hearts of your enemies and that you can predict what can happen, so that the slaughter you cause will be lesser than the slaughter you prevent, and that if you instead intervene with your own blood without physically incapacitating your enemy, God will not work through and bless your actions as much as if you had compromised. When this assumption comes to mind, I believe that God has answered it when he said "Satan is a liar and the father of all lies." John 8:44, and that that he can and will do "immeasurably more than we all ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3:20) I am personally offended by the idea that it is necessary to take evil in order to prevent evil, because it carries the implication that God is either a hypocrite (by telling us never to do evil, and having the power to keep us from a choice between acts of evil, but choosing not to) or incompetent (telling us never to do evil, but lacking the power to make this possible). At the heart of peacemaking is faith, faith that without committing any undesirable evil it is possible to conquer the darkness. I have taken too many leaps of faith and landed on solid ground too many times to think that God is unable or even unwilling to grant power to those that will not compromise.

It is said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Whether or not you agree with that - I find a great blessing in both - it is evident that one of the marks of love is that it benefits the one who loves and the one who is loved. Violence does not "do no harm to its neighbor" (I Cor 13:10), but very regrettably does what it hopes to be a minimum of harm to its neighbor. The power of love and peacemaking is such that it brings blessings upon the one who uses it to oppose evil, and the person whose evil is opposed

evil is opposed.

Civil disobedience must be loving and sincere in all regards. To hatefully scream while restraining your fists is not enough: you must act in complete love and not harm in the least the person who you are resisting.

When you take an action, always look at why you act.

Love that is ready to die leaves no room to be cowardly.

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:21

I hope that, if God offers me the honor of becoming a martyr, I would have the courage to accept the honor. As Paul said in Phillipians 1:21, "To live is Christ; to die is gain."

All Scriptural quotations (except for quotations from the ten commandments) NIV.

The Grinch Who Stole Christmas

My dear Wormwood;

I still do not have your report on the status of the yearly festivals. As you have not informed me of the circumstances for several years, I may unfortunately be forced to demonstrate drastic consequences in the case that you fail again to even tell what is happening.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

Dear uncle Screwtape;

It is about as well as could be expected. This is a time of festivities which we have very little difficulty turning the people away from; it is, also, one of the ones where there is joy and exuberance such that it is very difficult to introduce even a dead and ritualistic approach to ceremony. We have succeeded at least in enticing a handful of people to drunkenness and adultery on one hand, and on the others have slowly been building an interest in sorcery. I am currently contemplating the introduction of a number of grimoires to heighten the interest in spellcraft; unfortunately, this is the rare exception rather than the rule, and we can make very little progress with the great many. I suppose that we should expect greater success at other times of year.

Your nephew,

Wormwood.

My dead Wormwood;

YOU IDIOT!

You speak of getting a handful of people interested in spellcraft as a great achievement. Were you here, you would see that your letter caused me to engage in something not unlike men's prestidigitation; I immediately raised my arm and extended my middle finger.

So, you have enticed a tiny handful. Whoop-de-doo. Nobody minds that you've chopped down a tree or two, but we are here to burn a forest.

It is evident that your abysmal lack of understanding of temptation has produced the silliest possible results. If you are going to tempt a man, TEMPT him. A large shipment of spellbooks to devout people is not productive. Have you no idea why you are trained to masquerade as an angel of light?

Use the right tool for the right job.

I want a full analysis of the situation, and a preview of any ideas, just to ensure that you do not do anything dumber.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

Dear uncle Screwtape;

It is the season when they celebrate the greatest gift they have ever received; namely, when the Enemy became one of them and died to create a way of escape from our trap of sin.

There are two basic intertwined ways in which they celebrate, and we have been able to do very little to stop either.

The first is by thanksgiving and enjoying what they have been given.

They come to friends and family; they pray, sing songs, eat, drink, and be merry. A few we've managed to get drunk on the wassail or abstain from it as if it were an evil thing, but that is a chink here and there; we have had trouble making it larger. There is a wholehearted attitude of thanksgiving and worship at all the gifts which they've received; the time when we've set famine to take away some of their food only seems to make them all the more grateful and all the more prayerful.

The second is by giving each other gifts. Whether the gifts are simple or costly, they are heartfelt; they celebrate the gift given them by giving gifts to each other. Even in the lands where an evil duke has imposed harsh taxes on the peasant, so that they have little to give, their little gifts are taken as seriously as more lavish gifts from people who do have enough to live on.

I have been trying to deter them from the celebration and the gift giving, but results have been frustrating to the extreme.

Your nephew,
Wormwood

My dear Wormwood;

Having taken some time to think, I should like to temper some of my previous remarks. Nor that your bungling incompetence does not warrant them, but I should like you to be better informed.

There is both an individual and a corporate side to sin. The individual side is of extreme importance. Our father below personally tempted Job, and it is not an understatement to say that every last person should be tempted as far as possible. By chipping at one tree at a time, it is possible to clear cut a forest. (The importance of the individual is so great that it may be an interesting temptation to make people appear to be nothing but individuals). When the temptations facing a society do not affect a person, it is perfectly acceptable to give some variation. Once in a while, even that can be worked into a good plan for even greater corporate sin. It is spectacular to have a few become prostitutes and a

great many become Pharisees; a few become witches, and a great many become witch hunters.

As important as individual sin is, it is now your responsibility to see to corporate sin, and tempt the society as a whole.

There is something I should like to remind you about the nature of sin.

Man is created to embrace what is good. Even in his fallen state, even with the power that we hold over them, that man still somehow desires to embrace the good is so true that it dictates the nature of temptation. When we tempt, it is necessary to give a candy coating to that sin with what is good. Sexual sin is only possible when we twist the tremendous goodness of human sexuality; idolatry can not exist except as an exploitation of the need of man to worship the Enemy.

There is a time and a place to use intimidation, terror, and force, but your attempts here to either tempt solid believers with sorcery, or make their celebrations impossible by physical hardship, are clumsy and inappropriate. Gold which is passed through fire only grows purer; that is why you see their devotion flowering. Instead, why don't you appear as an angel of light and lull them to sleep?

There is a note about patience... Though occasionally we manage the sudden and sharp, it is much better in most cases (including this one) to work ever so slowly. So slowly that there doesn't seem to be any real progress; so slowly that everything appears to them to be as they want it. If you suddenly hold a candle by a frog, it will jump away. If, instead, the frog is placed in a pot of cool water and the candle beneath the pot, it will never notice; nothing constrains it from jumping out, and yet you need only wait for the ever so slowly growing heat to destroy it. Be patient; wait for decades or centuries if need be.

Now stop wasting your energy on stupid spellbooks, droughts, and taxes. Take away these hardships; for now, I want you to only make things easier. Help their economic systems be productive; don't take away from the laughter at the feasts. If you find an opportunity to get someone drunk at a festival, then by all means take it, but don't worry about having

things now. Just do as I have said, and wait.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

Dear uncle Screwtape;

It is ten years now, and I have done as you have said. I do not understand why; they enjoy the festivities as much as ever, giving and receiving gifts in a manner that enjoys each other; enjoying each other in a manner that loves and worships the Enemy. By all counts, things have only gotten worse. Am I to continue to wait?

Your nephew,
Wormwood

My dear Wormwood;

Patience, my dear. Patience. If you continue, you are making more progress than you think. Now, I still don't want you to do anything spectacular. Only give an idea to an inventor here, an economist there. Don't introduce anything nasty; just make the economic system more productive, and do nothing to impede their thoughts of giving generous gifts at this season.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

Dear uncle Screwtape;

It is twenty years since I last wrote you, and I still do not see the point. People have more money; they are giving it generously. The hungry are fed; the naked are clothed. The season is one of great festivity, and, as ever, they give generous gifts. Am I to continue?

Your nephew,

Wormwood

My dear Wormwood;

Still, you need patience. Now, I want you to do two things:

First of all, continue to increase the productivity of their economic system.

Second of all, without actively disparaging love for God or their neighbors, I want you to use the season to cause them to think about how good their material possessions are, and look forward to it.

Give it ten more years, and write back.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

Dear uncle Screwtape;

I have succeeded in making them think about the goodness of their material possessions (which I still do not fully understand; most of the time, you have had me delude people into thinking that the material is evil and an obstruction to spiritual growth; I am now emphasizing that truth in the matter as you say, and I don't see any real progress). It is ten years; what should I do now?

Your nephew,
Wormwood

My dear Wormwood;

Now, slowly, slightly, introduce seeds of greed. Not too much; just a little. And give them more money.

It is the time to twist, and everything you twist should be done, at least at first, in a slow and slight, imperceptible manner. Twist the good

least at first, in a slow and slight, imperceptible manner. I twist the good of the celebration and the presents just a little; that's all that it takes, for the moment. Just make the goodness of God and the gift the season celebrates seem less of an easy thing to think about than the goodness of all the material gifts.

Give it ten years or so, and write me back again.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

Dear uncle Screwtape;

Wow. Though it's been slow, this work has been beginning to show some real results. Though every gift given by one person is a gift received by another, people are thinking of this much less as a time to give gifts, and much more as a time to receive them. I've now made it a major part of their economy; people are beginning to look forward very much to all of the Christmas gifts they can receive.

Should I continue as I have been?

Your nephew,
Wormwood

My dear Wormwood;

There is something to be said about greed. Like most other sins, it produces satiety for the moment, but over time it yields only insatiety. Those who have enough and are content with what they have remain content; those who have much with greed grow more wealthy and less satisfied. More than that, many of those who have the most material possessions enjoy them the least; time to acquire possessions, and worry for them, becomes a consuming desire. A powerful chief executive officer who can buy anything he wants, will enjoy much less the leather seats of his Porsche, the view from his yacht, the beauty of his art collection, than many children of more modest means enjoy a chain of dandelions and a

grape flavored lollipop.

Just continue, and put some serious thought into the trash that you teach them to prize. I could give more detail, but I think you're beginning to understand. Write me back in a few more years; tell me what happens.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

Dear uncle Screwtape;

Things have really been taking off.

The holiday celebration has become a tremendous commercial extravaganza, the best time of year when people look forward to getting glowing plastic dolls and combination pizza oven/clothes dryers. I have gone wild with the items which are produced. I've made one device so that much of the time people spend "together" is distant and mechanical, with no eye contact and no touch. They now have, and look forward to ever more advanced entertainment devices with blinking lights and spectacular sound effects, bright and shiny enough to distract people the emptiness within, and ever becoming more effective. (You might also be pleased to learn of the content; although the type of devices would facilitate excellent strategy games, I've made graphic violence seem more and more attractive; a wonderful entertainment. Now I don't even have to be slow and patient in making a more realistic sadism; all that needs to be done is put somewhere in the storyline that you're the hero and morally justified in wading through blood. (I'm working on taking that away as well)) I'm making sure that the games are solitary by nature; you can't really play these games with your friends the way you can play cards, having a friendly chat as well as thinking about what to do as the next move. On a scale of glitz and convenience, they seem far more attractive than reading a book, holding a friend's hand, going for a walk, or having a relaxed meal together. I've been working on a faster, exciting, frantic pace for the entertainment, and people are "learning" that having fun means moving at a breakneck speed; leisure is beginning to be considered boring. There is a great air of celebration and festivity, and an air of gifts; the facade is tremendous

the parade is tremendous.

I think that the festival is mostly under control. Should we make a shift in strategy?

Your nephew,
Wormwood

My dear Wormwood;

Congratulations! You have passed this portion of your training with flying colors. Although I have more experience in this matter and have enjoyed many times sitting back and watching the flames as a society crumbles under the weight of its own sin, you have celebrated trivia to an extent that even I find astounding. My hat is off to you.

For now, your responsibilities (which you have made much easier) have been shifted; as you have so masterfully learned your lessons in corporate sin, it is now time for you to learn the next lesson. Your next area of training will be in the area of heresy, a battleground to which we are shifting focus.

I look forward to seeing what will come of your apprenticeship there.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement

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

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

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

Music begins to play, and the screen shows a woman holding a microphone. She is wearing a long dress of the whitest white, the color traditionally symbolic of goodness and purity, which somehow manages not to conceal her unnaturally large breasts. The camera slowly focuses in as she begins to sing.

"You got problems? That's OK. You got problems? That's OK. Not enough luxury? That's OK. Only three cars? That's OK. Not enough power? That's OK. Can't get your way? That's OK. Not enough for you? That's OK. Can't do it on your own? That's OK. You got problems? That's

OK. You got problems? That's OK. Just call out to Jesus, and he'll make them go away. Just call out to Jesus, and he'll make them go away."

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

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

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

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

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

"And now, we sit at the apex, blessed with more and better technology than anyone else. What more could you possibly ask for? What greater blessing could there possibly be? We have the technology, and know how to enjoy it. Isn't God gracious?"

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

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

The image fades.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The cans are opened.

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

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

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

"I know that you can't be happy, stealing, lying, and getting drunk all of the time. Here is a little gift to let you know that Jesus loves you." He steps back into the car without waiting to hear the man's response, and speeds off.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I am, and I would like to say how great you are. I sent you fifty dollars, and someone gave me an anonymous check for five hundred! I only wish I had given you more."

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

"I was wondering what God's will is for America? And what I can do to help?"

"Thank you; that's a good question.

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

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

"Caller number two?"

CALLER NUMBER TWO:

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

"Yes, I do. First of all, what really matters is that you have Jesus in your heart. Then you and God can conquer the world. Church is a peripheral; it doesn't really have anything to do with Jesus being in your heart. If you find a church that you like, go for it, but if there aren't any that you like, it's not your fault that they aren't doing their job.

"And the next caller?"

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

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

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

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

sponsors."

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

A few minutes of commercials pass: a computer animated flash of color, speaking of the latest kind of candy; a family brought together and made happy by buying the right brand of vacuum cleaner; a specific kind of hamburger helping black and white, young and old to live together in harmony. Somewhere in there, the Energizer bunny appears; one of the people in the scene tells the rabbit that he should have appeared at some time other than the commercial breaks. Finally, the host, who has regained his composure, is on the screen again.

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

The Way of the Way

I Beyond

Beyond doing, there is being.

Beyond time, there is eternity.

Beyond mortality, there is immortality.

Beyond knowledge, there is faith.

Beyond justice, there is mercy.

Beyond happy thoughts, there is joy.

Beyond communication, there is communion.

Beyond petition, there is prayer.

Beyond work, there is rest.

Beyond right action, there is virtue.

Beyond virtue, there is the Holy Spirit.

Beyond appreciation, there is awe.

Beyond sound, there is stillness.

Beyond stillness, there is the eternal song.

Beyond law, there is grace.

Beyond even wisdom, there is love.

Beyond all else, HE IS.

II Order

Love and the Spirit are the basis for all true order.

When love and true religion have departed, there is honor and morality.

When honor and morality have departed, there are rules.

Rules do not depart when they have lost their power. They grow and multiply.

When rules have grown to their full measure, there is chaos.

The more the rules, the less the order, and how does that profit anyone?

III Silence

The value of silence, of stillness, of meditation, of rest, is great.

I will not attempt to explain it with words.

IV Power

Strength is made perfect in weakness.

A vessel that is solid is worthless.

A vessel that is empty and hollow has room to be filled.

If you wish to become strong, learn weakness.

V The Heart

Thought goes before deed; that which fills the heart will fill the hands.

Greater than any conquest without, is the conquest within.

Remove the log from your own eye, and you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye. Master the mountain within, and you will be in a right state to challenge the mountain without.

Do you consider yourself ready for the task? You do not take it seriously.

Do you despair of ever accomplishing it yourself? You are ready to receive help.

VI Wealth

Poverty is a deadly bane. Yet it can be made a blessing.

If you wish to see the power of love and the Spirit of God at work, look at those who have nothing else.

Wealth is a blessing. Yet it can become a deadly bane.

Look at the wealthy.

There are few who own and are served by many possessions.
There are many who are owned by and serve many possessions.

Look at the wealthy.

There are many who can buy their children toys, video games, and cars.
There are few who pick their children up and hold them.

Look at the wealthy.

There are many who can afford any pleasure they want.
There are few who know joy.

Look at the wealthy.

There are many who can buy any vacation or entertainment device they want.
There are few who ever know leisure, rest, peace.

Look at the wealthy.

There are many who have more money than the poor would know how to spend.
There are few who are as generous as the poor.

Look at the wealthy.

There are many who can buy the softest and most luxuriant pets.
There are few who truly know the feel of a human touch.

Look at yourself.

Look at most of the people in the world.
Are you not wealthy?

are you not wealthy.

VII Through

Joy comes through suffering.

Freedom comes through discipline.

Glory comes through humility.

Security comes through letting go.

Masculinity comes through not being macho.

Femininity comes through not being a sex toy.

Life comes through death.

VIII The Kingdom

The Kingdom of Heaven is not a kingdom of this world.

It is a kingdom in which the weak have been chosen to shame the strong.

It is a kingdom in which the foolish have been chosen to shame the wise.

It is a kingdom in which the poor have been chosen to shame the rich.

It is a kingdom in which the humble have become the friends of God.

It is a kingdom in which that which the world has told, "You are worthless," God has told, "You are priceless."

It is a kingdom in which there is more rejoicing over one filthy sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous men who do not need to repent.

It is a kingdom in which vulgar peasants have been chosen to shame great theologians and sages.

It is a kingdom in which many wealthy men gave great and ostentatious gifts, and a poor widow, dropping in two pennies, surpassed them all.

It is a kingdom in which the power to conquer is held, not by the man who is able to stand behind the barrel of a gun, but by the man who is willing to stand in front of it.

It is a kingdom in which, to become a leader, you must become a slave.

It is a kingdom which begins, not with the love that you pour out, but with the love that is poured out on you.

IX Service

A river in health has water flowing in and water flowing out.

If it dams its outflow, saying, "I will gain more fresh water this way," then it only grows stagnant. Its greed and selfishness create an illusion of gain, that is only loss.

It must give out as it has received, and then it will be filled with water fresh and pure as it was first filled.

So it is with men.

Proclaim Christ at all times, and use words if need be.

Words are powerful, and can speak mightily.
Deeds are more powerful, and can speak more mightily.

The way to teach is not as a master.
It is as a brother, as a friend, and as a slave.

The one who seeks to control and dominate does not understand how to lead. Manipulation is not much different from dominating by intimidation; it is only better hidden. Both are hurt and pain lying and saying that they are health. If you wish to become a leader, scrub out a wastebasket.

X Lessons

Once, after years of teaching, the Buddha was walking with his students, and one of them asked him for one last, final lesson.

He bent down, and picked a flower.

All of his students looked intently, waiting for an explanation.

All but one.

The one student smiled.

And to this one student, Buddha smiled back.

Lessons are everywhere. They are in books and in the classroom, to be certain. But there are many, many other places.

Look at a single blade of grass. Its beauty bears the fingerprints of the Creator. There is a lesson there.

Feel the warmth of a friend when you give him a hug. We were not created to spend time only in solitude, but also in community, and touch is vital. There is a lesson in the touch of another person.

Write a story or draw a picture. You will learn something when you do it.

Pray. There is a lesson in the simplest prayer.

Where is there not a lesson to be learned?

XI Children

Children are a lot like everyone else, except that they have not fully learned how to act like everyone else. Therefore there is much to learn from them.

There is nothing like a child seeing that you are hurt, and coming up and giving you a hug. There is nothing like a child making a gift to give to someone.

There is also nothing like a child being loud, rude, and inconsiderate, ripping a toy away from someone smaller because he wants it and he is strong enough to take it. There is nothing like a child staring into your eyes with eyes of ice and saying, "I hate you."

Children embody good things that others have forgotten. A child knows how to imagine, how to look at how pretty a flower is, and they have not yet learned that it's not OK to say that you're hurting and need help. Children also embody pure and unmasked vice; it is very easy to see a child lie, manipulate, tear apart the one who doesn't fit in, and fight anyone who dare stand in the way of his selfishness.

Confucius said, "When I see a virtuous man, I try to be like him. When I see an evil man, I reflect on my own behavior."

XII Untainted virtue

Become as a little child, but do not become childish.

Become loving, and yet become firm.

Become strong, and yet become gentle.

Become wise, and yet do not rely on your own wisdom.

Become great, and yet become humble.

Become filled with imagination and dreams, and yet do not forget the world.

Become as a skillful warrior, and yet become peaceful.

Become ancient, and yet do not lose your childhood.

Become timeless, and yet use time wisely.

XIII Shadows

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

When people shun worship, they create ceremonies.

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

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

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

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

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

XIV Fullness

Once a father gave each of his three sons a penny, as a test; he would bestow his inheritance on the son who could go into the marketplace and, in a day, buy something to fill the room.

The eldest son came, with his pouch filled with sand. He took the sand and threw it, scattering it through the room. It covered a little of the floor, but not all of it.

The second son came, with his arms full of straw. He spread the straw on the floor, scattering it through the room. It covered all of the floor, but it did not fill the room.

The youngest son came, and, opening his hand, held out a tiny candle. He lit it,

and filled the room with light.

XV Wrong Questions

It is possible for an answer to a question to be wrong.

"Is murder good or evil?"

"Good."

Yet it does not take an answer for there to be a mistake.

"How many times must I forgive my brother before I may bear a grudge against him?"

If you are asking such a question, you are already mistaken. Here are some, to avoid:

"What is the rational justification for faith?"

"What must I do to make myself good and make myself righteous before God?"

"Where should I seek out suffering in order to take up my cross?"

"How may I learn humility?"

"How do I decide for myself what is good and what is evil?"

"How much force is necessary to bring order to this situation?"

"How do I choose the lesser of two evils?"

"What words constitute a true prayer?"

"What is the necessary, time, place, and form for true worship?"

"Where do you draw the line between proper use of food and drink, and gluttony and drunkenness?"

"How much money do I need in order to be able to do something

good?"

"What kind of rules should I use to infuse life to my spirituality?"

"What denomination should I join?"

"Who is my neighbor?"

XVI The Middle Path

In many ways, the Way is balance. The temptation is not infrequent to try to avoid one error by embracing its opposite.

Good speech and writing does not contain words for the sake of words. Neither is it cut short for the sake of being concise.

Order is not gained by adding rules to what God has given, nor freedom by acting as if sin were not evil.

Wisdom is not gained by deifying the mind as something supreme which God must bow down and worship, nor humility by rejecting it as a piece of filth which God did not create.

In moderation and balance are work, play, rest, exercise, thought, meditation, words, music, silence, food, drink, and refrain, all good things.

XVII Evil

Do you wish to see twistedness and depravity beyond belief?

Look within.

XVIII Impossible

If a man were offered five dollars to not think of a glowing pink bear, he would not be able to claim the prize. Yet he would have been doing it perfectly until he tried.

Likewise, people act inconspicuous until they try to act inconspicuous.

That is easy; they are matters where something is done automatically until they are tried.

Were a plank of wood a foot wide laid across the floor, anybody could walk across it without falling.

Yet, were it crossing a yawning and abysmal chasm, firmly secured so that it would not shake, many people would try to walk across it without falling, because they would, seeing the possibility of falling, cease to walk perfectly across the plank and instead try to walk perfectly across it.

The prayer of faith is like this; he who offers a prayer of faith succeeds, and he who tries to offer a prayer of faith fails.

That is more valuable and more difficult; it is a matter where it is not done automatically, nor something that is done by trying, but something that can be done only by doing. It is easy; children do this with great power until they grow up and learn to try.

There is something greater yet, which is most valuable and impossible.

Man is fallen, and sin and evil have pervaded his whole being. Sin must be escaped to enter into life, for its wages are absolute death.

But what is the way for man to escape from sin? Automatic doing or trying or doing or not-doing? Wisdom or stupidity or knowledge or ignorance or tantrism or willpower or doing nothing?

ignorance of carnism or impotence of doing nothing.

That is like asking what brand of gasoline to use to extinguish a fire.

Such proceed from man and are inescapably tainted by evil. At their worst, they are straw. At their best, they are straw. They cannot save.

God emptied himself of divine power and majesty to become a man, and then emptied himself of even human power and majesty to die on a cross.

He who was without sin became anathema, bearing the curse for sins.

Now, to those who have earned in full the full measure of God's wrath, he offers this: that they accept the gift of God taking the curse upon himself, so that they will not have to bear it themselves.

The impossible is freely given to whoever believes, praying, "Jesus, please forgive my sins and come into my heart."

This is the message of the Cross. It is foolish and weak. There is no way around it, no escape.

You cannot stoop to such useless nonsense? There is some question which remains unresolved, which must be answered before you can accept it?

Then go, and extinguish your fire with gasoline.

XIX A Difference

Once a man was on a beach, where countless thousands of starfish had washed up, their life and water ever so slowly ebbing into dust.

Someone came along, and asked him, "What are you doing? Had you the rest of your life to spend doing this, you would not scratch the surface of the dying starfish. You cannot help more than a drop in the bucket. Why do you think that it matters?"

The man calmly, patiently, bent over, took a starfish, and threw it up in the air, arcing as it came down to splash back into the life giving water.

"It mattered to that one."

XX Not

Teaching is not fallible men claiming divine authority.
It is divine authority claiming fallible men.

Righteousness is not, do what is right and you will be justified.
It is, be justified, and you will do what is right.

The beginning is not man reaching up to God.
It is God reaching down to man.

God is not a reflection of the best in man.
Man is a reflection of the best in God.

Wisdom is not mind establishing the place for faith and building it up.
It is faith establishing the place for mind and building it up.

You do not come to see the world as you should and therefore know God.
You come to know God, and therefore see the world as you should.

The Cross was the point where the power of sin and death crushed God.
It is the point where God crushed the power of sin and death.

XXI The Other Side

The foundation is that God loves you and your neighbor.
The foundation is that you shall love God and your neighbor.

Only those who believe can obey.
Only those who obey can believe.

A wise man will pursue love.
A man of love will pursue wisdom.

Christ shared in our life and died our death,
That we may share in his death and live his life.

The believer abides in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.
The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit abide in the believer.

Inside of your heart, there is a void that can be filled only by God.
Inside of God's heart, there is a void that can be filled only by you.

XXII Necessary

If you have nothing that you are ready to die for, then you have nothing that you are ready to live for.

If you will not lose yourself, then you can not find yourself.

If you can not accept that your own wisdom is not the final measure, then you can not become wise.

If you can not let go of efficiency, then you can not use what has been entrusted you properly.

If you do not fear God, then you will not know either courage or peace.

If you do not renounce everything to gain Christ, then you can not truly gain anything.

If you do not see the net sum of all your good works as —, then you can never produce good works.

XXIII Teaching

Once a man came out of a church service, visibly moved. He walked along with the town cynic, and began to speak.

"There's a new preacher, and his message is totally different."

"Really? What did the old one say?"

"He said that we have all sinned, and that Jesus died for our sins, and that, unless we accept his forgiveness for our sins, we're all going to go to Hell."

"And what does the new one say?"

"He says that we have all sinned, and that Jesus died for our sins, and that, unless we accept his forgiveness for our sins, we're all going to go to Hell."

"Bah! Doesn't sound like much of a difference to me."

"Oh, there's a world of difference. He says it with tears in his eyes."

XXIV Faith

The just shall live by faith.

Not, "The just shall live by works," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which works are a result.

Not, "The just shall live by meaning," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which meaning is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by rational explanation," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which rational explanation is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by mystery," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which mystery is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by power," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which power is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by security," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which security is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by happiness," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which happiness is a result.

The just shall live by faith.

XXV Means

The more haste, the less speed.

The more prudishness, the less purity.

The more rules, the less order.

The more will, the less power to obey.

The more excess, the less satisfaction.

The more license, the less freedom.

The more wrong means, the less right ends.

It is necessary, not only to believe that God has given the right ends, but also that he knows the best means to those ends.

XXVI Law

There is the Law for the lawless.

There is no Law for the righteous.

The Law is not a tool to help people obey. It is a mirror to show people that they can't obey.

It is meant to show people that however hard they try, they need something greater: that the Something Greater is how they are to obey.

Alas, for how many have tried to obey with the Law?

XXVII Virtue and Vice

The one man perfect in virtue was the Man of Sorrows, and we are not greater. In this world, virtue is no escape from suffering.

Yet vice is anything from the path of joy. Joy, indeed, is a part of virtue, and can not truly be separated from it.

Virtue is hard to begin with, but ends in joy.
Vice is easy to begin with, but ends in misery.

What does Heaven look like?

He who is proud will see that every man present is present, not because of, but despite what he merits.

He who is rebellious will see people serve an absolute King.

He who desires self-sufficiency will see that joy is offered in community.

He who seeks wealth, prestige, power, and other ways to dominate others, will find his effort in Heaven to be like buying a gun in a grocery store.

He who strives will see that there is no one to strive with.

He who despises the physical will see a bodily resurrection.

He who desires his own interpretation and his own set of beliefs, will see absolute truth in crystalline clarity.

To those who will not let God change their character to virtue and love, even Heaven would be Hell.

XXVIII Wrong Tools

Does one use an ice cube to start a fire?

Does one use a chainsaw to mend a torn garment?

Does one use nerve gas to heal paralysis?

Then why do people use worry to create security, or wealth and power to create happiness, or excess to create satisfaction, or distortions of pleasure to surpass pleasure in its proper function?

Perhaps the reason that the Tempter is the Father of Lies, is that only a master of illusion could make sin appear desirable.

XXIX Fallenness

Fallenness is subtle, and appears in many ways.

People do reverence to nothings, and disturb the order.

What should be used is loved, and what should be loved is used.

People consider ends which are good themselves, to be merely means to other ends, ends which are trivia. It is like seeking to heal a man deaf and dumb, so that he can tell you what time it is.

People try to achieve the right ends through the wrong means.

People take the right action for the wrong reason.

People try to do good by themselves instead of relying on the Spirit.

As well to give a thirsty man a canteen, without first allowing it to be filled with water.

Man alone can not escape sin. Only in God is that power found.

XXX Peace

Peace is not the absence of violent conflict between men.

Peace is first of all a peace between God and man, and then virtue inside a man.

Peace is not an absence of anything, but the presence of love.

The manifest presence of love does not leave room for people to try to kill each other, but it is far more than an absence.

In that way, peace is like many good things. Right action does not lie, steal, or commit adultery, but its essence is not what it does not do, but what it does do: in the Spirit, act according to love and compassion. Virtue does not contain vice, but it is a positive thing, the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, moderation, courage, justice, wisdom, honor, purity, timelessness, balance, obedience, submission, honesty, chastity, simplicity, penitence, faith, hope, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, humility.

Violence can not create peace. Only love can.

XXXI Nothing Else

Nothing can atone for the insult of a gift, except for the love of the person who gives it.

Nothing can allow the power to do good, except letting go of grasping power as the means to do good.

Nothing can sanctify any activity, possession, or skill, except offering it up completely to God.

Nothing can bless any activity of man reaching up to God, except for the activity of God reaching down to man.

XXXII Deprivation

Too much information; not enough wisdom.

Too many subtleties of interpretation; not enough understanding of the plain and simple.

Too much amusement; not enough leisure.

Too many activities; not enough true accomplishment.

Too much on the surface; not enough in the core.

Too much acceptance; not enough love.

Too much filled-by-man; not enough filled-by-God.

Sometimes, more is less.

XXXIII The Upside-Down Kingdom

The Kingdom of Heaven knows madness in which there is infinite method. The kingdom of this world knows method in which there is infinite madness.

It is a kingdom in which walking is a luxury, and driving a car is a necessity.

It is a kingdom in which lifelong marriage is less cherished than the isolated pleasure of sex.

It is a kingdom in which peace is pursued through intimidation and violence.

It is a kingdom in which men pursue freedom and joy by doing what they were never meant to.

It is a kingdom in which labor-saving devices destroy leisure.

It is a kingdom in which an unexpected moment of rest at a busy time, is considered an annoyance.

It is a kingdom in which certainty is pursued through doubt.

It is a kingdom in which men try to elevate and build up, by separating from foundations.

It is a kingdom which ignores, ridicules, or kills the prophets God sends it.

It is a kingdom which manages to be so terribly practical that it loses what practicality is meant to achieve.

It is a kingdom in which holding power is more esteemed than being loved.

Which kingdom is really the upside-down kingdom?

XXXIV He Who Is

He is the Way.

He is Truth.

He is Tao.

He is Light.

He is Life.

He is Love.

He is the Word.

He is Mystery.

He is Beyond.

He is the Origin.

He is Energy.

HE IS.

It is in him that we walk, and live, and breathe.

It is by knowing him that we know ourselves.

It is by being united with him that we become ourselves.

XXXV Rotting

When people forsake the Spirit, they embrace rigid asceticism. Asceticism gives birth to libertinism, and libertinism gives birth to death.

When people forsake wisdom, they embrace rationalism. Rationalism gives birth to anti-intellectualism, and anti-intellectualism gives birth to chaos.

When people forsake faith in God, they embrace faith in man. Faith in man gives birth to faith in nothing, and faith in nothing gives birth to nothing.

There are ten thousand improvements on the Way. Do you know where they lead?

XXXVI Eden

In Eden, there were no temples.
There was no place where men did not come to meet God.

In Eden, there were no priests.
There was no one who did not know God intimately.

In Eden, there were no oaths.
There was no falsehood.

The words, "At that time, men began to call on the name of Yahweh," do not tell of heights to which man had risen. They tell of the depths to which man had sunk.

The Kingdom of Heaven does not know a great many things.
Rather, it knows what was unspoiled in Eden, and something yet greater.

Its members are gentle, humble, and pure.
They carry a sense of timelessness about them, and they make peace.
They repay evil with good, and rejoice when persecuted.
They walk in the Spirit.
They have overcome the world.

Eden saw the image of God.
The New Jerusalem will see sinners redeemed, who are not only God's image, but share in the divine nature.

In Eden, men saw by lights God had made.
In the New Jerusalem, there will never be a lamp, for God himself will be their light.

XXXVII Unconditional

Like is because. Love is despite.

If you begin to understand all of the reasons man has given God not to love him, you will begin to understand the nature of God's love.

Love is not desire, nor is it want, nor is it even duty.
Love is love.

When does love prove that it is love?

When you look into a man, see some virtue, something beautiful, something great he has done for you, and love him more?

No. When you look into a man, see some vice, something ugly, some great wrong he has committed against you, and love him more.

It is perhaps those who are called unloveable who are easiest to love, for love for them will truly be love.

XXXVIII True Learning

A student, beginning the study of a new language, will first ask, "What does this word mean? What is the word for that?" Translation will be difficult.

As time passes, he will learn more of the skill of translation. He will know more words, and understand not only what word stands for what word, but what idiom stands for what idiom.

Then, gradually, something else will begin to happen. He will begin to understand the new language, not in terms of the old tongue, but on its own terms. He will learn to think in the new language. He will begin to understand that which lies a step beyond words or even idioms, that which can not be translated. His words in the new tongue will begin to sound, not like a new translation, but like the language itself.

Then, even more gradually, this will be done, not with effort, but as a part of him. His speech will flow, free and unconstrained, as in his native tongue. Translation, in the end as in the beginning, will be difficult; in the beginning, as an unnatural artifice to which there is no alternative, and in the end, as an unnatural artifice which does not compare to the beauty and simplicity of the language itself.

The language has been mastered, not when the student has become skilled in translation, but when he does not need to.

The Way, the Kingdom, the Spirit, are like this.

They are not new. They are ancient. But sin has grown so great that they are not even recognized.

Of course it is possible to strive to make these clear. It is in their nature that this be done. The Way has come, that those who are blind may see.

There are many parables which tell, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like "

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Yet the parables say always, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like," never "The Kingdom of Heaven is."

It can never be fully translated.

It must be learned.

XXXIX Heaven

The blind will see God's face.

The dumb will sing praises to him.

The deaf will listen to the eternal song.

The lame will dance for joy.

Those convulsed by spasms will rest in perfect stillness.

The leprous will feel God's touch.

But all this is dwarfed by the shadow of the wonder beyond wonders.

Sinners will be made holy.

XL God

Believe and know that which can be grasped by reason.
Believe that which can only be called mystery.

So also, know God who is very personal.
So also, know God who is beyond personality.

Call him firstly and finally, "Abba," Daddy.
Rest in his bosom.

Know also that, though man is like God, God is not like man.

Embody Tao, and walk according to the Way.

The nature of God — three persons who are yet one — is vast and
incomprehensible.

He is all of the things of which I have spoken, and more, far more.

XLI Better

It is good to love so that any sacrifice considered is made.
It is better to love so that sacrifice is no longer considered.

It is good to understand through profound symbols.
It is better to come to the point of understanding from which profound symbols are made.

It is good to have faith be a part of everyday life.
It is better to have everyday life be a part of faith.

It is good to abstain from what should not be done.
It is better to do what should be done.

It is good for the Way to become a part of you.
It is better for you to become a part of the Way.

It is good to know a friend so that you understand his words.
It is better to know a friend so that you understand without words.

It is good to see an enemy, with all the evil he has done you, and love him.
It is better to love so that you do not see an enemy.

XLII Knowledge

He does not know how to swim who can recite manuals and comment on them.

He knows how to swim who can fall into water and not be harmed.

Those who have pursued knowledge have learned that knowledge is never mastered when it resides only in the head.

This character of knowledge is difficult to describe; something of it is captured in that the word 'know' tells of the union of male and female.

Knowledge proceeds from faith. The call is to believe and know the truth.

There is much to wisdom that is not captured by systematic theology, and he is wise who knows systematic theology and the rest of wisdom.

The call to know God and know yourself is a call to truly know.

The one who knows the Way, knows it in the head, the heart, the hands; it rests in his spirit.

XLIII Sanity

Sanity builds an immense boat in the middle of a desert.

Sanity offers up the son of the promise on the altar.

Sanity leaves net and boat to obey the words, "Come, follow me."

The only true sanity will let go of everything to grasp the Way.

Therefore,

He who follows the Way may have no possessions.

He who follows the Way may have no identity.

He who follows the Way may have no security.

He who follows the Way may have no good works.

He who follows the Way may have no friends.

He who follows the Way may have no family.

He who follows the Way may not have even his own life.

The Way costs everything. To follow it, one must let go of, renounce, hate all of these things, offering them up completely to God.

Then, and only then,

His possession will be the Kingdom of Heaven.

His identity will be Christ.

His security will be the providence of God.

His good works will be the good works of Christ.

His friends will begin with God.

His family will be all who follow the Way.

His life will be eternal.

Of the old things, he will expect nothing back.
That which is given back will be taken to be an unexpected gift.

Even then, he will not have them as before.
He will not have them except according to the Way.
They are not his; they belong to the Way.

XLIV Greatness

A great leader is not overbearing.

A humble man is not self-deprecating.

A man of love is not accepting.

Why is this?

It is because they follow, not the pattern below, but the pattern above.

XLV Leaving Room

A great teacher does not spell out every detail.

He leaves room open for the student to understand.

Think about why a joke is funny. It causes no laughter if it is explained.

A great teacher leaves room for his students to learn.

XLVI Voice

Wind, earthquake, and fire are but heralds of something greater.
That something greater is soft and still.

That is the voice to listen to, and the voice to imitate.

It is shouting which makes a man hoarse.

If you wish to be heard, do not raise your voice.
Speak in a gentle whisper.

XLVII Between

The Way between man and God does not leave them separate.
It draws them together.

The Way between two people does not leave them separate.
It draws them together.

The Way between man and nature does not leave them separate.
It draws them together.

Where there is separation, the Way enters the separation and creates intimacy.
Where there is discord, the Way enters the discord and creates harmony.
Where there is absence, the Way enters the absence and creates presence.

In the beginning was the Way.
And the Way was with God.
And the Way was God.

XLVIII Slowly

Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly.

It is over untold aeons that coal is turned to diamond.

The Way is not speedy, hasted, or rushed.

It is always on time, because it is never in a hurry.

It is nonsense to pray, "Lord, give me patience, and give it to me now."

God gives patience, patiently.

God draws people into the Way, according to the way of the Way.
It is ever so slowly and imperceptibly that they grow in virtue.

The time to obey is now.

The time for results to come, is God's concern, not yours.

Do not be in a hurry with God.

God is not in a hurry with you.

XLIX Prayer

Do not spend a season without food,
nor a week without drink,
nor an hour without air,
nor a second without prayer.

Prayer is not useful. Wonders come of it, but it is not useful.
Prayer makes innumerable petitions, but it is not a tool to get things.

Prayer is the step by which a man walks in the way.
Prayer is the letting go by which a man rests in the Spirit.
Prayer is the force by which God draws man into himself.

Prayer does not draw into communion with God to ask and receive.
Prayer asks and receives to draw into communion with God.

L Control

A microbe controls the biologist who studies it. It causes him to place it on a glass slide, and look at it through a microscope.

A mountain controls the climber who scales it. It causes him to flatten himself against the rock, grab on to tiny holds, and move according to their pattern.

A thermometer controls the patient who uses it. It causes him to sit still and close his mouth.

There are many other things that control, for good or evil, and the control rarely extends only to the moment.

Lust causes a man to look at a person and see only breasts and legs.

Devotion to mammon causes a man to think of "What does this cost? What am I willing to pay?", and worry for his riches.

Playing a tactical assassination game causes a man to think about how to kill stranger and friend, and jump in fear at every sound, paranoid without cease about which stranger or friend is trying to kill him.

But,

The Way causes a man to be filled with peace and innocence.

Forgiving wrongs causes a man to be undisturbed by hate and anger.

Prayer causes a man to be filled with trust and security.

Mercy causes a man to be filled with love.

A man can choose what will control him.
He cannot choose whether or not he will be controlled.

It is those who most resist control, who are most under control, and

whose master destroys.

What controls you?

LI Great

A step into the Way has been made by the person who ceases to say, "God, look how big my problems are!", and instead says, "Problems, look how big my God is!"

Greatness is in God, and in everything that comes from him.

The Way is great.
The Kingdom of Heaven is great.
Tao is great.

I do not know words that will hold the greatness of God.

Greatness comes to a man, not by conquering a city, nor by earning a million dollars, but by growing into accord with the Way.

To enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, become as a little child.

LII Accordance

A true climber will climb according to the shape of the mountain.

A true wayfarer does not stay in hotels, ride tour buses, and buy shiny trinkets; he steps into the culture, meeting its people, listening to its music, tasting its food.

A true architect will not take a medieval cloister and attach to it an addition that belongs in a shiny new mall. Rather, he will build new buildings that fit the pattern of the landscape, and new additions which fit the pattern of the old.

Being will do, but it is a doing which is in accordance with being and does not strive.

A man who walks in the Way will not strive with what around him is not evil.

One does not write poetry to defy the rules of a language; it is rather to write in accordance with the nature of the tongue.

A poet may change the structure of his language, but he does so only according to its spirit.

An intercessor can change the will of God, but he will do so only in accordance with what God wills.

God is eternal, constant, timeless, unchanging.
In time, he has constantly changed his will, that there may remain inviolate his unchanging love.

Therefore, to change the will of God is in accordance with God's will.

Such change will be the nature of change made by a man who walks in the Way; he will never try to make changes which are haphazard or random. If that is how it is changed, even more accordance is how it is not changed.

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He who walks in the way will know accordance.

LIII Freedom

Freedom of motion is the freedom of a skeleton intact. It is a freedom that allows a person to run, and jump, and dance.

What comes of breaking a bone is freedom to bend a limb in ways it was never meant to move, freedom to have sherds of bone tear at living flesh, freedom to writhe in agony, and freedom to die.

That is not freedom.

It is only in accordance with the Way that there is freedom.

It hurts to kick against the goads.

For freedom, all who walk in the Way have been set free. Freedom is the nature of the Way.

LIV Return

To the faithful, God shows himself faithful.

To the forgiving, God shows himself forgiving.

To the kind, God shows himself kind.

To the wise, God shows himself wise.

To the patient, God shows himself patient.

To the pure, God shows himself pure.

To the loving, God shows himself loving.

When the Spirit places virtue in a man, he is ready to see that virtue in God.

Seek what is right, and it will be accorded to you.

LV Title

"Master!"

"Do not call me master. There is but one."

"Surely you know that you are a sage."

"He is a fool who considers himself wise."

"Teacher?"

"Do not think of me as teacher, either."

"But I see in you such wisdom, such gentleness, such peace. If I may not call you master, nor sage, nor even teacher, then how may I call you?"

"Brother."

LVI Growth

A wise man learns from the words of the simple.

Only a man of little learning says, "I have nothing to learn from you."

In this, wisdom reflects the Way.

Growth is not like an empty room being filled with boxes, where each thing placed inside leaves less and less room for more.

It is rather like dominoes being placed on a table; the more are set in place, the more possibilities are created to add more.

The more a man grows in the Way, the more he is able to grow.

LVII Measure

Playing with one sniffly child and lecturing to one thousand eminent scholars,

Blessing a meal and commanding a mountain to be thrown into the sea,

Praying for a minute and praying for an hour,

Giving up a shoe and giving up life,

These things are not different in the Way; they are different only in men's minds.

One who walks in the Way will not care for numbers, or fame, or so-called greatness. They come, and he will not be puffed up; they leave, and he will not be distraught.

There are many people who have faith to move mountains. Then why is it not seen? Because the Spirit does not lead them to perform parlor tricks to obviate the need for faith.

The Way is silent as light; ears filled with the din and noise of the world must grow silent to hear it. It performs great wonders, but they go unnoticed.

The Way has its own measure.

LVIII Behold

Behold the candle. It gives itself up, that others may have light.

Behold water. It does not resist one who pushes against it, yet it changes the shape of mountains.

Behold light. Men see it, and by it see all else.

Behold. Even the pebbles beneath your feet tell of God, of the Way, of the man who walks in the Way. They bear its imprint.

LIX Unity

When two believers come together, the power of their prayer increases tenfold.

A hand or a foot on its own is dead. The sum of such hands, feet, eyes, and other members is still dead. That it is larger and more complete means only that its stench will be greater.

Yet there is the breath of life, animating the body of every man alive.

Life is in each part, and each part is united with the whole.

The body is controlled by the head, which loves it, and the breath of life animates each member.

Christ is the head.
The Spirit is the breath of life.
All who follow the Way are the members.
There is infinite variety among them.

Why are they different?
Because they are members of one body.

The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

LX Increase

The step from boyhood to manhood has been made, not by the one who looks into the mirror and finds the first excuse to shave, but by the one who looks into the mirror and finds the first excuse not to shave.

Dignity is found, not by the one who tears others down, but by the one who builds others up.

Good works shine before men, not when they are paraded, but when they are done in secret.

Ceasing to make God the image of man comes, not by making God the impersonal image of not-man, but by letting God be God:

HE WHO IS,
mysterious and incomprehensible,
unlike a man,
far beyond anything that can be captured by personality,
and therefore more personal than any man.

He who loves God will have all the more love for his neighbor, and he who loves his neighbor will have all the more love for God.

The more love and joy are shared, the more they abound.

The more prayer, worship, and Communion abound, the more they become special, sacred.

LXI Sight

One who sees will look at a gift and see also the love which gave it.

One who sees will look at a face and see also a person.

One who sees will look at artwork and see also an artist.

One who sees will look at the physical and see also the spiritual.

One who hears will listen to the words of a friend, and hear both what is said and what is not said.

One who hears will listen to a question, and hear also the thoughts, the perspective, and the knowledge from which it came.

One who feels will sense the presence of God's love in the dryness of the absconditus deus.

The Way is a way of reality and substance.

An artist who creates a masterpiece will care for the smallest detail, but the compilation of technical details never forms art. One who abides in the way will never despise accident, for he knows that a forest is never seen by chopping down trees; yet neither will he look at accident and fail to see substance.

Look at the surface and see into the depths.

LXII Practicality

Nobody who enjoys wine takes some grape juice, throws some yeast in, and hopes that it will be ready in ten minutes.

Instead, it is carefully prepared, and stored away to rest. Years will pass before it graces a table as fine wine.

This is how a wise man is like the master of a storehouse, producing from it treasures old and new.

In studying the Scriptures, looking into the wonders of Creation, listening to the voice of the Spirit, every morcel of wisdom will be carefully stored away, allowed to ferment for minutes or years until the right moment comes.

Even in use, the thought of utility does not come. Like all else in the way, wisdom is pursued, not for the sake of using, but for the sake of having.

The first lesson in practicality is to let go of it.

LXIII Gifts

To come into being is not something one causes; it is given by God.
The forgiveness of sins is not something one earns; it is given by God.
Obedience is not something one accomplishes; it is given by God.

The Father created man in his image.
The Son was crucified that men's sins might be forgiven.
The Spirit is poured out that men be given the power to obey.

Do not do; obey.

LXIV Intimacy

It is only to a stranger that respect is shown by formality and distance. To a good friend, respect is shown by a love that has no need of such things.

It is only to a foreign student of language that thoughts of grammatical rules occur. To a native speaker, the language flows.

It is only to someone outside that obedience looks like willpower and rules. To someone inside, obedience flows from the motion of the Spirit and its fruit, virtue.

The Way is a way of closeness, intimacy. It knows the great order which lets go of the silliness of little order. It has no need for formal structure, ceremonial laws, and other such trivia.

It is in this Way that men greet each other with a warm embrace and address the Creator of Heaven and earth as "Daddy." It is in this Way that men grow into all that is good and pure.

It is in this Way that men become of one spirit with HE WHO IS.

No distance.

LXV Invisible

Good acting does not cause people to think about what good acting there is. It allows them to see into the characters.

Good clothing does not cause people to think about what good clothing they are wearing. It allows them to move without discomfort or restraint.

Good government does not cause people to think about what good government they have. It allows them to go about their affairs without interference.

A good window does not cause people to think about what a good window it is. It allows them to see clearly what is on the other side.

A good waiter does not cause people to think about what a good waiter he is. He allows them to enjoy their meal.

A good temperature does not cause people to think about what a good temperature the air has. It allows them to live undisturbed by heat or cold.

A good preacher does not cause people to think about what a good preacher they have. He allows them to think about what a great God they have.

The Way is as silent as light. It is gentle, soft, and unobtrusive. One who walks in the Way does not seek his own glory.

It is from the Way that issued the words,

"My precious, precious child,
I love you and will never leave you.
When you see but one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you."

LXVI Mercy

When man embraced evil, he was expelled from Paradise and bestowed a curse. Accursed, that time would see him wither and die.

Yet even in that curse, was an act of great mercy.

The true curse would have been an imperishable body, filled with eternal youth.

A body forever young, as spirit and soul rot in vice.

Time would see bitterness and suffering grow without end.

Worse than a curse to die away from the Way, is a curse to live apart from the Way.

But Mercy did not do that.

Mercy gave another gift, a gift greater still.

In the Way, though men waste away outwardly, inwardly they are renewed day by day.

The moment of death is transformed into a birth into life.

After death comes the resurrection; spirit, soul, and body filled with a life even greater than that of Eden. Men will become the sons of God, sharing in the divine nature.

HE WHO IS took death beyond death, and transformed it into life beyond life.

LXVII Not-Doing

Swallowing a pill is a difficult thing to learn.
It is difficult because a child will strive to do it, and it is something which can only be not-done.

Even discipline follows the path of not-doing.
Discipline does not force a square peg into a round hole; it slides a round peg into a round hole.

Six days of work were not evil, but it was one day of rest that was holy.
Rest surpasses work because it was before.

Before the worlds began, before even the creation of time, the Father is in glory with the Son.

In that glory is absolute rest.
In that glory will be the rest of all who follow the Way.

From being issues doing; from being and not-doing issue doing.

This is the order of the Way.

Not-doing leaves room open for God to fill.
Faith is a rest-in-God; it is a state of being and not-doing.
It is from faith that actions proceed.
Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

To those who not-do, abide, receive, believe, life is given.
The Son rests in the Father's bosom, and the Spirit flows between them.
In this nature, rest, glory, and love, will they share.

Be and become.
Not-do and rest in God.
Let love flow into action.

LVXIII Honesty

To walk in the Way is to become honest.

Honesty certainly does not lie on an income tax form, but there is something more. To become honest is to become unmasked.

A mask is an armored shell.
It protects from feeling pain.
It protects from being healed.
It protects from growing and becoming real.

To remove it is to become naked and vulnerable.
It is to allow people to look into your eyes.

The pain of removing it is the pain of being healed.
It is like swallowing pride.
To swallow pride tastes foul, not because of the nature of humility, but because it is the taste of the foul and bitter nature of the pride that is swallowed.

After the mask is removed, there is a warmth and freedom like the freshness that comes after tears.

There is substance and reality in the image of God.
There is substance and reality in the Way.

There is too much substance and reality to fit inside of a mask.

LXIX Interaction

The Kingdom of Heaven does not know interactions based on power: "I will compel you to do this."

Neither does it know interactions of economic character: "I will do this for you if you do this for me."

Instead, its interactions are based on love, freely and lavishly bestowed.

This lavishness is embedded in the words, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

He who uses power to compel things from other people, or economic exchanges to bargain things from them, does so for a reason. He does so in order to gain what is good, desirable, and beneficial for himself.

The question, "Why does he want that?" is a misplaced question. He does not wish to benefit himself as a means to something else. He loves himself.

This is how you should love yourself.
This is how you should love your neighbor.

Love is not the son of want.

Love is the foundation of the Kingdom of Heaven.
Love is the air which its citizens breathe and through which they see.
Prayer is love in communion with God.
Kindness is love wearing work gloves.

It is freely received and freely given, poured out without measure.
It is shared, and increases all the more.
It is generous, like the woman who poured pure nard over Jesus's feet.
It is a cascade of flowing water, which cleanses what is soiled and heals what is wounded.
It is full of joy: finding something good, it seeks to share

It is full of joy; finding something good, it seeks to share.

It is forgiving; it looks upon the person who has wronged it, and says, "I love you."

Love God.

Love the brothers and sisters, all mankind, yourself.

Love the stars, the waters, the animals, the trees.

All that is written about the nature of godly living is an explanation of love.

Heaven, the hope of the ages, is the final hope of being united and immersed in love with God and the saints.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a kingdom of love.

LXX Being

The rock, the foundation, the origin of all.
A state of being eternal and changeless.

All glory, all holiness, all authority, all wisdom.

Beyond all measure.

Infinite stillness.

Life beyond life.

Light without any darkness.

One.

LXXI Dim

Thomas Aquinas wrote many books; among numerous others, he wrote a Summa Theologica of encyclopaedic volume.

Late in life, he had a vision.
In this vision, Christ spoke to him from the Cross.

The vision profoundly affected him.
He became silent, and ceased to write.

And all his great and wonderful writings?

He declared them to be straw.

LXXII End

A journey is a long voyage that leads home.

Childlike faith meets testing and fire and new experiences, that it may become childlike faith.

Depths of theology, profound insight, and great learning, lead to hearing the simple words, "Jesus loves you," and trusting them.

The Alpha is the Omega; the First is the Last; the Beginning is the End.

All good things come from God through the Way;
all good things return to God through the Way.

LXXIII Around

To worship is to take a little step into Heaven.

A candle which is lit, glows. It sheds light and warmth on all that is around it.

One who walks in the Way will carry little pieces of Heaven with him. He will bear with him a sense of timelessness, peace, joy, and love.

Bringing Heaven down to earth is very important. It is to be not-done and done.

A relief worker, returning to a war zone, said, "I'm going back to Hell, to plant some flowers."

LXXIV Maps

All mapmakers face a difficult task.
They have a flat surface with which to represent a surface which is not flat.

Many maps of the world look very different.
Some have a grid which preserves latitude and longitude.
Some preserve the area of each part.
Some preserve something else.

Someone who knows only flat surfaces may be confused.
He may think that each mapmaker has produced a map of his own perspective.
He may imagine something vague and indefinite, tell a parable of blind men feeling an elephant, and call it great arrogance when mapmakers examine something which looks like a map and declare it unacceptable.
This is not a mark of openmindedness, nor of nuanced understanding, nor of humility.
It is a mark of ignorance.

The truth is not something indefinite and unreal.
The truth is very definite and real.
Maps vary because they represent something too definite and too real to fully capture with a flat surface.
A mapmaker never alters geographical features which he doesn't like or which do not seem to make sense to him.
Mapmaking is an activity of absolute fidelity.

LXXV Within

A parent has properly disciplined a child, not when he behaves properly upon sight of an authority figure, but when he behaves properly regardless.

Protection from drunkenness does not come from restricted access to alcohol, but from learning to know and respect one's limits.

Order is not externally imposed; it comes from what is placed within.

Training does not give men the power to conform reality to their nature, but to conform their nature to the ultimate reality.
Fighting the evil without never comes without fighting the evil within.

To walk in the Way is always to look inwards.

LXXVI Bread

There is no need to worry about what to eat; God feeds even the birds of the air, and we are worth more than many sparrows. He knows our needs and desires before we begin to pray. He desires to give even more than we desire to receive.

It would seem that a man of faith would believe in this, and not annoy God by interrupting him with requests for bread.

Yet the model for prayer asks for the coming of the Kingdom, the forgiveness of sins — and, day by day, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Why is this?

It is because man does not live by bread alone.

God wishes that man be nourished in body and spirit.
As bread sustains the body, prayer and communion sustain the spirit.

Therefore, we are invited to share his presence in the smallest detail of our lives.

It is by prayer that we receive each meal as a gift wrapped in love.
It is by prayer that a blade of grass can draw us into the heart of the Father.

Pray continually.

LXXVII Meta

Cognition is made complete by metacognition.

Cognition sees that wealth will buy an abundance of possessions.
Metacognition sees that life does not consist of an abundance of possessions.

Cognition finds an edge in the rat race.
Metacognition climbs out of the rat race.

Cognition finds a way to admire the Emperor's new clothes.
Metacognition asks, "Why is that man naked?"

Cognition gives the greatest volume of food to the highest number of beggars in the least amount of time.
Metacognition shares a human touch with at least one beggar.

Cognition asks, "What does this say?"
Metacognition asks, "Is this orthodox?"

Cognition asks, "How can I do this?"
Metacognition asks, "Is this right?"

Cognition thinks.
Metacognition thinks about how cognition thinks.

Cognition is necessary, but it is even more vital to take a step back and restore things to sanity.

LXXVIII Undisturbed

LXXIX Life

Of what is to be known, I know little.
Of what I know, I can explain little.

These words tell of the Way by which a man may find life.
Come to the Way of which these words tell.
These words are imperfect; the Way is perfect.
Do not come to these words to find life.
If you do, they will kill you.

LXXX Love

Love is the foundation and cornerstone of Law and virtue.
Love is the character of a saint.

The Law, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, care for the poor, worship God alone", is an extended commentary on the actions which love dictates.

Virtue is only another name for the different sides of love. Patience and forgiveness are the nature of love when it is wronged.

And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love.
The greatest of these is love.

LXXXI Beyond

Beyond doing, there is being.

Beyond time, there is eternity.

Beyond mortality, there is immortality.

Beyond knowledge, there is faith.

Beyond justice, there is mercy.

Beyond happy thoughts, there is joy.

Beyond communication, there is communion.

Beyond petition, there is prayer.

Beyond work, there is rest.

Beyond right action, there is virtue.

Beyond virtue, there is the Holy Spirit.

Beyond appreciation, there is awe.

Beyond sound, there is stillness.

Beyond stillness, there is the eternal song.

Beyond law, there is grace.

Beyond even wisdom, there is love.

Beyond all else, HE IS.

A Treatise on Touch

Touch is something deep which is lightly explored in my culture. I wish to explore it here.

It is characteristic of Western thought, probably in a tradition reaching back to the Greeks, to pay a strong degree of attention to sight when studying perception, to the exclusion of the other five senses. (The sixth sense is not ESP; it is the internal, kinesthetic sense, commonly called the sense of balance, which enables us to tell up from down; when this sense fails (after, for example, spinning around or drinking too much alcohol), we feel dizzy and become disoriented as to how to keep from falling over.) For example, in the Myers [Psychology](#) text, the vast majority of the space devoted to perception studied how we extract information from what our eyes report, so much so that ESP (which the authors did not believe in) received more attention and space than hearing, smell, taste, touch, and balance put together!

(I might incidentally comment that psychology, for all but the most recent times, has been explored as a part of philosophy, and in some ways has suffered more than any of the hard sciences from the separation. A lot of what goes on in psychology is truly bad philosophy, and would improve greatly if its theories were grounded in good philosophy. Behaviorism is a prime example of this.)

In speaking about touch, I intend not to generally talk about sex, for a couple of reasons. The first is that sexual technique, along with massage, is perhaps the one (two) narrow and restricted area of touch

that people are taking seriously; manuals on sexual technique exist in droves. And I might incidentally mention that I do not know sexual technique — that will come if and when I get married. But even to if I were expert in sexual technique, and were writing to an audience of married couples, I do not think that I would write about sex. It is not because I despise sex — I believe it right and good that an entire book of Scripture, the Greatest of Songs, is pure erotica. It is for another reason, a reason that lies deeper.

The conception of romance and relationships in American thought is not nearly so universal as might be thought by someone who is from our time. At this point, I might shock the reader to drawing attention to how, in a great many cultures across much of time, people were happily married, sexually satisfied, and enjoying life, without ever having occur to them what modern America understands by romance. Romantic love was one of the great discoveries of the middle ages — a genuine discovery, because it was not really known.

If we exclude the supernatural love of agape, and the love-beyond-love of worship that is due to Jesus Christ, then we are left with four natural loves between human beings. There is the love of all other human beings, which applies even to strangers and even to enemies. Then there is the love of friends — a friend is both to be loved as a human being, and in a special way as a friend. There is next the love of one's own family — family are to be loved as human beings, in a special way as friends, and in a more special way as family. Finally, there is the last love, a love which is romantic and sexual. A spouse is to be loved as a human being, in a special way as a friend, in a more special way as kin, and finally in the most special way as a lover, a lifelong partner and mate.

This fourth love does not stand on its own, and was never meant to in the first place. If we look in the Song of Songs, we see that the lover calls the beloved a woman, that the two are addressed as friends, and in particular he calls her his sister and then his bride. Even in a book all about sex, we see not sexual love in isolation, but sexual love as the crowning jewel, united with the other loves to make a rich and full marriage.

Romance, its delightful intoxication, is a wonderful and God-given thing. But it is transient, and when it wanes, there is (or at least should be) something far deeper than sex alone; that deeper, companionate love is what God intended as the *basis* for marriage, as thrilling as romance may be.

God created us as his image, and the particular way he in his goodness chose to do so was as a unity of spirit, soul, and body. The spirit, with its ability to love, is the greatest part, and love is greater than even rationality. But it is not the only part, or the only good. And even the word 'part' is deceptive; it suggests a collection of compartmental modules, when in fact there is a unity.

And in that unity, there is a spiritual way of drawing near and embracing by love; this is what Aquinas (for example) described as the will, seen not in the modern Nietzschean sense of iron determination, but rather as a recognition of good that inclines towards something. And in the spirit-soul-body unity by which God has blessed us, there is a physical way of drawing near and embracing by love. It is called touch.

If nothing else, by analogy at least, we should be able to look and see that among human loves there is a highest and superlative form of love in marriage, and yet the romantic love does not and should not stand in isolation, then sexual touch may be the highest, holiest, and most exciting form of touch by which God has blessed our race, but it probably wasn't created in isolation to be the only touch — even in marriage.

And if I may push the analogy even further, I would say that that touch is absolutely wonderful while it lasts, but it is not the fundamental or foundational touch of physical love, even in marriage. Something else is.

What I am saying here may be more transparently obvious to women than to men. Women tend to feel more the need for physical affection, men the sexual drive. And many men, especially those who grew up in households with little physical affection, may not only not see the need for physical affection, but be uncomfortable with it. Even then, I would ask you to bear with me.

Our society has inherited the disastrous wake of Victorianism, and is a post-Victorian culture; I will include here an appendix an essay which I wrote on Victorianism as the death knell to sexual purity in Western culture. Apart from referring the reader to that, I will simply say that we've inherited a mess.

The essay:

Victorianism, *n.* The death knell to sexual purity in Western culture.

Victorianism held sexual purity to be extremely important. All well and good, but it did not stop there. Victorianism believed sexual purity to be best approached via a Pharisaic guard around the Law. And, like every other guard around the Law, it did a tremendous amount of damage to numerous other things before destroying the very object it was meant to preserve.

Touch and community are vital elements of human health. This is witnessed in Scriptures that tell of John reclining in Jesus's bosom and in the hands quickly extended to pets, one of the few situations where our society will allow an innocent touch to be an innocent touch. An infant who is not held will wither and die, and psychologists have a bluntly accurate term for the failure of parents to hold and cuddle their children a great deal: abuse. And of course the special kind of community that exists between a husband and wife is given a special kind of touch.

Victorianism looked at sex and did not quite see something which is fundamentally good within a certain context. It saw something which was essentially evil (but tolerable at best within a certain context). And, in progressively widening circles, encompassing different forms of touch further and further from what is necessarily foreplay, saw that there exists at least some possibility for that touch to be sexual (at least from the perspective of the younger monk), and placed on each one a label of "This is dirty. Avoid it." Word such as "Greet one another with a kiss of love." cease to be acknowledged as a divine command which was given for

human good, and instead look like, um, an odd cultural thing which, um, shows, um, um, um...

The aim, it appears, was to end up with nothing that was sexual. The result was to make everything sexual, and create a major unanticipated problem.

God created people with certain needs, and when those needs are not met, Satan comes in with counterfeit substitutes. These things are hard enough to resist to someone whose needs are met with the genuine article; when there is an immense sucking vacuum coming from unmet needs, pushing away the counterfeits acquires a difficulty which is unbelievable. A little girl who is deprived of a father's hugs and kisses will grow into a young woman who has a tremendously difficult time avoiding sexual promiscuity, unsuccessfully searching in a series of abusive boyfriends' embraces for enough love to fill the emptiness inside.

Fortunately, most of Victorianism did not quite leave a stain that dark and deep, but there is still a major problem with a culture that refuses to wholeheartedly say, "It's OK. You may enjoy an innocent touch as an innocent touch." There is still a failure to meet a need that God created people to have filled, and still an uphill battle to fight off the counterfeit substitutes.

In this century, Victorianism has crumbled, but, like every other evil, it fails to crumble in the ways that a sane person would want it to crumble. What disappeared was not the prohibition on friendly touch, but the belief that sexual sin is a deadly poison which should be fought tooth and nail. What appeared and took the place meant to be filled by innocent touch is something which is not innocent. Thus, Victorianism did a perfect job of making room and clearing the way for a great deal of lewdness.

Current Western culture is saturated with sexual sin, not despite, but because of the fact that it is the continuation of Victorian culture.

(There is one note I should like to mention before I forget. The careful reader may ask why I am undertaking to *write* about touch and have other people read it; the practice does not involve touch as thinking about logical reasoning involves reasoning. My response is threefold: (1) You have a point to an extent; reading or writing this is not an act of touch. (2) There is a place for thinking and theory in a way that is never intended to be complete or self-sufficient. Christian theology is not an insular system of ideas, but an integrated part of the walk of faith in which one loves and is loved by God. (3) Theory strengthens and furthers practice, as physics furthers engineering. The invention of devices is far older than any empirically accurate knowledge of physics — but that doesn't mean that physics didn't add a whole new dimension to engineering.)

Having talked about the philosophy and theology surrounding touch, the reader may well be wondering if I am going to say anything about touch itself. And the answer is 'yes'. What I have been doing, or attempting to do at any rate, is to establish a framework that will make it possible to do so.

The first thing I will say about touch (perhaps belaboring the obvious, but remember George Orwell's words, "It is the first duty of intellectuals to state the obvious."), is that it is an immediate, proximal mode of perception. Sight, hearing, and smell, all work at a distance; touch only works when you are right with someone or something. This has rich potential for analogy — for instance, as you can only feel something if you draw near to it, so also there are ways in which you can only know something if you love it.

The second thing is that it is a baby's primary sense — not sight. Only later does sight come to dominate. The baby is continually engaged in a tactile exploration of the world. He puts things into his mouth, not because plastic, cloth, wood, and stone taste wonderful, but because the tongue is *the* most sensitive part of the human body to touch — more sensitive than even the fingertips. And, long before the words "I love you." have any meaning to a child, touch constitutes the baby's awareness of his mother's love. He is enfolded by her body for nine months as she carries him, and when born he is held, and hugged and kissed. He is fed,

not in some abstract way, but by nursing — a very special and intimate touch. It is presumably not coincidental that the focus of a baby's eyes is not twenty feet to infinity as with an adult, but eighteen inches — the distance between a mother's breast and her nose.

The third thing I would like to say is that, thought touching is a surface to surface contact, it is anything but superficial. This is why doctors touch their patients when they want to know what is happening inside the body. In a few cases, exploratory surgery is necessary — they need to cut a person open to find out what's inside. But most of the time, they can probe and find out what's happening just by touching.

And, medicine aside, touch can communicate a wealth of information about a person's emotions. Muscle tension, skin temperature, sweat, rate and quality of pulse — all have a story to tell about what's going on inside a person's heart.

The fourth thing is that touch is deep. I am not sure exactly how to convey this, as I am trying to express something greater than what I myself know. But, in the absence of perfect knowledge, I'll give an analogy.

I have some training in martial arts. I have just enough knowledge to begin to appreciate the wealth of knowledge I do not know. I have seen the basics of pressure points, joint locks, and hip throws. I have seen enough to recognize that there are subtleties which elude me, and rich veins to explore. If I were to devote the rest of my life to the study of martial arts, I would not lament with Alexander, "Alas! I have no more worlds to conquer." There would always be more there, always be more to explore.

For two specific kinds of touch — sex, and massage — there has been considerable exploration, and (though everybody can do them at least minimally) there are great books from which most people have a lot to learn.

Given what I know about God and his creation, I would be very surprised to learn that the rest of touch is shallow — that you learn a certain amount, and then there is nothing left to explore.

certain amount, and then there is nothing left to explore.

The fifth thing, in relation to the fourth, consists of a couple of analogies concerning what we may find in exploring touch. I believe that we find something like a language, but a language, a communication, that is alogical and non-symbolic. (This may, indeed, be a lot like one of the things feminism is searching for. I'll have to run this by a women's studies professor.) I believe it also to be like art and music — in an act that is creative, and an expression of beauty. I believe it also to be qualitative rather than quantitative by nature — returning to the theme of an alogical language, this would communicate not the rule-based formal manipulations computers are capable of, but the qualities, the experience, of which computers are incapable.

I would now like to engage in a thought experiment. I will ask you to imagine three times that you put your hand into a dark hole in a wall, through which you cannot see.

The first time, you almost hurt yourself touching a sharp corner. As you feel inside, you recognize the shape of a box — a hard metal box. It is cold, unresponsive, and unyielding; it does not acknowledge your presence.

The second time, you meet no resistance; you have plunged your hand into a bucket of water. The water is too responsive and too yielding; there is nothing there *but* an acknowledgement of your presence. It has no shape but the shape of your hand; there is nothing there. So you pull your hand out and dry it off.

The third time you stick your hand in, you meet something that is yielding and yet solid, something that responds not out of what your hand is alone, but what it is. You meet something that is warm. You touch another human hand. As you touch, it wraps around, clasps, embraces your hand. You have finally found something very good.

Human touch is, or at least should be, like the third experience. It is not just a moderate between two extremes; it is something more. It is warm.

In the Vietnam War, the Viet Cong understood very well that warfare is won, not by destroying soldiers, but by destroying soldiers' morale. That is why they had a very poor kill ratio, and were fighting a modern war against an enemy that vastly outranked them in resources, and still were never defeated.

One of the many weapons in that arsenal was called a 'ballbuster'. It was a non-lethal anti-personnel land mine with a three foot blast radius.

Of the U.S. soldiers hit by such mines, there were some that still had male hormones produced by their bodies afterwards. And investigations showed that they were the men who had been involved in real, intimate relationships beforehand. Not, presumably, the common soldier's visit to the brothel, or the rape of local women that has been a part of warfare since time immemorial. That is a dismal rule whose exceptions are few and far between. But real relationships. Those men still had testosterone.

The most sexual organ in the human body is not the genital organ, nor even the gonads. It is the brain.

Sex goes much further than just a physical act. It unites souls. It was created as such.

And again seeing as God has created us as spirit-soul-body unities, isn't there every reason to believe that this is not isolated to sex? That when we touch other people, it need not be only with our bodies, but can also be with spirit and soul?

Madeleine L'Engle wrote of kything in [A Wind in the Door](#). In one way, it is a colorful and fantastic picture of prayer, that shows its beauty. In another way, it seems to capture, not so much the literal fact, as the *way* of the best touching.

Individualism is a very impoverished notion of personhood, and touch is not a thin bridge between two essential islands, nor an act that one person (subject) does to another person as to an inanimate object; the latter, if a picture of any kind of "touch", is a picture of rape.

Aquinas viewed teacher teaching and learner learning as part of the same activity; another helpful notion is that of intersubjectivity — it is not between isolated subject and object, but between two connected subjects. This doesn't mean that there is uniformity and absolute symmetry; nursing mother and child cannot simply swap places. But it is intersubjective.

This may be an interesting way to view what constitutes the difference between making love and rape. Physically, the two are not very different — they have much, much more in common than making love and nursing a baby do, or than rape and murder (or even two kinds of murder) do. But spiritually, they are leagues apart. Making love is between two connected subjects, and rape is done by a subject to an object; spiritually and philosophically, these are two very different things. And it might be that the way rape crushes a woman's psyche has much less to do with the physical event than the fact that a subject, an 'I', is reduced to an object, an 'it'.

(Of course, another aspect is that the greatest evils come from twisting the greatest goods; Hitler could not have done one tenth the damage he did unless he were the legendary leader that he was.)

Something like this is related to why the mystics refer to God as 'I' without blaspheming. If a person *must* be understood as a subject, as an 'I' and not an 'it', how much moreso the Lord God of Hosts?

I would like to now talk about different forms of touch. I will not attempt here to begin in a logical order, first things first, because I am taken by a whimsy, a quality. I will begin talking about one of my favorite touches, tickling.

In a lighthearted mood, I coined the following beatitude:

Blessed are the ticklish,
For the touch of a friend shall fill them with laughter.

Tickling is light. It is a tactile tease. It is carefree, spontaneous, and whimsical. It is trusting. It is the least solemn of all the touches; it is serious and intimate, but in a completely silly and nonsensical way — thank God! Its very seriousness and intimacy is ruined if it becomes heavy and what most people think of when they hear 'serious'. There is something special about it, something so special that both tickling and other things are ruined if, for example, someone tickles a person whose friend just died. Tickling can greatly enrich and deepen our understanding of what it means to be serious, if we let it.

There is an infinite difference between a friend's playful teasing, and a cynic's sneering. Neither is solemn or formal, but they lack solemnity and formality for very opposite reasons, just as a baby and an old man can lack hair, not because they are of the same age, but because they lie at opposite extremes.

A friend's teasing is infinitely respectful. It is a respect which lies far too deep to confine to being somber, a respect which must bubble up into exuberance and say, "I take you far too seriously not to take you lightly."

At this point, I will treat a certain aspect that may run the risk of offending feminists; I will ask for a suspended judgment until at least I have made my case. I am going to say this: sometimes 'no' means 'no', and sometimes 'no' means 'yes'.

I am not here justifying the claim that "Her lips said 'no', but her eyes said 'yes'." That is stated chiefly by men who lack the honesty to admit, perhaps even to themselves, that "Her lips and her eyes said 'no', but my lust said 'yes'." I will damn that alongside *any* feminist.

What I am rather saying is that tickling exemplifies a pattern, a pattern of love and community that does not reduce to words. Consent is an important principle, but using explicit verbal words to inquire is a last resort, usually only necessary when two people do not know each other very well. And there is something deep enough about consent that it, and furthermore its recognition, are *entirely* compatible with saying 'no' or 'stop', or offering physical resistance.

As a paradigm example of this, I would point to a parent chasing around a little child in a back yard. The child is trying to escape, and in a sense doesn't want to be caught. But in a deeper sense, he *does* want to be caught. (I at this point remember one woman, who, disappointed that I had stopped tickling her when she pushed my hands away, told me, "I am blocking you because I want you to push past.") This is why it is good for a child's psyche to be chased by a parent, even (especially) if he is caught, and it is very bad for a woman's psyche to be chased by a rapist, even if she gets away.

Chasing, or tickling, is or at least should be an intersubjective act of love. What fundamentally distinguishes it from rape is not so much what lies on the surface as that deep below the surface, the one is done between two subjects, while the other is done by a subject to an object. The deep connection between two subjects is what enables 'no' to mean 'yes'.

And tickling is not so much for the tickling as for the other person. It is not an act in isolation; it is a part of love. This provides another distinction between tickling and rape. The rapist does not truly desire the woman, even as just an object, an 'it'; he desires the rape, the action, an action that exists self-sufficient, by itself and without any need of a larger context. Perhaps the rapist is to be greatly pitied alongside the victim; it does not cause consciously realized unending torment as being raped does, but it is a single act within oneself, an act of masturbation that involves an unfortunate woman, rather than an intersubjective act of love that transcends self. Even if rape did not violate a woman's personhood and were not morally wrong, it would still be greatly be desired for his own sake that a rapist could let go of rape and give-receive a real hug.

The next touch I'll mention is holding hands.

Someone once said, "If all other arguments failed, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence." The hand is one of the most beautiful parts of the body; it contains the glory of the whole body in miniature. If you haven't done so already, at least once in your life, I would encourage you to *notice* hands, to look at someone's hands (yours or somebody else's) as you would an Impressionist nude. I don't think it

is quite an accident that Michelangelo's *David*, the single greatest male nude in Western sculpture, has hands that are just a little bit *larger* than they are proportioned in real life. The *David's* hands are exquisite.

The hand is in a sense the most useful tool we have. It is amazing, strong, dextrous, sensitive, and versatile. It is uniquely adapted both to manipulate, and to feel and explore. And so it is not a surprise that one of the touches God has given us is holding hands — an equal touch between two sensitive areas of the body, which can last.

Our culture understands holding hands primarily in a romantic context — which it certainly can be, but need not be. At least a hint of this is seen in that parents hold little children's hands. I still hold my twelve year old brothers' hands, and I am happy to do so.

In many Islamic nations, men hold hands in public. This is not a sexual act (and, unfortunately, is not extended to women — even wives), and the fact that it may take some effort to really realize by many of us is reflective of a fundamental problem in how many of us view sex and morality.

Dorothy Sayers, in her essay, "The other six deadly sins," points out that a man could be a liar and a drunkard, greedy and avaricious, wrathful, prideful, and dead to every noble instinct, and still we would not call him immoral, because we reserve the term 'immorality' to talk about — well, you know, *immorality*. Thus a term that was meant to cover the whole range of vices is reduced to referring to just one, because we are too embarrassed to call that one vice by its name, lust. Lust is *one* of the seven deadly sins; it is not *the* deadly sin. And the Church has always recognized that the cold-hearted sins, the sins of mind and spirit such as pride and greed, are infinitely worse than the disreputable sins of the flesh, such as lust. In the [Inferno](#), the incontinent occupy the very least and outermost circle of Hell proper; it is only far deeper that we find sins like pride, the sin by which the highest and holiest being in all creation became the Satan, the Accuser who stands before God accusing the saints day and night.

(One thing that I beg of you here — do not flatter me by saying that I

am original in claiming this; do not credit me with this innovation. Christianity has taught this for ages; it has just become a bit obscured recently.)

Homosexual lust, in this scheme, is in a sense worse than heterosexual lust; it is a perversion of nature in a way that even adultery is not. But it is not the vice beyond all vices, and it does not compare even to pride. And it is really paid a far-reaching and very undue tribute when it is held in the fear that it is, in how (for example) many men in our culture fear touching each other. All sin is serious, but in most cases the possibility of homosexual lust is not that serious of a threat that men need to be afraid of each other. Therefore, the Islamic world has it right in the level of touchiness and contact that it has between men.

Holding hands is a touch that can be deepened by pressure, variations in pressure, and responsiveness; one of the most common and basic letters in this alphabet is in giving a squeeze or answering a squeeze with another squeeze; it is a theme which has infinite variations. And this provides a lot of depth to a touch, making a touch more touchy, the very opposite of holding hands like a dead fish.

I would like to make a brief interlude to talk about the question of what touches are sexual — and to refuse to give a Pharisaic catalogue.

The Pharisees attempted the doomed project of an exacting guard of rules, more specifically the wrong type of rules. By contrast, I would like to draw an analogy with what C.S. Lewis said in [Mere Christianity](#) about modesty in dress across cultures. Different cultures vary greatly in what social rules they have concerning covering and showing different parts of the body. But having a principle of modesty does not, even in cultures that do not wear any clothing. It is like language; what sounds bear what meaning is highly variable. But having sounds that bear meaning, and parts of speech and grammar, is not. That is universal — and the deaf subculture is the exception that proves the rule; even when they can't hear to be able to naturally converse as everyone else does, they use their eyes and hands in a language of hand signs.

Another analogy might be found in comparing the U.S. borders with

Another analogy might be found in comparing the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico. Much (not all) of the Canadian border lies at a single latitude; there is a near-universal rule that tells, "One mile north of this latitude, you are in Canada; one mile south, you are in the U.S.A." But no such rule exists between the U.S. and Mexico; there are some latitudes that (given that one is on land in North America) tell you that you're in the U.S., and some latitudes that tell you that you are in Mexico, but a great many latitudes that could be either in the U.S. or Mexico.

However, the U.S.-Mexican border is just as sharply defined as that between the U.S. and Canada; the latitudinal rules fail in many cases, but there is still a razor sharp distinction to be made.

That distinction is made in the Holy Spirit; it is the Spirit who is the structure of obedience revealed in the New Testament, and that gives the believer the power to obey.

Any kind of touch can be sexual, and a good many can be non-sexual as well. And the power to be pure, the power to reserve sexual touch for its proper and special place, comes to the believer through the Holy Spirit.

I would like to say something more about tickling: it is dependent, not only on body, but also on mind. I will not belabor the obvious point that certain touches tickle some people, but rather point out something else: whether something tickles, depends on how it is perceived. A thin cotton shirt touches very lightly — but it does not tickle. And conversely, some vivid use of language can tickle from far away.

The kiss seems to receive the most attention in Scripture. The second verse of the Song of Songs says, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." And half the New Testament epistles say, in their closing exhortations, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." In a sense, the kiss is a symbol of all contact in Scripture. And it is significant that the prophets record Elijah being told when he is desperate, "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Ba'al, nor have their mouths kissed him." It is so great of a touch that it cannot be bestowed on

an idol.

To those who have seen it, I would recall the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The kisses in even a seriously flawed movie stand out; the emotional charge bristles, and the final kiss between Christ and Judas stands as a tribute to how even a non-sexual kiss can be intense and passionate. And the kisses recorded in Genesis stand as a hallmark of that book's sensitivity to emotion.

Someone writing about music talked about how, as a person's experience with music grows, the keys gain different and distinct emotional residues, different moods, different qualities. And the same is true of touch, only moreso. There are twelve major and twelve minor keys, and that is fixed; but with each of the basic touches, there are variants, and variants of variants. A kiss may be on the lips or not on the lips, just a peck or longer, and so on, and these allow not just discrete combinations, but a continuum. And this provides room for great subtleties in emotional significance.

I just got back from my cognitive science class, and I believe that touch provides a good illustration of what is lacking in the classical model of cognition.

The classical model of cognition describes human thought as an essentially rule-based manipulation of symbols, ideally manifested in a formal game such as chess. Of one area where it is lacking — that of simulation, where people manipulate in their heads models or representations of things — I will not treat here. But there is another area which I *will* treat; I am not contesting that there are parts of the human mind that are well described in that manner, but rather that it is a description of a part, and not, by a long stretch of imagination, the whole. And so I will outline seven differences.

The first is that chess is manifestation-independent, while touch is fundamentally qualitative. Perhaps the best way I can put it is this. Humans happen to refer to chess pieces by poetic names, such as 'knight' and 'castle'. But that is entirely irrelevant to the game; Deep Blue beat

Kasparov without having the faintest inkling of the romance we know, of knights in shining armor and fair maidens in distress. And chess would be the same if Bill Gates played it with helicopters on rooftops; that is, the real game of chess can be separated from the physical objects which happen to be used in its play.

But this is not true of touch — at all. Chess is still chess without a chessboard; and it happens in blindfolded masters' games. But a kiss would not still be a kiss without bodies, and I could not touch in anything remotely resembling the way I do now, if my soul were transplanted to the body of a steel robot.

There is a formal sense in which the numbers 1297 and 1348 are different, and in which we can recognize them as such, but there is a much deeper way in which red and green affect us differently; there is a fundamental qualitative difference in looking at two objects of different colors that we cannot experience in simply thinking about two different numbers. This kind of quality, which occurs incidentally (if at all) in chess, is fundamental to touch.

And in some way, this touches on a problem in Western thought, an occurrence of the ancient Gnostic heresy which recognizes us as spirits and minds, but refuses to give any recognition to us as animals whom God created to be fundamentally physical as well as fundamentally spiritual. Our bodies are not a merely coincidental attachment to our minds; God created us to be a certain way physically as well as a certain way spiritually, and body is not to be dispensed with or altered as we please. Touching is an act of the body, involving mind and spirit as it may, and it is (God be praised) not something we can simply assign the way we assign a particular shirt to cover us. Seeing everything as chess makes us pure minds who have the misfortune to be encumbered by some (possibly mutable) matter; seeing some things as touch recognizes us as blessed with some particular bodies, which are a part of us as much as reason is a part of us. God has given us a very earthy spirituality.

The second difference is that chess is driven by a single objective in the future, to which any particular action is a mere instrument, while touch embraces now and recognizes things as intrinsically good. (Now the truth is not either alone but both, and if I do not talk much about our

touch is not either alone but both, and if I do not talk much about our ultimate future goal, it will only be by a restriction of attention.) In chess, there is one objective — checkmating your opponent before he can checkmate you — and nothing else is done because it is good in and of itself, but only because it can function as a means to that end. A checkmate is never made by a single move, except between two terrible players; it is carefully prepared in anticipation. Now goals, ends, and sacrifices are very important, probably more important than what I am concerned with here. But touch doesn't work that way. A touch is not given because of what it will enable at some later moment, as a mere means to an end; it is given as valuable in and of itself. And we do not touch in the future, but touch now; the now (as well as the future) is given by God's hand.

The third difference, which is probably more restricted to chess and other games than formal systems in general, but which I will mention, is that chess is oppositional, while touch is synergistic. What is good for your opponent in chess is bad for you, and vice versa. The success of one person necessitates the failure of another. Now there *are* principles of good sportsmanship, but these come because people are better than chess, and not from chess itself. Chess sets people at odds with each other, in and of itself. Touch, on the other hand, is of a cooperative and synergistic nature; for one person to benefit means in general the benefit and not the detriment of another. You will fare badly with someone who plays chess well; you will fare well with someone whose touch is good.

The fourth difference is that chess is digital and discrete, while touch is continuous. Touch moves not simply from black and white to a greyscale, but even further — to colors, where there are many different ways of being bright. I have talked about this before, so I will not treat it in detail here beyond saying that it ties into the qualitative aspect.

The fifth difference is that chess is abstract, while touch is concrete. Abstraction extracts certain key features, and then leaves the specific instances behind, which is a powerful thing to do, and good, but not the only kind of thinking which people do, and not the kind of thinking that most people are best at. The concrete takes a specific instance and explores it in detail, in specific things that abstraction leaves out. Touch is concrete, and can push one specific contact much deeper than is possible

concrete, and can push one specific contact much deeper than is possible abstractly with every contact at once. Touch has the depth of concreteness rather than that of abstraction.

The sixth difference is that chess is logical and rational, while touch is emotional and perceptive. The chess type of thinking is best done by someone who can retreat into himself, and carry out cool, logical operations without regard for the outside world. Emotions are irrelevant. Touch, on the other hand, is something which emotions and the external world matter a great deal for; touch should be moved and moving, and it depends far less on isolated calculation than a sensitivity to other people. It is perceptive, connected, and interactive.

The seventh and final difference I will mention here is that chess is self-contained, while touch resonates of something greater. Once you know the rules of chess, you have no need to refer to anything outside of it, but touch is part of something far greater. It is a part of love, of the very highest potential of the imago dei. To understand the profound difference between making love and rape, you need to go past the touch alone and look at far greater things — to see how one is part of the sacred one-flesh union which God has given us, and the other is one of the most crushing and dehumanizing blows that one person can inflict on another.

Another facet of what something greater there is, may be found in the older and somewhat broader conception of Romance. I am not only referring to the romance that goes on between a man and a woman, but a broader sense of — poetry. It is related to the innocent and childlike wonder that looks and sees the real beauty in so many things, that is obscured so often by jaded eyes.

There is something haunting and elusive, something which we can chase but cannot catch, something beautiful. This something is why so many people have looked at woods and believed that there might be fairies dancing, or looked at a pool of water and seen that there might be a nymph. There is a sense of poetry, a sense of something beautiful. You cannot pin it down and hold a gun to its head, but it will surprise you.

This Romance is something which makes itself manifest in touch, or to put it another way, touch is laced with Romance; it is one of those

beautiful things by which beauty surprises us.

Having lived in France, I rather miss the custom of friends giving kisses on alternate cheeks when they meet; there is something about a kiss that is delicate and embodies a tiny beauty. We do not give each other kisses in consolation; hugs are more fitting to those times. Of all the different touches, I think that the kiss is (to me, at least — there is a good subjective element here) the one most laced with Romance.

The handshake originated as a means of occupying someone's weapon hand so as to afford some protection when he was within striking range. That is, it was a gesture of mistrust.

To see what it has become, is in my estimation a tribute to the nature of touch, and a tribute to the better side of humanness. Touching hands upon a meeting has become a greeting, a welcome, and I have received some warm handshakes that felt like hugs.

Hugging is perhaps the most equitable and universal of touches (at least in our culture; I acknowledge and understand that much of what I am writing may be culture bound, but even a non-universal cultural perspective can have great merit). It is the one touch I can think of that is fitting both after something very good has happened and after something very bad has happened; when someone is at a low point especially, a hug is one of the most simple and human actions of love and support, from one person to another.

In the book of Job, we read before any of the lengthy speeches, that Job's three friends came, and sat with him in silence for a week because they saw his misery was so great. And this is the one thing which they did for which they were not reprimanded. There is a time when sorrow and agony are great, and even the best of words are too much of a burden to bear. In that time, it is a tremendous comfort to have a friend who will come, forgo the usual bad habits about always having to do something, and sit in silence, sharing in your pain, sharing with you his presence.

And a hug, moreso than any other touch, is very appropriate then.

But hugs are far more than that. They can also be soft hugs, bear hugs, gentle hugs, pick-me-up hugs, and all sorts of other possibilities.

There was a man by the name of Bob Sklar at one of the places I worked, who would give all manner of friendly insults; the only time he didn't insult you was if he was angry with you, and then you were in trouble.

Something like this is descriptive of banter; it is a sign that everything is going well. As an example of how that can fail, I would point to its absence in the situation concerning racial humor.

If my guess is correct, at least some readers had a significant jump in tension level — am I going to advocate racism in the form of jokes? There are substantial racial tensions, so that people in many situations are walking on eggshells, afraid to tell jokes involving race because it might be taken as a sign of racism — nobody seems to consider the revolutionary idea that some people might tell jokes involving race for the same reason they tell jokes not involving race — because they find them funny, and want to share a bit of good-natured mirth.

The one major exception is the exception that proves the rule. It is acceptable to joke about your own race — we are not too completely thick-skulled to think that (for example) a Jew might have reasons besides anti-Semitism for telling jokes about Jews. The fact that an exception be of such nature is a testament to the strength of the rule.

If nothing else, I must regard such a state of affairs as unfortunate for the sake of humor. If you have had the good fortune to know a few Jews as I have, you will no doubt know that the Jewish consciousness has produced a number of jokes which are subtle, clever, and extremely funny. I will quote two of my favorite ones here:

At a Jewish wedding, how do you tell which branch it is?

If it's an orthodox wedding, the bride's mother is pregnant. If

it's a conservative wedding, the bride is pregnant. If it's a reformed wedding, the rabbi is pregnant.

I take this one to be a good meta-joke as well as a joke. There are four branches of something called Judaism; the fourth, reconstructionism, is far out in loonie land, a sort of Jewish PC-USA. And it is both fitting and amusing that the joke doesn't mention them.

A Jewish man named Jacob has fallen on hard times; he has lost his job, and goes to the synagogue to pray.

"God? Could I please win the lottery?"

He doesn't win the lottery, and not too much later his house is broken into, and everything of value is stolen. Visibly upset, he goes to teh synagogue again.

"God, I have done a lot for you, and I don't ask for too much. Please, I beg you, please let me win the lottery."

This week, not only does he not win the lottery, but his house burns down and his car is destroyed by a hit and run driver. Again he goes and prays.

"God, I have served you my whole life, and I don't ask for too much at all. I have taken good care of my wife and children, and I want this money for them and not just for myself. I do so much and ask for so little. Please, God, please, can't you let me win the lottery just this once?"

The voice of God booms forth, and fills the synagogue, saying,

"Jacob, meet me half way on this one. Buy a stupid ticket!"

One more:

Q: What do you say to a Puerto Rican in a three piece suit?

A: "Will the defendant please rise?"

I mention these jokes specifically *because* they disturb how we are trying to have races live together peaceably. That such jokes are not often told may be slightly sad from a humor perspective, but it is also a sign of a much deeper problem, and for this problem I will again go to Jews for a treasure, an even greater treasure this time. I hope you might see why I would tell offensive jokes.

This treasure is the word 'shalom', which means peace — a rich and full peace, a peace which is not merely characterized by what is absent — physical, violent strife — but goes much further. Shalom as understood by Jews is a positive state of well-being, a state of justice and equity — "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like ever-flowing streams." In my view, the best way to characterize this peace is to say that it is the manifest presence of love.

What we now have between races is not shalom; it is only a whitewashed wall. And it does not really help matters to put on another coat of whitewash, and proscribe racial humor because of how dangerously it threatens to reveal the racial tensions we pretend aren't there, and how dangerously it threatens something even more terrifying — to make a human to human contact in mirth, to separate us from our separateness and let us see each other as brothers and sisters, the sons and daughters of one man and one woman.

Roughhousing is very dear to my heart, in part because it can only exist where there is shalom. It is too energetic, too real, not to destroy a whitewashed wall, and therefore if roughhousing can be enjoyed, there is a real shalom there, a shalom deep enough to take a bit of mock conflict on the surface and still be the strong flow of love between real people. In its own way, its obnoxious roughness achieves what a thousand polite and distant handshakes can never accomplish.

Touch is not simply a tame thing in a box, and — while there are certain patterns of touch that are hit on more often than others — there is always more. I, for instance, am quite fond of grabbing my little brothers' noses, and tugging on their ears, and so on and so forth. These silly — or sometimes not so silly — little touches we make up have their place, their

niche, as well. And other cultures, while almost certainly sharing foundational elements such as hugs and kisses, will have their own touches and their own variations on themes. What exactly this may be is variable, as the exact sounds of a language are variable. Having a language capable of communication is not. What I am writing in these pages is only one of a legion of possibilities on the topic; others can and should address other things that I omit.

Another aspect of touch is that it is free and voluntary. The Christian understanding is not quite the same as the overblown (or underinterpreted) American notion, but that doesn't mean that there aren't substantial freedoms.

"If you love something, set it free; if it doesn't come back, it was never yours to begin with."

Another critical aspect of touch is that it is voluntary, that saying 'no' is an option. A part of what makes a touch enjoyable is the knowledge that it is not forced on you, that it comes from a love not only great enough to touch, but also and furthermore great enough not to touch. Another part of what makes rape rape is that the victim has no choice in the matter — that she is in fact in one of the most utterly powerless and defenseless situations, both physically and psychologically, that a person can be in. Then what should be one of the greatest goods becomes one of the greatest evils. The only other comparable situation I can think of is abortion, especially a partial birth abortion in which a child begins to receive that great and unique embrace called 'birth', and then his head is cut open and his brains are sucked out, live and unanaesthetized.

The nature of this freedom means, in particular, the freedom to become bound, the absence of which is an unnatural and constricting shackle. <<*La liberté totale est la pire des prisons.*>> — total liberty is the very worst of prisons. The poetic, the romantic, the true freedom is the freedom which can choose a good, not merely for a moment, but permanently. This freedom, rather than having to re-evaluate all of the time and have no solid basis to rely on, is truly free, infinitely more free than if every decision and commitment is in danger of being revoked at

any time. This freedom is the basis for marriage and parenthood, a freedom that chooses permanently to be available to another person in touch and love.

There is one last specific touch I would like to mention, and that is massage. I do not mean to give an account of how to massage, as there are good books on it. But I will say this: that it is the touch of a healer, that it goes past the surface to work inside the body. It is perhaps the most involved and giving of non-sexual touches, and I regard it as not entirely unfortunate that it is the one non-sexual touch that it is easy to come by books on.

Touch is one of the blessings that lies far beyond Mammon. It's free.

To begin what may well be the last section of this treatise, I will talk about something that is not so much a specific touch, as a topic relevant to touch. That is the difference between contract and covenant.

The contract is a very modern and very impoverished notion of the covenant. A contract is an external artifice which binds a person's actions. A covenant is an internal reality which binds persons themselves. A contract is shallow. A covenant is profound.

The contract, especially the social contract, is the impoverished notion of community that corresponds to a view of people as isolated and essential individuals and islands, between which thin strands of bridges are erected as a minimal concession to our inability to function as absolute islands. It is a superficial modification to a basis of individualism.

Christianity is not an individualistic religion, and it has a much more rich, complex, and multifaceted view of personhood — for example, the insistence that we are both as much spirit as any angel, and as much animal as any beast. And it claims both that we have a profound individual side, and a profound corporate side — and that these two

truths are not only not exclusive, but complementary. The individual side, which I have not treated here only due to a restriction of attention, is one which (for example) solitude figures in deeply. Many things are a part of *both* facets. Our uniqueness and difference, for example, is perhaps most visibly related to our individual natures, but Paul's talk about the body — which needs not thirty-two ears but a great variety of different, equal, and necessary body parts, each in its proper place — shows how our differences can and should contribute to community as well.

The view of touch as a specific action defined by the consent of two individuals, with no intrinsic meaning in and of itself, is to the Christian view of touch as the concept of contract is to the Christian understanding of covenant — an impoverished and woefully inadequate simplification and truncation. Touch is not something accidental, which means whatever we decide that it means; it is part and parcel of who we are, with a meaning ordained by God. It is a part of love and community; it is a physical aspect of the very highest and holiest in the *imago dei*.

John wrote at the end of his account of the Gospel that he did not record everything which Jesus said and did, and that he supposed that if everything which Jesus said and did were written down, the whole world would not have room for all the books which would be written. Christ's life is inexhaustible; even the four brief accounts which have come down to us from the apostles are themselves inexhaustible. It is one of the marks of what is great and profound.

I am drawing this work to a close rather arbitrarily — not because there is no more to be said, but because I decided that I would write for the length of the notebook I had chosen, and draw a line of moderation there. Instead of just writing forever, I am stopping to type it up, print it out, share the copies with other people, and what is most important of all, touch them.

I would ask you to do the same. I hope that you have enjoyed this; I hope that I have stimulated you to think; I hope that I have shared with you some good insights. Don't cut this work short by stopping there. Go out and touch someone.

Epilogue, 21 June 03

Since I first wrote this, about six years have elapsed. I have since let it simmer inside me, and I have a couple of things to mention.

The first has been that what I wrote is incomplete. It's not quite in a mature state. One caring, touch-y friend observed that there was something forced in my touch.

The second has been a realisation which crystallised after two comments. The first comment when one friend said, "You and Robin hug differently from most people." I was surprised and asked, "How?" He said, "You hug with the whole of yourself."

The other comment came when I asked a close friend, Yussif, when a hug was appropriate in Ghanaian culture. He said that in England he learned to value hugs, and in Ghana he gives a handshake to close male friends. In retrospect, I realize that when Ghanaian men have shaken my hand, it has *never* been distant, or a perfunctory greeting. Something Yussif said about "palm against palm" made me realise how unappreciative I had been about handshakes.

I tried to apply this treatise by seeking out hugs and kisses. I thought in terms of what kind of touch to seek, and I was basically barking up the wrong tree when I did so. I hesitate to say that I would never ask, "May I give you a hug?" or, "May I give you a kiss?" but that sort of thing occupies a far less central role than I assumed.

What would I put in its place? Go with the flow of the social situation rather than against it. Don't force it. Be careful about when you muster courage—sometimes trying to muster courage is the wrong thing. *And*, when it is fitting to give a touch, be able to do so with your whole person. Don't go overboard and try to give your total presence when you've just met someone and are shaking hands...

...but all these restrictions are *but the shadow* cast by a great light.

Good touch is a way that love shows itself. Embodied love, from one whole person to another, can appear in many different forms of touch, and what makes it deep is less dependent on technique or form than being given from the whole person. It is at *least* as much spiritual as physical, and is therefore to be sought in whole person love, given by God, which moves through the spirit to embrace the body. Things such as loving God and the other person, trying as much as possible to give your attention now rather than diverting it to other things (past or future), and meeting the other—whole person to whole person—are much deeper to pin down than any kind of minutia, and have a much deeper yield.

Perhaps after I have let this simmer for a few more years, there is something else I will be able to share.

Espiriticthus: Cultures of a Fantasy World Not Touched By Evil

Nor'krin

The Nor'krin are tall and strong, with thick, sandy blonde hair, deep blue eyes, and white skin that turns reddish when they go south from their frost-kissed land; the Janra affectionately refer to them as the Northern giants. They love to run across the snowy plains and up to the peaks, to feel the crispness of the air, and to drink the cold and crystalline waters of the flowing streams.

There are not very many of them; they live nomadic lives, spread out across the snowy North, carrying with them only their clothing, their hunting weapons (a large bow and quiver of arrows, an axe, and a knife), a canteen, and a handful of tools and other miscellanea.

Theirs is a culture of oral tradition and folklore, filled with a richness of symbolic thought. Their thought is expressed by storytelling. Some tell of people and actions full of goodness, love, and wisdom; some are allegories packed with symbolic detail; some are both. The evenings — from the meal onward — are times when the clans gather together, and the oldest member tells tales until long into the night, when the fire has died down to embers and the icy mountain peaks glisten in crystalline blue twilight.

blue starlight.

(The language is one which revolves around the oral tradition; its grammar is fairly simple, sufficient for basic expression, but there is an extensive vocabulary fitted to epic poems, great tales, and the transmission of a symbol-filled body of lore)

Their experience of sense is primarily aural, centering around the communication and preservation of their tradition. The other senses all play a part in their knowing about the world around them and its enjoyment, of course, but the ears dominate.

Coming of age is very significant in Nor'krin culture. It is the event upon which a child becomes a full member of Nor'krin community, and appreciates it fully, for it is accomplished in solitude. It is the same for male and female, big and small.

Denuded of all possessions save a hunting knife and the clothing on his back, the child begins a solitary trek, south through the land of the Urvanovestilli and Yedidia, penetrating deep into the thick forests inhabited by the Tuz, until he enters a village, and, coming inside a shop, says, "Blacksmith, blacksmith, find me a task, give me a quest."

There are as many quests as there are questions. Some are easy, some are hard; some are simple, some are complex. Whatever the quest be — be it finding an amethyst in the caves, climbing an immense mountain, answering a riddle, memorizing a book — he leaves the blacksmith shop and does not return until the quest is completed. (It must be said that, though some quests have taken years to complete, recorded history has yet to see a Nor'krin fail. A child leaves the immediate presence of his family, but remains in their prayers; they have great faith, and it is in this faith that they tread securely into the unknown.

Upon the return, the blacksmith begins to ask questions: "What is your name? What is your family? Who are you? What is your story?" — and begins to fashion an iron cross. This cross is at once a cross as any other, and a unique reflection of the person who wears it; no two are alike.

It is with this cross worn about the neck that he returns to his clan, come of age.

Nor'krin greet each other by standing opposite the other, placing the left hand on the other's right shoulder, and lowering the head slightly; the gesture is a sign of respect.

The emotional side of their culture is not as intense or spectacular as many others, but is present and offers an important reflection of what they value. They know a deep sense of respect and appreciation; when they think of others, the first thought is, "This person is an image of God," and there is a feeling of respect. The mountains, the trees, and the streams all bear a magnificence which they appreciate. Nor'krin worship services are filled with awe at the One whose glory is declared by tales, by lives, and by the created order. They are traditional liturgical services, where the place of the homily is taken by long tales and stories, conducted by the eldest members of the clan.

The Nor'krin homeland is named 'Cryona'.

Tuz

Many wayfarers go south, early in life, to buy equipment; they need only wait, and a blacksmith will forge a pair of iron boots which will last for life.

The people are dark and strong; their eyes shine with power and lightning. The average Tuz male is short, stout, very broad-shouldered, and built like a brick wall; a thick, straight, jet black moustache and a thick, curly beard push out of leathery skin. Women are equally short and stout, but do not have such broad shoulders, being (relatively) more plump and less muscled, and do not have the moustache and beard (usually).

Their buildings are hewn of solid granite, with iron doors. The villages are small and scattered, joined by worn paths passing through the rich, deep green of the forest. It is this forest, fertile and full of beasts, from which the heart of their meal comes. They are more than fond of spicy meat stews and bear jerky. Their beer is dark, thick, and strong, and every house has at least a little bit of khor, a spiced rum which is occasionally used by the other peoples as a pepper sauce.

The Tuz work hard and play hard. They are often hired for heavy work in the construction of Urvanovestilli palaces, and their work rarely receives complaint. After work is over, they tend towards wrestling and general rowdiness; if they are present, Janra children (and occasionally adults) are tossed about.

For all of their rowdiness, the Tuz do possess a great deal of restraint; even after a couple of beers, they seldom give each other injuries beyond occasional bruises and abrasions, and Janra children do not receive even a scratch. (Most of them rather enjoy being tossed about).

The usual greeting is a crushing bear hug, often accompanied/ followed by a punch in the stomach, some wrestling or tossing around, etc; it is generally toned down a bit for children and

visitors from afar, but there is always at least a spark of rowdy play.

As much as the Nor'krin are at home in the cold, loving everything that is crisp and chilly, the Tuz love heat. Their land is by far the hottest, but that doesn't stop them from munching on peppers and wrestling around. Blacksmiths' shops and fire and sun-hot iron — these are a few of their favorite things.

The Tuz also build obstacle courses of stone and iron and rope, which the Janra have no end of finding new and inventive ways to use; a slack rope which Tuz climb along the underside of will be walked — or occasionally run — atop by the Janra; jumping shortcuts, backwards or inverted travel, and acrobatic ways of avoiding raw strength moves are common. Tuz, by contrast, have very slow and methodical paths.

They are, indeed, probably the most constant and unchanging of peoples; the process of maturing is a process of becoming more who they are. Their sense of order is also great; they value greatly the gift of being well ruled.

A child, at the age of ten, is presented to the village elders and the various guildmasters. They spend a day talking with the child and his parents, in order to determine his talents, interests, and personality; then they spend another day talking and discussing amongst themselves; then, on the third day, his profession is announced, along with the master to whom he will be apprenticed. The results are sometimes surprising, but always embody a great deal of wisdom, and the selection of a vocation is a gift for which the child is grateful.

Children learn a way of life filled with discipline, tradition, and respect for elders. It is quite simple, not at all ornate when compared to some other philosophies, but it has a power, a solidity to it, and love, faith, honor, friendship, and hospitality are things that they truly live by. Their families and communities are very close, and their friendships are loyal until death. They do not pay as much emphasis on verbal articulation of teaching as a way of life. There is thought, but in its expression, words take a second place to actions. That a life of faith involves discipline is declared very loudly by Tuz hands.

The are very aware of the value of solitude and prayer; it is a common practice to simply leave, taking nothing save clothing and a hunting knife or axe, and go up into the mountains for a few days of solitude, allowing time to pray and to be refocused.

Their language has, in speech, a very heavy, thick, consonantal feel, full of grated 'h's (which is often present in 'k's, 'r's, 'g's, and 'b's). The speech is terse and concrete.

Their experience of sense is also very concrete, centered somewhere between visual and aural. Sight tells what is around and where, and what is happening and where. Hearing tells what is happening, and where, and what is being said.

The emotional side of their culture knows such things as accomplishment, tradition, exertion, and discipline. There is an emotion that comes from a job well done and a challenge mastered; they value it. To have a heritage and respect elders as well as enjoy children brings a feeling of right order. To wrestle around, run, or laugh heartily has a pleasure. To control oneself has a joy. Things such as these are what they feel.

Tuz worship services are be short and sweet, with worship embodying a great deal of fervor.

The Tuz homeland is named 'Rhog'.

Urvanovestilli

The first thing to strike a visitor is the devices. In every house and many shops there is a tinkering room; a large workbench is covered with every imaginable sort of gear, spring, hinge, lever, chain, and shaft; the clock is only the beginning of clockwork. Two nearby cabinets — one filled with tools, one filled with parts and working materials — stand neatly closed; at the touch of a button, a drawer springs out, and shelves slowly slide up.

The craftsmanship of clockwork devices is, along with the study of diverse subjects — theology and philosophy, history and literature, science and mathematics — a hobby that symbolizes the culture. Each piece is created not only for utility, but also for artistic effect. Cuckoo clocks and spring loaded umbrellas, Swiss Army Knives and mechanical pencils, player pianos and collapsible telescopes: mechanical objects such as these fill the land.

The ornate complexity of the devices reflects the ornate complexity of thought. The language, quite possibly the most difficult to learn, allows a speaker to express detailed and nuanced thought in exacting specificity. There are twenty four verb tenses, so that there is (for example) a different past tense for a brief, well demarcated action, and one which occurred over a period of time; there are twenty four other verb forms, which are like verb tenses as to conjugation and construction, but express the verb in an atemporal manner. Their language has much room built in for conjunction and logical connectives, nesting and predicates, as well as subtlety, implication, and allusion.

They have a complex and formal system of etiquette, although it must be said to their credit that they take no offense at a wayfarer who is warm and friendly but does not know their rules; they understand how simple the heart of politeness is.

Their speech is clever and witty, and they are fond of abstract strategy games. They enjoy ornate and complex polyphony, and will spend hours exploring theology and philosophy (two disciplines which

they have the wisdom not to separate).

Urvanovestilli culture places a very heavy emphasis on a facet of virtue which they call *contrainte*. *Contrainte* is a kind of inner constraint, where order is approached by adjusting conditions inside before conditions outside, and not letting oneself be wrongly controlled by external circumstance. A similar concept is embodied in the words 'moderation' and 'self-control.'

Contrainte enables a man to be free and use that freedom responsibly; it enables a man to have access to drink without getting drunk; it enables him to think constantly without becoming rationalistic. The Urvanovestilli homeland has the richest natural resources in the world, and (with centuries of first rate craftsmanship and efficient work) they are by a wide margin the richest nation in the world. Despite this, they keep a very cautious eye on wealth, so as not to be enslaved by it. Theirs is not a culture of consumption; though some of their interests — art, sculpture, board oriented strategy games, tinkering — generally are pursued in a manner that involves wealth, the bulk — discussions, prayer, dance, imagination, thought — do not. Consumption as a status symbol and waste are both seen as vulgar.

In *contrainte* is also balance and complement. There is time in solitude and time in community, freedom and responsibility, private and public property, work and rest.

It is in *contrainte* that an ornate system of etiquette does not obscure love, and elaborate ceremonies do not obscure worship. Just as they do not have their sights set on wealth — they do not look to it for happiness, security, and other things that it can not provide — and are therefore able to enjoy it (among other and greater blessings) without being harmed, so also they set their sights on love and worship, and therefore do not permit rules of etiquette or liturgical forms to make themselves the focus and cause hearts to become cold and dusty.

Contrainte likewise allows them to act efficiently without becoming efficient. Off of work, life takes a calm and leisurely pace; nobody fidgets. It allows them to be very judicious in their use of money, and at the same

time very generous; their hospitality is lavish, and it is unheard of for anyone — friend or stranger, native or foreigner — to go hungry in their land.

The single greatest mark of *contrainte* lies in that, with all of their achievements, they remain open to the gifts of God. *Contrainte* itself — though they work very hard to cultivate it — is not something that they try to achieve on their own power, but ask for in prayer, expecting to receive as a gift from God. Nor is it set up as the supreme context, the *Supra-God* to which God must bow down; they know nothing of religion within the bounds of *contrainte*. *Contrainte* does not "point to" itself as an object of worship, but rather God; it brings, in worship of God, a desire to grow in faith, hope, and love. It is like being reasonable enough not to be rationalistic.

On the surface, the *Urvanovestilli* culture appears to be the antithesis of that of the *Shal*. One is complex, and the other simple; one is rich, and the other poor; in one, people sit and talk for hours; in the other, people sit in silence for hours.

At the very heart, though, they are very much the same; *Urvanovestilli*, when traveling and visiting the *Shal*, feel that they are at home; the *Shal* find the *Urvanovestilli* to be brothers. They see beyond, rest in God's love, and love their neighbors.

The *Urvanovestilli* are quiet, patient, temperate, and refined. They are classically educated and cultured; their country is a federation of republics, each one ruled by a senate in a tradition that has remained unchanged for centuries. Tradition is strong, and families remain together; come evening, three or four, sometimes even five generations sit down at one table, eating and drinking, talking and listening, long into the night. There is a great respect for age, but a respect that in no way despises youth; the oldest spend a great deal of time caring for the youngest. Indeed, one of the first sights to greet a visitor who steps inside an *Urvanovestilli* mansion is often a grandfather or great-grandfather, with a long, flowing white beard, sitting with a child on his knee.

Urvanovestilli names are long and ornate. The full name is rarely spoken outside of formal ceremonies; even Urvanovestilli do not often pronounce thirty syllables to refer to one entity; all the same, each one is considered important. The names are:

Family name: This is the first and foremost of names, and the most cherished; it is the most commonly used.

Maiden name: Among married women, this follows.

Birth name: This is the name given at birth, and is often used within families and when there are several people of the same family present.

Reserve name: This is a very intimate name, which is not always known outside of family and close friends; it is spoken with a great deal of affection and familiarity.

Baptismal name: This name is chosen at baptism by people who know the person well, and given a great deal of prayer; it is used especially in religious contexts.

Regional name: This tells of the city or village a person comes from, carrying with it connotations of regional flavor and culture. It is used primarily in reference to travelers or (occasionally) people far away.

Friend names: These names (some do not have any; a few have ten or eleven; the average is two or three) come according to friends; a friend can bestow a name, and it becomes thereafter formally a part of an Urvanovestilli full name. When such a name is bestowed, it will become the name used primarily by the person who chose it.

The phrases of politeness — those which would correspond to hello, goodbye, please, thank you, you're welcome — are all benedictions; they take innumerable forms and beauties according to the people and situation. Blessing is something which they value; they often speak of good things — friends, virtue, art and music, food and drink — as so many blessings from the heart of the Father.

The traditional greeting is a hand raised, open save that the ring

finger bends down to meet the thumb, or (when greeting a child) placed atop the head; the gesture is a symbol of benediction. It is followed by three kisses on alternate cheeks.

In youth, Urvanovestilli are filled with a wanderlust. They voyage to many different places, seeing different nations and lands — as well as the variety of their own cities — and enjoy experiences which provide a lifetime's worth of memories. The wayfaring is never really complete, though, until it becomes the voyage home: the Time sometimes comes after two years of travel and sometimes after ten, but the Spirit always makes it clear. When that Time comes, each Urvanovestilli spends a little longer — perhaps a month — with the people he is visiting, and then leaves, with a very passionate and tearful goodbye.

It is Time to return home, to put down roots, to deepen, to mature; Time to wholly enter into the homeland. From this point on, the Urvanovestilli is no longer a wayfarer. The memories of his travels are cherished and very dear, a set of riches that he will always carry with him, and he will still send blessings, gifts, letters, and occasionally visits to friends in far away lands, but it is no longer time to go here and there; it is Time to grow into family, friends, and city.

Urvanovestilli writings and teaching, the means by which theology and philosophy are transmitted, take many forms — poems, riddles, parables and allegories, personal conversations, to name a few — but the predominant form is a systematic and structured logical argument: point one, point two, point three, subpoint three b, conclusion one... The structure carries allusion, nuance, and beauty; it leaves room for the speaker to make a very beautiful craft of words.

They enjoy being absorbed in thought; it is how they spend a good time of each day. They do not look down on sensation — indeed, they have a great appreciation for what is a very highly developed art, music, and cuisine — but it does not fill their world as it does that of many others. Abstraction and complexities of thought are fundamental to their experience of the world: sensation leads into perception, perception leads into concrete thought, and concrete thought leads into abstract thought. Moments of immersion in the senses are rare, Sensation, being the

outermost layer, is governed and enjoyed from within. Its form is generally of aural and visual character; the aural side is shaped by words, and then accommodates the other plethora of sounds, and the visual side is shaped by the forms, the spaces, and the interactions of their devices, and sees something of springs and gears in the world around.

Their faces appear at first glance to be almost expressionless — a faint hint of a smile, perhaps — until you look at their eyes, the first window to the fire and intensity within. Urvanovestilli eyes — whether brown, amber, hazel, grey, or blue — bear an intense, probing gaze; in Urvanovestilli culture, eye contact is almost continual, and reflects a fire, an intensity, a passion, that fills their way of life. It does not take long to be reminded that eye contact is a form of touch; their eyes seem to be looking into your spirit. The gaze, in its intensity, is never cold and calculating, never the chilling, devouring stare of a steel face beyond which lies a heart of ice; at its most intense and most probing, it is the most filled with love, and most easily shows the intense fire within. They can rest — and they know calm and tranquility — but there is a great energy within, an energy that shows itself in their artwork and writings. Those who read their theologians certainly do not fail to notice the depths of wisdom and insight, but what is most striking is their love for God. The passion — of their love for God, for spouse, for family, for their neighbor; of desire to grow in virtue and knowledge, for their work — burns, and their experience of emotion — of discovery, of awe, of appreciation of beauty — is long and intense, complex and multifaceted. This emotion is the other side of *contrainte*; it is the same virtue that enables them to enjoy wine in temperance, and to be moved to tears by music and theater. It is not a "virtue" of stifling — that would be far too easy, but of control and proper enjoyment. Just as they find abstinence from drink to be too easy, a way of dodging the lesson of moderation, stifling emotion and crushing it would be, to them, a way of dodging the lesson of passions rightly oriented in accordance with holiness and love — not to mention an unconscionable destruction of an integral facet of being human.

Those Urvanovestilli who are the most virtuous, the most filled with *contrainte*, are nearly always the most passionate.

Urvanovestilli are usually short, but look like very tall in miniature, with clear white skin and jet black hair. The men have a thin and wiry frame, with sharp and angular features. They have flaring eyebrows coming out of a prominent brow, a thin, hooked nose, and tufts of fine hair flaring away from their ears. Skin holds tightly to bones, muscles, and veins, and arms end in long, thin hands with nimble fingers. Their voices are a very soft, almost silent tenor.

The women are somewhat slender, but a slenderness which is graceful and rounded. Their features, as well as their build, bear this slender, graceful, rounded character, and their movements are light and flowing. (If the men know more of passion, the women know more of calm). Their voices are high and clear, with a sound that is like silver, like cold and crystalline water, like clear, light, dry Alsace blanc.

Urvanovestilli worship services are long and complex, with ornate liturgy and ritual. The language is florid and ornate (like that of the liturgy stemming from St. John Chrysostom) and every sentence of the liturgy would embody theological truth. The homilies (although not the only part of the service which varies (much of the liturgy itself changing according to a traditional pattern dictated by a complex algorithm) from week to week) are themselves not that long. They are of moderate length, and differ from the liturgy — which presented different doctrines sentence by sentence — in being a full and well-developed presentation of one single idea, expressed in unequalled detail and eloquence.

The Urvanovestilli homeland is named 'Flaristimmo'.

Urvanovestilli city — Capitello

Capitello is the capital of the Urvanovestilli land, and the classical Urvanovestilli city.

At the very heart lies a cruciform cathedral. It is an immense domed building, the outside in white marble, covered with statues and spires. Inside, all is dark — or so it seems to a person who first steps in.

Someone who steps in first stands in place, seeing nothing really, perhaps a few points of light in the darkness... and then, very slowly, begins to adjust. It is cool inside, and very still. The silence is a silence that can be heard, a very real and present stillness. As he begins to step into the coolness and the silence, he begins to see light — light that had gone unnoticed at first, but as he steps into it, becomes more and more visible. The light is shining through a thousand candles, each one bringing a little bit of light, a little bit of warmth, to what is around it. Then, after the candles become visible, it is seen what they illuminate — mosaics, worked with colored dyes and gold leaf... and faces.

Outside of the cathedral lies an open garden with fountains and statues. Around the garden lies a circle of seven great halls. In clockwise order, beginning south of the cathedral, they are:

Library: This collection, the largest in the world, has at least one copy of all known writings, and a scriptorium in which they are copied and transmitted.

Device museum: This is a clockwork building filled with exemplary devices (and copies in various states of disassembly).

Senate: This building is decorated with arts and crafts from the cities throughout the land; it is a place where senators (two from each city and one from each village) meet to govern the nation.

Mayorship: This is the local senate, the seat from which public affairs are run; the majority of political power is on a local level (the senate being the head of a confederation), vested in the town elders.

Forum: This is an immense amphitheater which hosts a variety of speakers, panels, and open talks. Lecture is the predominant medium and presentation, but poetry and storytelling occur not infrequently. The forum, along with the evening worship services in the cathedral, walking in the garden, attending a concert, or looking through the art museum, is appreciated as an enjoyable way to spend a night out.

Music hall/theater: This hosts concerts and recitals, theatrical performances, operas, dances, pyrotechnic displays, occasional Janra

acrobatic performances, dramatic readings, puppet shows...

Art museum: Half of the space is devoted to permanent exhibits, and half to temporary displays. Most of the finest artwork ever produced by Urvanovestilli, and a good deal of the finest artwork from other cultures, may be seen here.

Outside of the seven halls lies what is called "the mélange"; outside of the mélange lie fields, pastures, and vineyards; outside of the farmland lies forest.

The mélange is a large annulus which contains mansions, shops, roads, paths, public squares, gardens, open lots, little forums and theaters, restaurants, and so on. It is where a great deal of life and culture transpires; in the little nooks and crannies, inside the parlors of the houses, a lot transpires.

The Urvanovestilli enjoy going out, but the enjoyment does not come from despising being at home. The parlors, which have the distinction of being within a person's home and hospitality, are lavishly furnished, with couches, chairs, lanterns, some instruments, a liquor machine, some sculpture or paintings, often a fountain or clock or... and people enjoy sitting around, talking, reading, performing music...

Urvanovestilli city: Éliré

Éliré is known among the Urvanovestilli as the city of seashells. While most Urvanovestilli cities are built out of white stone, in ornately embellished classical geometric forms, Éliré is built out of sandy yellow stone, in flowing curves; buildings seem like giant seashells. The artwork and jewelry are crafted from seashells and other treasures from the sea — coral and pearls — and the public squares are filled with fountains and pools, where colorful fish swim about.

The people enjoy swimming, and often meet the dolphin population; they enjoy each other.

Urvanovestilli city: Mistrelli

Mistrelli lies in the heart of the Fog Valley; a shroud of mist cloaks the ground, out of which rise trees and tall buildings with spires and towers. Inside the buildings are all manner of tunnels of tunnels, secret passages, and trapdoors; there are clockwork devices in each one. Throughout the city are spread a handful of entrances to a vast underground labyrinth, of which the better part is known; there are all manner of doors and puzzles inside.

The city is full of rose bushes, climbing up the sides of the buildings, over and around gates; most are yellow, but there are some of every color.

The people take a long time to get to know, and their personalities always have hidden gems. Their study of theology emphasizes mystery and the incomprehensible nature of God; Connaissance, a theologian from Mistrelli, began and ended his magnum opus with the words, "I do not know."

Urvanovestilli city: Fabriqué

Fabriqué is the biggest of Urvanovestilli port cities; it lies on the Tuz border, and is the site where ships — full rigs with multiple masts, many sails, and innumerable ropes — are built. They are polished and ornately carved, well suited for transport and trade as well as a work of art. The crews hired tend to be heavily Tuz — strong and sturdy workers who have no problem tying a rope as thick as a wrist in waves and storm — and set sail to other Urvanovestilli ports and ports around the world, transporting voyagers and cargo to destinations near and far.

Yedidia

The Yedidia culture is a culture of vibrant life. They live in buildings woven out of living trees and plants; the doorways are filled by hanging curtains of leafy vines which softly part as a person passes through.

Their manner of gardening spins out of a wonderful talent for drawing beauty out of the forest; many visitors come for the first time, do not even realize that they have stepped into a garden; they only notice that the forest's beauty is exceptional there.

The Yedidia are very sensitive to the rest of Creation; they speak in a melodic, lilting tongue of the purest song, but even that language is not the one that is closest to them. The first language of every child is that of rocks and trees and skies and seas. They know how to call birds out of the forest to fly into their hands; they know how to make plants flourish.

They have ears to hear the crystalline song by which the Heavens declare the glory of their Maker. They appreciate the beauty of the created order as it tells of the Uncreate with a power that can not fully be translated into words — and they use the language of Creation to speak of the mysteries of the Creator, whose fingerprints are everywhere in nature.

They look into the great and unfathomable vastness of space; it furnishes the language by which they tell of the great and unfathomable vastness of the Creator. They know the energy, the great fire out of which the sun pours out light and energy; it furnishes the language by which they tell of the energy and great fire in the heart of the Father, offering warmth and light freely and without cost. They dance in the rain, the life giving water poured out from above; it furnishes the language by which they speak of springs of living water come down from Heaven. They admire the beauty of the lilies of the field, which simply rest in the sunlight, rain, and dew showered on them; it furnishes the language by which they speak of resting in the love poured out. Their eyes are not closed when a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies...

They are sensitive to the silent beauty that is sometimes unnoticed

even by the Janra. They enjoy the brilliance of the sun, and the pale blue luminescence of the moon; the gentle warmth of a summer night, and the powerful motion of a pouring rainstorm (and there are few things many Yedidia enjoy more than being thoroughly drenched). They look at the veins of a leaf, the hairs of a caterpillar, the motion of a snail; they listen to the song of birds, the sound of wind whispering amidst the leaves, the splashes of water flowing over rocks; they taste the cold freshness of water, the tartness of lemons, the sweetness of strawberries; they smell the soft fragrance of jasmine, the spice of cinnamon, the freshness after a rain; they feel the velvety softness of a rabbit's fur, the raspiness of a rhubarb leaf, the roughness of bark, the smoothness of a worn stone, the gentle kiss of a summer breeze, the springiness of pete moss, the shimmering heat of fire long into the night, the light tickle of a crawling gecko, the fineness of a child's hair, and the warmth of a friend's face.

They are as intuitive as they are perceptive; the emotions of friends especially, but strangers as well, are quickly understood; be it singing together, a friendly joke, talking, listening, leaving alone, sitting together in silence, holding a hand, giving a hug — they always seem to know.

The Yedidia make wines and incense which even the Urvanovestilli do not come close to. It is, though, the Urvanovestilli who make their garments. Some are short, some are tall; some are slender, some are rounded; they tends towards being fairly short and fairly round, but there is a lot of variety. All, though, have olive skin and dark, shiny black hair; the women wear a long, flowing robe of kelly green, over which cascades of hair fall and spin, sometimes reaching to the waist, sometimes almost touching the ground; the men wear cloaks and tunics of walnut brown. The clothing is soft and light as air; it streams out in the motion and jumps of dance — like their music, smooth, soft, flowing, graceful.

"Dance, then, wherever you may be, for I am the Lord of the Dance, said he." Theirs is a culture full of joy and celebration; it is full of smiles, and always willing to welcome a visitor. Finding something good, they look for someone to share it with.

They are very sensitive to the cycles of nature, of the day, of the phases of the moon, of the seasons in turn. They shape the regular

rhythm of their songs, and provide a sense of constancy and regularity, again, which furnishes the language by which they speak of the constancy and regularity of the Creator.

The traditional greeting is a soft and gentle hug, one which often lasts a while (or a butterfly kiss, or...). That touch, as their faces and voices as they speak, bears a great deal of expression: The phrase of greeting used means, literally, "Here is a person in whom I find joy." The words remain the same, but the music of the speech colors it to perfection.

Though each culture has its own drink — even the icy cold water enjoyed by the Nor'krin is appreciated by visiting Janra, who recognize it as a gift given without sowing or reaping — drinks are one of the first things that come to mind when most people hear the word 'Yedidia'.

First of all are their wines. Nearly all of the finest wines are made in their land. Red and white, and a little bit of rose and green, are stored away in caves to age for years, perhaps decades, before being opened to enjoy with friends and memories.

After the wines come cider; it is served hot and well spiced; the spicing is done in many different ways, and gives a wonderful variety to a very soothing drink to warm a cool evening.

There are fruit juices of every color of the rainbow; strawberry, pear, guava, banana, apple, peach, and fig are but the beginning of a very long and flavorful list. There is, though, one strong point of commonality: the fruit is always still attached to the plant a few minutes before it is served.

(the variety of fruit juices is fermented and aged as are grapes to make wine, but that variety of drinks is reserved for very special occasions)

They also enjoy teas and infusions; the trees and herbs provide another spectrum of tastes to sip with friends.

Roots of various plants are sometimes spiced to provide another drink.

Yedidia cuisine varies somewhat from region to region. In some places, it is based on fresh fruit, and in others, on breads, cereals, thick soups and vegetable stews; the latter is spiced, lightly salted, and often has some meat for added flavor. All forms of Yedidia cuisine begin with a small salad (either garden or fruit), have a main course of some form of the local specialties, are followed by a platter with an assortment of breads and fresh fruits, and end with a dessert of cheeses or cured fruit.

Life, to the Yedidia, is one big, long party, and, to the Yedidia, song is the symbol of celebration. They sing in the morning, and sing in the evening; they sing while working, and sing a prayer — hands joined together — before meals. Thought is expressed in song; the first place to look for an expression of their perspective on theology and philosophy is in the verses of their hymns. There are many cherished songs shared across the nation, but there is also much spontaneity and improvisation; their way of speaking/singing is in metered verse, and a wealth of their wisdom is embodied in the rhythm of hymns, regular and dependable as the cycles of nature. The day, the moon, the year — these different cycles are echoed in the structure of verses.

For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies, For the love which from our birth over and around us lies: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night, Hill and vale and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child, Friends on earth, and friends above; for all gentle thoughts and mild; Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For Thy church, that evermore lifteth holy hands above, Offering up on every shore her pure sacrifice of love: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For Thyself, best Gift Divine! To our race so freely given; For that great great love of Thine peace on earth and joy in Heaven.

that great, great love of mine, peace on earth, and joy in heaven.
Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears, All nature
sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres. This is my
Father's world: I rest me in the thought Of rocks and trees, of skies
and seas; His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise, The
morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's praise. This is my
Father's world: He shines in all that's fair; In the rustling grass I hear
him pass, He speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world, O let me ne'er forget That though the
wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet. This is my Father's
world: the battle is not done; Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and
earth and Heaven be one.

The Yedidia are the most alive to sensation; each sense is valued, and
each one provides something a little different.

Touch is pre-eminent; it is enjoyed immensely, and they consider it
the most informative of senses. Touch tells them of texture and
temperature, of moist and dry; by how things respond to pressure, they
can feel what is present beneath the surface and what structure it forms;
it tells much of emotion. When sensation yields perception, touch
provides them with the greatest richness.

Smell is a sense of memories; to walk through an orchard is to
remember seasons past. It no less bears a tale of what has happened; each
person bears his own distinctive smell, and a place by its smell tells who
has passed by. Many different things leave a mark on a placés scent, and
to smell is to be told, as if in a far-off memory (indeed, like those that
smell mysteriously triggers), what plants are present, what the weather is
like and has been, who has passed by, what fruit was picked — though not
all of this is perceived all of the time, the fragrance of a place often tells
bits and pieces.

Sight is a sense that works by light illuminating all that it shines on (and this is something from which they draw a lesson). It tells of the color, the form, and the beauty of what is around; what is moving and what is still; it tells of what is far away and can not yet be touched. It serves as a guide to what is around, as a guide by which to move and act in an unknown situation, and it bears its own beauty; all of this provides lessons about God and about faith.

The first sound in their mind, and the one they most love, is song. The song of a friend's voice, the song of a bird chirping, the song of a babbling brook, the silent song of silvery blue starlight — all of these are listened to and enjoyed.

The taste of food tells of the time of year and of culture. Drink and food are a kind of art, and its taste tells both of the time of year and how it was prepared.

Yedidia emotions have a fluid character; they are a sensitive people who are easily moved and who show their emotions quickly. Their celebration is filled with smiles and mirth — as is, indeed, much of life. Tears are held to be very precious — in their language, the same word means 'tear' and 'diamond' — and they know tears, not only of sorrow, but also of joy. Tears come to greet both memories and powerful music, and mark as both sign and symbol the most significant events in life — farewell and death, yes, but also a loved one regained, and birth, and marriage. Memories and hopes, also, are precious. They know sorrow, but never bitterness; however deep and angst-ridden the sorrow may be, deeper and more healing is the joy. Farewell is always marked by the thought of, "I will be able to enjoy your presence again;" on many a deathbed has been spoken the words, "We will be brought back together again in the heart of the Father. It will not be long."

Yedidia worship services are filled with songs — celebrations in which everybody participates.

The Yedidia homeland is named 'Syllii'.

Yedidia Character: Sylla

Sylla is relatively short and rounded; she has dark, olive skin and soft, brown eyes. Her hair falls down to her waist, and she wears a long, flowing kelly green robe, as is traditional among Yedidia women; more often than not, a chain of flowers rests in her hair. She chooses to go barefoot, so that she can feel the grass, the moss, the earth, and the stones beneath her feet.

The only possession which she carries is a small harp; a slow strum accompanies a soft and gentle song. She also has with her a pet: a milshh: a small, eyeless animal, about two feet long, with brilliant golden fur that is long and soft, two large, pointed ears, eight short, flexible legs ending in large paws, and a shiny black nose which is always sniffing inquisitively. It is both shy and curious, and it is very warm and affectionate; it is usually very calm and sedate, but often becomes very excited when it smells someone familiar.

A quote:

Fair is the sunlight;
Fairer still the moonlight;
Fairest of all, is the light of thy face.

Jec

The Jec life is filled with faith, humility, and simplicity. They live in small rural villages, where farmland — pastures, fields, orchards and vineyards, the village commons — outlies a few houses, some artisan's shops, and a simple church.

They are peasants very much like those chosen to be apostles, and the carpenter who chose them. Farmers, blacksmiths, cobblers — clothed in rough, plainly colored robes, they are the sort of people one could easily overlook in the search for the spectacular. It is calloused hands and dirty fingernails that are lifted up to God in worship, and that continue to worship by placing a yoke on a pair of oxen, gathering firewood, peeling carrots and potatoes, or threshing wheat. There are many who are given great wisdom and knowledge, a faith to move mountains, or who speak in the tongues of men and angels, but they do not bear an otherworldly air or a strange electricity; they appear as men and women like any other, usually harvesting barley or carving wood.

Their thought is expressed in parables, little stories, and proverbs, the first and foremost of which are "Love Yahweh your God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your might," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is a great sense of community and continuity, carrying the torch passed down by the saints who walked before.

They do not really travel; most are born, live, and die within a few miles of a single point. They do not look down on wayfarers who voyage far and wide to see the height of mountains and the vastness of seas, and enjoy the richness of the visible and invisible artifacts of the variety of cultures, but they pay a lot of attention to what is easy to pass by without noticing. They know their culture, their village, and its people very well.

Jec culture is a culture of the very small. They see the great in the small; in the Law of Love is seen all of virtue and right action; in a tiny shoot pushing out of the ground they see an immense oak whose branches will someday provide shade; in a simple gift, they see the love

that gave it. They are fond of the words, "He who is faithful in little is also faithful in much." Piety is given expression in the tiny details of everyday life, to which careful attention is devoted. They search to love God by seeing to the needs of whoever they are with.

Gift giving occupies an important cultural position; each gift serves as a little symbol, a little morsel, of love. The gifts are very simple — poverty does not permit the spectacular — but are given generously. A flower, an apple, a song, a blessing, a handshake, a prayer, a poem, a cup of cold water wood carved into a statue or a whistle, an oddly shaped pebble, a skin of wine, a walk, a story, a patterned candle — all of these are given.

Sight, sound, touch, smell, taste — there is nothing really special about their use of senses. They notice and enjoy little details; there is not much more to say.

The language has simple rules and few words; it is one of the easiest to learn, and bears well the load of talking about everyday matters, about personality and friendship, and about God.

When two Jec meet, one is usually coming to visit the other, and something of this notion of visit and welcome is embodied in the greeting. The visitor comes with one arm outstretched and hand open, saying, "I give you my love." The host clasps the outstretched hand, bowing slightly, and says, "And I return to you mine." These actions are accompanied by a gentle smile.

They are fairly short, with tan skin, brown eyes, and hair that is usually brown (and sometimes black or sandy blonde).

Their emotions are the emotions of being human, the common points of feeling shared across all culture. They know at least something of laughter and peace and passion and tears and awe; if there is one point that runs strong, it is a sense of tradition, community, continuity, and place; they have a sense of unique importance and a part in the great plan (two concepts which are not really separate in their thought).

Their worship services are simple, without any real distinguishing

Jec worship services are simple, without any real distinguishing remarks — no bells and smells, just a week by week liturgical service presenting the Gospel message and embodying worship. The opening words of each service are, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh your God is one. You shall love Yahweh your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind, and with all of your might. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love one another."

The Jec homeland is named 'Tev'.

Shal

The language is soft, gentle, simple, and calm. It is spoken slowly, as if it were a lullaby; it has few words: simple, little words with rich and profound connotations; 'Way', 'Tao', and 'Word' are like the nouns which are used.

Even the verbs are rarely verbs which tell of action. Rather, they describe that which is; 'be', 'abide in', 'embody', 'love', 'nourish', 'support', 'is the friend of', 'know', 'receive', 'is from', 'resemble', 'live', are the essential words which a child would learn as one of our children would learn words such as 'walk', 'talk', 'eat'. Just as our language has different words — 'walk', 'run', 'jog', 'sprint', 'mosey', 'trot', for example — which tell of the action of moving by the use of legs, so their language has at least a few different words to tell of being, or understanding, or abiding, or loving. The way of speaking sometimes does not even need verbs; there are more adjectives than adverbs.

The genius of the language is embodied in a flowing prose which is the purest poetry; words with the simplicity of a child. It does not have abruptly ending sentences, but rather slides somewhat like Hebrew; one thought gives form to the next. It has something like the feel of the prologue to John's account of the Gospel, or his first letter; it has something like the feel of a Gregorian chant; there is nothing abrupt in their speech or music. They speak, but even more, they are silent; there is a communion.

The understanding is one which sees beyond, which looks at the surface and sees into the depths. They stand dazzled by the glory of the starry vault, and worship the awesome Creator who called them into being; they look at a friend's face and see the person behind.

Their culture is a place of perfect order. It is ordered by things being placed rightly; by God worshiped by man, the spiritual ahead of the physical, being beyond doing.

It is of this that God is known in all of his majesty, that spirituality

becomes rich and profound, that there is a right state of being. This brings the lesser things to flourish. Men shine as they reflect the glory of God. That which is physical is enjoyed immensely — the warmth and softness of a friend's touch, the sweetness of a freshly picked orange, the fragrance of a garden of flowers, the sound of a bird's song, the colors of a sunset — all of these things are received gratefully. Being, they do; they tend the garden, and create.

The order flows from resting in the Spirit and from love; there is no one who thinks of order. The truthfulness knows nothing of oaths; the order knows nothing of rules, nor even of honor and morality.

The culture is best understood, not by looking at men, but by looking at God. God gives generously, and they receive and rest in his love.

There are many people in modern society who, when waiting in an office or at a traffic light, become agitated and begin to fidget; they are hollowed out by an excess of doing. The Shal are innocent of such hurry. They act, but it is a doing which flows from being.

Food, wine, music, incense, touch, silence, storytelling, dance, drama, puppetry — it is not often that they all get together to have a celebration (they prize greatly time spent alone with one person, and then extended families and tightly knit communities).

Shal culture does not exactly have greetings as such; their way of thought works differently.

To say 'hello' or 'goodbye' is an action of an instant, in two senses. In one sense, it lasts for an instant; no one says 'hello' twenty times or shakes hands for five minutes. In the other sense, it marks an instant, the instant where absence becomes presence or presence becomes absence.

The Shal do not really think in terms of instants; time is measured and perceived — or, rather, not measured and not perceived — by moments. A friend is present, and he is enjoyed, and then he is absent, and then there is solitude. In the place of a greeting, the Shal have a presence. With the Shal, you never get the feeling that you are alone and there is another person nearby who is also alone; you never get the

there is another person nearby who is also alone, you never get the feeling that there is a close group of friends nearby and they are inside and you are outside. If a Shal is nearby, he is present; indeed, the Shal have a very present touch.

Life, to the Shal, is full of moments. There is a meal with friends, and then there is reflection in solitude, and then there is a beautiful song, and then there is time with a friend, and then there is prayer, and then there is sleep, and then there is work tending to the trees... There is not interruption or haste; a moment lasts as long as it is appropriate for a moment to last.

Their moments of community are profound; their moments of solitude are even more profound. 'Withdrawing' is what they call it; it is a time of stillness, and an expression of a love so profound that all other loves appear to be hate. It is a time of finding a secret place, and then withdrawing — from family, friends, and loved ones, from music and the beauty of nature, from cherished activities, from sensation — into the heart of the Father. It is a time of — it is hard to say what. Of being loved, and of loving. Of growing still, and becoming. Of being set in a right state, and realigned in accordance with the ultimate reality. Of purity from the Origin. Of being made who one is to be. Of communion and worship. Of imago dei filled with the light of Deus. Of being pulled out of time and knowing something of the Eternal.

This withdrawing fills them with an abundant love for other people, and gives them a renewed appreciation for nature and music; it fills them with silence, and fills their words and song.

Their perception of the world is quintessentially tactile. Sight, hearing, and smell all work at a distance; touch perceives what is immediately present. The eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are all organs of sense at one place on the body — more sensitive in some places and less in others, to be sure — and feels all of what is immediately present. Touch provides the physical side of the presence which is so greatly valued.

The emotional side of the culture is filled by peace, in which is embedded joy and contentment. It does not change very much or very quickly — though it encompasses affection, or appreciation of beauty, or a

special serenity, or absorption in thought.

Their appearances have the peculiar property of not seeming to be any particular age. If you look, age is not very difficult to judge, but somehow the thought doesn't come up. They have a rounded shape, soft eyes, and warm, soft skin.

Shal worship services are different from the others. They are characterized, not by the presence of words, but by the presence of a profound and penetrating silence where God is imminent. There are a few words, but they are not where the essence lies.

The Shal homeland is named 'Liss'.

Janra

The Janra, unlike any of the other cultures, have no homeland; they voyage among the other lands, where they are generally well-liked and warmly received. Their wayfaring is at once literal and symbolic: literal in the sense that they know that they are passing through this earthly country for a better one. They enjoy all of the lands that they visit — they have an informal character, and always seem to be at home — but they know that none of them is really home.

It must be said that they know how to move. They can walk, skip, and run, of course, but that is only the beginning. Trees, buildings, and cliffs are climbed like ladders. Come oceans, rivers, and lakes, they will happily swim. Be it lightly skipping atop a thin wall, or jumping out of a window to grab a tree branch and swing down, or running at top speed through the twisty passages of the Southern mines and caves, they make acrobatics seem another form of walking. Somehow, even flipping through a window or somersaulting under a table, they have an extraordinary knack for barely missing collisions with hard objects; the Urvanovestilli are still debating whether this is the result of skill or luck.

The dances of the Urvanovestilli have a marvelous complexity, and those of the Yedidia are known for their flowing grace, but there is still nothing like the spinning energy of the Janra. The Janra are very adaptable, pulling bits and pieces from other cultures and setting them together in vital new combinations. In some of the dances can be seen bits and pieces — moves of strength that look like Tuz wrestling, or complexity from the Urvanovestilli — and the result is nothing short of breathtaking.

In their adaptability, they usually speak at least a few words of each language, and usually borrow whatever form of greeting is common in the land they are visiting. They are familiar with the household objects (often enough to use them in new ways). This, combined with a flair for practical jokes, is occasionally enough to annoy the town guards, but (more often than not) their antics leave people laughing, sometimes to the point of tears

the point of tears.

The Janra have a remarkable talent for not remaking God in their image. Their description of Jesus is anything but boring and respectable — a firebrand with a phenomenal knack for offending religious leaders, in the habit of telling respectable pillars of society things such as, "The prostitutes and tax collectors are entering the Kingdom of Heaven ahead of you." — and they are known for an honesty that can be singularly blunt. They know that he passed over scribes and lawyers to call, as disciples, a motley crew of fishermen, tax collectors, and other peasants — one terrorist thrown in to make matters interesting. They are, however, just as cautious not to water him into only being a social reformer who had nothing to say about sexual purity.

For all of their sharpness, for all of their ability to bring forth the most embarrassing Scriptural teaching at the worst possible moment, it must also be said that the Janra have hearts of pure gold. Love and compassion are constantly in their thought and action; they are the first to share their food with a beggar, say hello to the person who is alone, or ask, "Are you hurting?" The accusations brought against them are accusations of having too many quirks, not of being unloving.

Their language is of a force that is not easily translated into writing; of course it has nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. and respects masculine and feminine, but intonation, speed, vocal tension, and other factors tell at least as much; they carry connotation and sentiment, express the level of clarity of understanding the speaker believes he has, and many more things. There are also a number of verbal tics, on the order of two or three dozen ('Eh?' is, however, not included, and apparently perceived to be a mark of general silliness); in a sense, they don't do anything, but in a sense, they add a very nice pepper to the speech.

Janra thought involves a kind of sideways logic, which is part of why their ways of speaking are difficult to describe. They take little bits and pieces from different places, and put them together in unexpected ways, making connections that can be very surprising. They are very good at reading between the lines, and sometimes perceive things which were not intentionally meant to be communicated. Sometimes they borrow

manners of speech from other people — conversation, structured argument, metered verse, stories, parables, and so on — but their usual way of speaking has all sorts of sideways jumps and turns, with segues that can be rather odd, and often leaves gaps; these gaps are not a matter of sloppiness, but rather something like a joke or riddle where the hole is intentionally left to be filled in by the listener.

"When it comes to games, never try to understand the Janra mind."

-Oeildubeau, Urvanovestilli philosopher and anthropologist

It is known that Janra sports usually last for at least half an hour, involve a ball, two or more teams, running and acrobatics, and animated discussion. Beyond that, neither the Urvanovestilli's logic nor the Yedidia's intuition are able to make head or tail of them. In general, the teams appear to have unequal numbers of players; the players often switch teams in the course of play; teams are created and dissolved; the nature of the activities makes sudden and radical changes; there is no visible winning or losing. There are occasionally times in the course of play when some intelligible goal appears to be being approached... but then, all players seem to be approaching it in a rather erratic manner (when asked why he didn't do thus and such simple thing and achieve the approached goal by an inexperienced anthropologist, one of the Janra said, "Technically, that would work, but that would be a very boring way to do it," and then bolted back into play: the extent to which game play is comprehensible heightens its incomprehensibility). Late in life, Oeildubeau hinted at having suspicions that, if the Janra believe that they are being watched, they will spontaneously stop whatever sport they are playing, and instead begin a series of activities expressly designed to give any observer a headache.

Janra come in all shapes, sizes, and colors, showing bits and pieces of other races; they tend to be of moderate to tall height and a lithe build. Most are fairly light skinned (although a few are rather dark); a fair number of them have skin spotted with freckles. They have every imaginable color of hair (black, brown, blonde, grey, white, red, tweed, shaven head, etc). and eyes (brown, blue, hazel, grey, amber, purple, etc).

They wear loose clothing in a variety of colors, usually quite vivid; red, purple, and green are the most common of solid colors, and patches or stripes of some pattern or the whole rainbow appear not infrequently. Therefore, Al is a pud.

Their sensation of the world is primarily visual, and in a way patterned after their thought; visualizing and visual problem solving comes very naturally to them. They see, as well as beauty, a world to interact with, and parts to rearrange and make something new. Sound and touch serve largely to complement and extend visual image; taste and smell are enjoyed, but do not play a terribly large role. The other side of the coin (to problem solving) is observing and enjoying, which is also very much a part of culture.

Their emotional life has several sides. They carry with them, in their emotions, a little bit of every place and people they visit — the passion and control of the Urvanovestilli, the peace of the Shal, the festivities and music of the Yedidia, the respect of the Nor'krin, the enjoyment of exercise of the Tuz, the common factor of the Jec. Perhaps the most prominent side of all is laughter. Janra are immeasurably fond of banter and practical jokes, and have an uncanny knack for guessing who is ticklish. There is an element of what is carefree, spontaneous, and given to pure enjoyment of simple pleasures; there is also a large element of being immersed in sidethink, and they enjoy greatly the flash of insight when everything fits together. They are curious and enjoy discovery.

There is another side to this emotion which seems paradoxical, but fits perfectly. There is a difference between childlike and childish, and not a trace of childishness is to be found among them. They enter the Kingdom of Heaven as little children — in particular, like one little boy who stood up before crowds of thousands and asked, "Why is the Emperor naked?" Of all the skills people learn as a part of growing up, they know perhaps least of all closing their eyes and using intelligence as a tool to make oneself stupid. They are moved by what goes unnoticed, smiling at the beauty in a single blade of grass, and weeping at the death of a beggar who, homeless, friendless, handicapped and burned, explained that he was unable to drop a knife taped to his defunct hand for self-defense, but was still shot and killed outside of the White House by

men entrusted with the responsibility of protecting innocent life.

There are two things to said about Janra worship. The first is that they adapt and participate in whatever is the local manner of worship (as do traveling Urvanovestilli and other wayfarers) — in that regard, they make no distinction between themselves and the peoples that they visit. The second — and this does not stem from any perceived defect in the other forms of worship, but from who they are — is that they hold their own worship services.

These services do not occur at a fixed time and place (though they occur more frequently when Janra are on the road between different locations), but at random intervals and locations, spontaneously. Anyone and everyone is welcome, and children and sometimes adults of other races are usually present.

They are a warm and informal occasions, where anyone can take the lead, and a great many activities are recognized as worship; the Janra have a particularly strong emphasis on the priesthood of the believer and the sacredness of everyday life. People sit in a big circle, and people or groups of people come to the center to present or lead as they wish.

There is no canonical list of activities that are performed at these services, but the following are common.

* Songs. The Janra sing their own songs (often improvised) or those of other peoples; those of the Yedidia are especially treasured. While singing, the people are sometimes still, sometimes swaying, sometimes clapping, and sometimes dancing with their arms.

* Prayer. One person will lead a prayer, or people will pray popcorn style, or...

* Sermons. A theologian or philosopher will preach a sermon.

* Sharing. Someone will share an insight or experience from personal life.

* Dance. The whole assembly will dance, sometimes in a long, snaking line.

* A joke is told. The Janra are fond of laughter.

* Drama. One of a few people will present a dramatic presentation, play, or skit.

* ...

- * Group hug, usually in whatever is the common greeting of the land.
 - * Ticklefest. "Blessed are the ticklish, for the touch of a friend will fill them with laughter."
 - * Silence. This is treasured.
 - * Reading from the Scriptures.
 - * Reading or recitation of poetry.
 - * Storytelling.
 - * Juggling and similar activities.
 - * Acrobatics.
 - * Instrumental music.
 - * Non sequiturs.
 - * Miming.
 - * Mad libs.
 - * Impressions and impersonations of various and sundry people.
 - * Janra-ball. This occurs in a modified form such that members of other races, while still not understanding anything, are capable of participating. (Nobody gets a headache.)
 - * Eucharist. This is the most solemn and important moment, and occurs exactly once in a service — at the end.
 - * None of the above. This category is especially appreciated.
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Janra character: Nimbus

Nimbus is fairly short and wiry; he has light, almost white blonde hair, deep, intense blue eyes which sparkle and blaze, and a rich, laughing smile. He wears a loose, shimmering two-legged robe of midnight blue, from the folds of which he seems to be able to procure innumerable items of Urvanovestilli make (for example: goggles (waterproof), telescope, silk rope and grappling hook with spring-loaded launcher, climbing/rapelling harness and gear/self-contained, spring-loaded belay), lantern, tool kit (large blade, precision blade, compass, wire saw, corkscrew, ruler, reamer, chisel, pliers, scissors, needle, punch, protractor, file, and sharpening stone), paper pad, mechanical pencil, supply kit (string, pencil lead, chalk, flask of oil, wire, miscellaneous device components (gears, springs, shafts, etc.), cloth), meal kit, tinderbox, mechanical puzzle, mirror, whistle...).

During childhood, he spent a lot of time in the land of the Urvanovestilli, and began to take an interest in tinkering. He has very much his own way of tinkering, from an Urvanovestilli perspective; he is fond of all manner of kludges. The resulting devices have caused his Urvanovestilli mentors to conclude that he is mad (the truth of the matter being that he is not mad, but produces and modifies contraptions in such a manner as to drive any honest Urvanovestilli tinkerer mad). When the city unveiled a new fountain in the public square, he added a pyrotechnic spark; when, in a public ceremony, the mayor celebrated his wife's birthday by presenting a specially commissioned music box, the tune somehow changed from "Happy birthday to you" to "The old grey mare ain't what she used to be."

He does, however, possess a sense of what is and is not appropriate; his practical jokes never take on a mean or spiteful character, and he does possess a strong degree of contrainte. He does appreciate the variety of cultures he visits, and enjoys Urvanovestilli philosophical and theological discussions.

He is, in short, as Janra as any — left-handed and colorful, warm and compassionate, and a heart of solid gold.

A quote: "What? You think I would do something like that? I'm hurt." (generally accompanied by a wide grin)