

SOLA SCRIPTURA

A Dialogue

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A Dialogue in which Friends
eagerly pursue the Right & Proper
Understanding of Salvation,
Authority, Scripture, Glory, the
Word of God, & the Canon—
reaching some Conclusion about
the Relationship between
Scripture, Tradition, & Reason—
and What to do about It.

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For Jim, Alishia, and Kirk: for whose sake I could wish that I
were accursed and cut off from Christ.

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PREFACE

Sola Scriptura is an invitation to conversation. I hope you enjoy it and (more importantly) learn through conversation with your friends, and with me.

It started out as a joke (isn't it funny how serious jokes can be?); it developed into an earnest inquiry into Holy Scripture. The dialogue format retains the playfulness that between friends, even in serious discussion about theology and (ultimately) salvation.

Peter Kreeft says he writes the books he wants to read, but that no one has written yet, so he has to. I wanted to read a book that analyzed *Sola Scriptura* in a story. I've read a half-dozen prose books on the subject, but few stories—a lot of heated argument, but precious little real *dialogue*. Theology never takes place in a vacuum, nor in some purely intellectual angelic space. What about the textured, dappled histories of these doctrines? What about their practical outcomes?

I wanted to see the arguments from every angle—a dramatic dialogue, like Plato's, that would analyze *ideas* but also reflect on *people*. I wanted to see real people, like my friends, my pastor, American professors, or my high school students—to see them in a realistic setting, exploring, conflicting, breaking ties, abandoning promises, and considering new ideas no matter how radical and ridiculous.

No one had written this yet. So I had to. This is my offering to you, to likewise explore, analyze, and reflect.

The dialogue is divided into three main parts. The first part is Chapter 1, a sort of preface or prelude “written” by an unknown college student. The second part is Chapters 2-5, wherein the primary topic of conversation is *salvation*. The third part is Chapters 6-9, wherein the primary topic is *authority*. Both of these parts are “written” and compiled by John Mark Reynolds. I leave it to the reader to further sub-divide the structure.

Who are the characters? You'll meet two friends at the beginning: Andrew, and the unnamed implied author of Chapter 1. For the rest of the story, however, these two are not the *authors* but the *auditors*. Their importance can't be overstated, of course, to the story, since they are young men in pursuit of truth, and ready to hear it. However, their reaction, like your reaction, to the arguments is not included within the book.

Most of your time you'll spend with John Mark Reynolds, the implied author of chapters 2-9. In real life, like many American Christians, he started out in a small evangelical denomination, and travelled a long, winding, (and sometimes dark) road before he arrived back at his Father's home. Herein, I've dramatized and time-condensed this process into one pivotal conversation. John Mark and his graduate school friends engage Father Seraphim Rose (an Eastern Orthodox Monk) in a full-scale examination of salvation and Scripture. While the dialogue herein is only occasionally historical, the man does exist. Knowing him personally is not necessary to understanding the story.

The book is, at bottom, a stylized and dramatized journey of John Mark Reynolds losing friends, making friends, trusting reason, and doubting his faith.

Father Seraphim Rose, too, is a real historical person—and many details are pulled from Hieromonk Damascene's excellent biography, *Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works*. But the occasion of the conversation and many details of the portrait within are supplied by invention. I hope it does him honor.

With these qualifications regarding John Mark and Seraphim Rose, I may say without qualification that the other characters are pure literary inventions whose job is to illuminate my theme.

The theme, of course, is Scripture—but not merely the Bible. Since the Latin word 'scriptura' means 'writing,' the examination necessarily ranged over *writing* in general, the Bible in particular. From there, the theme is the Church, the Christian community, the "body of Christ," whose life and controversies revolve around the items (like salvation) written about so controversially in the Bible.

The setting is a mixture of fact and mere likelihood. St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Rochester, New York exists, but I have never been there. I would like to thank them for letting me borrow the name, and assure the reader that any imperfections implied are purely fictional.

Hence the dramatic setting itself contributes to the theme. It is a dialogue (live and in person) recorded and published later (in written form), and read aloud (live and in person) by two college students (in

written form).

It's not quite a novel, nor quite a play. It's technically a "platonic dialogue," which so far as I can tell means "a play whose subject is so intellectual as to bore normal theater-goers." As a literary or philosophical genre, such "plays" have somewhat fallen out of style, but never out of merit. What I love about Plato (and Augustine, and Maximos the Confessor, and Peter Kreeft) is that delicate organic interplay of people & their ideas.

Plato avoids the dual pitfall of (boring) informative lecture and (shallow) enjoyable narrative. Therefore, I took him as a guide not only in thinking, but in writing. There is much room for innovation in Platonic dialogue (for instance, Professor Kreeft's series on Socrates), but I have chosen a rather conservative imitation of Plato's great English translators, especially G.M.A. Grube, and Professor Allan Bloom, and the brilliant Seth Benerdete.

I hope that this unfamiliar blending of literary, philosophical and historical content does not distract you from the dialogue's main purpose, which is to create space for authentic, friendly discussion about difficult subjects, between you and me, or between you and *your* friends.

So much is helpful in approaching the book. If there is any curiosity as to the author—the subjects discussed are those that occupied my mind and my heart, and many hours of conversation with my friends and family: Denominational fracturing, the loss of faith in Western culture, academic hostility to Christianity, the slow dwindling of church-attendance, and the theological quagmire at the root of it all.

I was raised an evangelical Christian in Southern California. I had (and still have) deep struggles with the faith, both intellectually and emotionally. But I was not the only one whose own Christian beliefs were as tenuous as spider webs. I have watched dozens of my close childhood friends "walk away from the faith." Many times, I thought, for lack of rooted reflection on the teaching we received in high school and college. I at least did not reflect, certainly not until college.

My dad was a Four Square church pastor in Westminster when I was little, before he moved into Christian talk radio. My earliest memories are attending a new church, the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anaheim, under the leadership of John Wimber. John Wimber was one of the thousands of hippie converts of the 60's & 70's, ushered into the Kingdom by Chuck Smith.

Wimber was one who became more charismatic than many of his fellows were comfortable with, so he started the Vineyard. I grew up in this

community of spiritually-minded people, less theologically exacting than mainline Pentecostals, but more Biblically-rooted than the esoteric sects of Christian spiritualists—you know the type, the churches that virtually end up Christian mediums, not descendants of Luther and Calvin. I was weaned on charismatic worship and simple Bible preaching. Thus, I went to college at Biola University with as many assumptions as my Reformed friends, but much fewer arguments. I didn't know the five *Solas*. I didn't know what year the Reformation happened. I'm not sure I even knew a Reformation happened...Reform *what*?

Sola Scriptura is the doctrine I was “born into,” you might say. And a fish doesn't know it's wet. I was never taught the doctrine explicitly, but being a clever little lad, I understood the unspoken or implied instruction as clearly as a message in the sky.

In college I had the opportunity to read church history for the first time, to dialogue with Christians of various denominations, to hear arguments from all sides, to reflect on and defend my deeply-held assumptions. I experienced a radical transformation of my mind and heart during those formative years.

After a winding journey back to the traditional Church, I realized my path is not unique. This book became the reflection and solidification of that path, and thus, I thought, might be helpful to others who are searching, seeking, questioning, reading, and dialoging.

During that time, I noticed some curious facets of religion in the world today you might have noticed yourself. (1) What sometimes seems a perpetual war between atheists, agnostics, scientists, rationalists, and secular humanists and Christians, is actually going somewhere. The brothers Christopher and Peter Hitchens represent the religious chaos with an almost-fictional perfection. The people from the most committed Christian families sometimes become the most rabid antagonists of the faith—Nietzsche once wrote hymns to Jesus. But also the non-believers lose ranks every day. They have taken casualties in men like C. S. Lewis, Chesterton, Anthony Flew, Thomas Nagel. (2) Many (including myself) who were most committed to their particular tradition within Christianity transferred to another ‘room down the hall’, as Lewis might say. The recent conversion of Francis Beckwith is one example—also, think of the denominational roving of John Henry Newman, Hugh Hewitt, and Jaroslav Pelikan. (Sarah Palin and Peter Kreeft have curious stories—isn't it as difficult to be Catholic in politics as to be Evangelical in academics?) Millions of not-so-famous Christians switch camps: Eastern Orthodox immigrants converting in droves to Evangelical Protestantism; Catholics going to Protestant tent meetings and “getting saved” for the first time; Reformed Christians read church history and getting

christened; Presbyterians and charismatics changing places; Anglicans and Episcopalians all over the world becoming charismatic or high Anglo-Catholic, or Eastern Orthodox; back in England herself millions of Christians becoming atheistic and humanistic. (3) Despite growing numbers of Muslims in the western world (not to mention the Middle East and Africa), many hundreds of thousands (some reports say millions) of Muslims are converting to Christianity, especially a Pentecostal or evangelical flavor. The same is true in China and Latin America.

In other words, non-religious people are becoming religious, religious people are becoming non-religious, non-Christian religious people are becoming Christians, and Christians of one community are switching communities. To note a “trend” is to be immediately refuted. These bewildering facts demand an explanation.

Of course, one possible explanation is to reduce all religious migration to merely sociological phenomena—“there is no right religion; all such ideological switches are ascribed to social pressure, psychological longings, or nationality-envy.” Maybe this explanation is right—but you and I must admit that, if so, we have given up the search for truth altogether. Two thousand years of Church history with some claim to the *sui generis* nature of Jesus and his followers must be abandoned.

A second more promising explanation is to fight for Christianity as the “one true religion,” but reduce all denominational migration to merely sociological phenomena—“there is no right denomination, etc.” Those who are satisfied with this explanation will probably find this book tiresome, overly complicated, or perhaps a bit quaint.

As seductive as the explanation may be, a few nagging questions remain: What are the essentials of the faith that unite us all in the great house? Jesus, surely. But which Jesus? “Who do you say that I am?” The identity of Jesus, I may modestly suggest, is the very crux of the issue, and many mutually-exclusive answers compete.

Furthermore, Who gets to decide those essentials? Is C.S. Lewis (against his will) starting a new “mere Christian” denomination, standing along side Greek Orthodoxy and Presbyterianism? Upon examination, we realize that the some Calvinists have more in common with Muslims than with the Charismatics. The differences between Roman Catholicism and Quakers are in some ways larger than the difference between Mormonism and Brahmanism.

With such gaping differences, if there is no one denomination that is *more right* than the others, then how can we argue there is one religion that is *more right* than the others?

A third possible explanation is that there exist bedrock truths from which humanity world-wide tends to become unmoored, and to which all people, Christians first, and then all of God's children, must return or else fail to know and serve the true God. Of course, this is basically a re-statement of the Christian dogma of original sin. The conclusion, however, is that some people are right in their views about God, and others wrong—that some Christians are right in their doctrines, and others wrong. Such a commonsense conclusion is so contrary to the spirit of the age that to some, even Christians, this explanation will seem laughable.

I offer this book, then, as an invitation to those few still curious to explain the facts with a scientific spirit of consistency and intellectual honesty, who determine to unravel the confusion, who still trust in reason and the Holy Spirit in the face of to penetrate beyond the surface of abject chaos to some meaningful patterns underneath, who still hope for church unity without compromise, who still look for truth, wherever it can be found. As Socrates says in the *Laches*, “Modesty is not good for a needy man.” I am not modest, and so I run like a fool wherever there is water for my thirsty soul. I pant for truth, eternal truth—if you do too, then let's dialogue.

Every project is a group project. I'd like to acknowledge the invaluable help of many who formed this book from its beginning to completion. I would not be any sort of Christian today without C.S. Lewis (especially *Surprised by Joy*) and Plato (especially *Gorgias*), Richard Weaver (*Ethics of Rhetoric*), and Morris Engel (*With Good Reason*), and many friendly arguments with friends, and attention of mentors like John Mark Reynolds, Fred Sanders, and Christianne Squires. More immediately, I must thank Fr. Jim Salladin, whose lively and stimulating email exchange, even in the midst of a busy ordination process, formed the seed of Chapter 7, and—really—for whom I undertook this project. Fr. Jim, I hope you are well answered. Zak and Michael and Brandon were the friends who made the jokes that predestined the project. Alishia Fry first braved a reading of the rough draft and offered invaluable critique. Naomi Geier offered to do a grammatical edit, Hope Bartel did the first edit of grammar, punctuation, and style—though the remaining punctuation errors are mine. Michael Garten not only did content-edits on several chapters, but the countless hours of good conversation with him were a model and inspiration of indefatigable, friendly, intellectually-rigorous pursuit of truth. Also, thanks to the Donovans, who let me “house-sit” for them, an opportunity I used to begin writing. To my friends in the Hall, thanks for suffering with me and dialoguing with me through these issues in real-time. You are the best intellectual community I could imagine. And to Elizabeth, thanks for being *my* hope, and my partner in all things. Let's dialogue.

Above all, my friend, I ask you to enjoy the story, and ask the authentic questions that that arise in you. Agree, disagree, love the characters, hate them—only don't give up the search. Otherwise, my contributions to the ongoing dialogue will amount to nothing.

K.E.D.B.

August 19, 2010

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(in order of appearance)

CHAPTER 1

Unnamed friend

a Protestant Student

Andrew

an Orthodox Student

John Mark Reynolds (Older)

an Orthodox Professor

CHAPTERS 2-9

John Mark Reynolds (Younger)

a Protestant Christian

Father Seraphim Rose

an Orthodox Christian Monk

John Paul

a Roman Catholic Christian

Charlie

a Methodist Christian

Henry

an Anglican Christian

CHAPTER 1: FRIENDS IN APORIA

Friend: “If only you had been there with Bishop Joseph!” my friend Andrew said. I protested: Why shouldn’t we read the transcript?

Andrew: “They only recorded part of his speech.”

F: “Every little bit helps...”

A: “But you’ll miss the emotions in his voice, the way he pronounces and annunciates, his emphasis—all the *sounds*.”

F: “Is his theology the intelligible message of his words, or the vibrations in the air as he talks?”

A: “Very funny, but you know what I mean.”

F: “No, I don’t.”

A: “Tell me, what good would a transcript do? The fact is that I *heard* him, and *I* don’t fully understand it. Having a written text—which *seems* to know what it’s saying—doesn’t help if you don’t understand it.”

F: “A book, though, you can read over and over if you don’t understand it.”

A: “—What if you don’t understand it the second time? A book is like a video or recording. It’s dead, it can’t respond to questions; it just keeps saying the same thing over and over.”

F: “Then why do we use books and videos and recordings so often in instruction if it ‘doesn’t help?’”

A: “You can learn *something* from a transcript. But you can never escape an *impasse* if you read it and don’t fully understand. With a live speaker, if he says or writes something you don’t understand, you can continue the conversation by asking him a question; but in this case, the author flew out of town yesterday. With a book, you could dialogue

with *yourself*, but even *you* might realize that ignorance cannot answer its own question.”

F: “Fine. But I choose option four, which you left out.”

A: “What option do you mean?”

F: “Asking a live person who was *with* the speaker at the time the writing was made.”

A: “I didn’t leave that out on accident, my friend. Sure, you may ask someone who was there, but if possible that person should know the speaker or author well, spending time asking and answering questions, so as to know his mind.”

F: “Haven’t *you* spent time with Bishop Joseph?”

A: “I’ve heard him speak several times, but I’ve never asked him any questions.”

F: “Well, I knew it. You were teasing me just enough to paralyze me, and now you intend to confuse me, and abandon me in *aporia*.”

A: “Look! There’s Dr. Reynolds coming out of his office.”

F: “He looks like he’s in a hurry.”

1.2 APOLOGIA

A: “Won’t he stop for two desperate students, eager to learn? Dr. Reynolds! It’s a bit late to be in the office, isn’t it?”

Dr. John Mark Reynolds: “I finished a long meeting with the Provost and the Taskforce Committee. Good news! I get to keep my job... At least for now!”

A: “Congratulations. You’re going home to be with Hope?”

JM: “She is arriving soon to take me to EV Free Fullerton, where I am lecturing on the ‘The Love of Beauty.’ But why are you in Sutherland when you should be getting ready for graduation tomorrow?”

F: “We finished our last class for the year, so we’re free to discuss the important but not urgent questions.”

JM: “I wish I could join you. Which questions?”

F: “Augustine’s definition of Grace quickly turned into a discussion of Albert Camus’ statement that, ‘There is but one truly serious

philosophical problem – and that is suicide.’ Except I would add that Camus underestimated the stakes, and the ‘Rich Young Ruler’ in Matthew 19 got it right: There is only one truly serious philosophical question, and that is ‘what I must do to be saved?’”

JM: “So what shall you do?”

F: “Frankly, Dr. Reynolds, I don’t know. If I died tonight, would I inherit eternal life?”

JM: “That’s pertinent question, considering you almost did die! We prayed for you in class.”

F: “You heard about the car accident last week, then?”

JM: “I heard you were OK, glory to God. “

F: “I have never been so frightened in all of my life. It wasn’t the crash itself, actually. It was the sound of crunching metal, the butterflies in my stomach as the car flipped, the powerlessness of dangling upside down just waiting. I have to remind myself to keep focus on what’s important, because death could come at any time.”

JM: “And that seems right. After his death sentence, Socrates was only motivated to pursue wisdom harder. So, Andrew, what do you think we must do?”

A: “Well, Dr. Reynolds, obviously I think salvation comes about through faith, but not faith alone. That’s where we got hung up and left Augustine behind long ago. See, Bishop Joseph was in town last week and gave a talk about ‘salvation by faith and love,’ which I’ve been trying to explain to him. I think salvation by faith and love harmonizes with James and Paul. But Lewis said ‘Opposition is true friendship,’ in which case my friend here is truly a friend, for he disagrees with me, and says so. But his questions confused me, so now we’re both stuck. I have the transcript, but I don’t want him to read it, I want to discuss it.”

F: “I’m all for discussion, but I don’t know what to say about salvation, by faith or love. After four years reading and discussing the Bible and the Great Books, here in the Torrey Honors Program, double-majoring in Philosophy and Biblical Theology, I’ve lost the basics. Like everyone else, I grew up in church and have heard all the ‘right answers,’ which seem to help some people feel assured of their salvation in times of doubt. These do not work for me. I’ve read the Scriptures, I’ve read the Christian authors, I’ve interviewed my pastor, my professors, and I’ve gotten about as many answers as people. It’s not the little contradictions that bother me, like ‘did Jesus say this or that on the cross.’ It’s the big contradictions, between faith alone & faith plus. Frankly, I prefer talking about it to reading the

Bible right now.”

JM: “That’s a place to start. Do you have faith in Jesus?”

F: “I believe I have faith in Jesus, that he loves me, and died for me, and that my ‘sins are forgiven.’ Why then do I daily ask for help with my unbelief? Hebrews tells me to come ‘with a true heart in full assurance of faith,’ but I come with only partial assurance, some of the time, at best. Just because God loves me does not mean that I love God, and He said, ‘They shall know you are my disciples by your love.’ Just because he died for me does not mean I have died to myself, and he says, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’ [Mark 8:34] Just because my past sins are forgiven doesn’t mean my present sins are mortified, for he says ‘A good tree bears good fruit.’ He also says, ‘I have come that you may have life, and life abundantly.’ When I look at my life I see a mixture of some good fruit, and some bad fruit. I see that I am a loving person sometimes but not others, or loving to some people all of the time, and to some people never, or loving to one person in some ways but hateful in other ways. For this reason I talk to anyone who will talk back about all these things, older or younger, until I find the answer, or I find out there is no answer. Andrew here talks a lot about faith and love, but I don’t want to fall into works righteousness, so I’m at a loss.”

JM: “From the day you arrived, I thought you were good students, bright-eyed and eager. I told Fred Sanders ‘If their arrogance wears away, this class will be better than the first.’ Now I’m not a prophet but you’re turning my prediction true. Many are the students who come through Torrey and get a good education, discover the lost tools of learning, and so on. But some get caught in eristic dispute, vain contradictions of words with words, foolish controversies not after Christ. Few are those who learn the free man’s science, the science of conversation, dividing being according to kinds and not taking the same shape for a different one, or the different for same. Few are willing to devote themselves to strenuous participation in the logos for four or six years, and thus grasp that the divine Word is useful for correcting and training in righteousness, so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Ah, many are called, but few are chosen. Here, take this”

F: We didn’t totally understand him, but we laughed at his enthusiasm. He handed us a stack of papers, unbound. On each page was a mixture of printed text and hand-written notes.

JM: “We have much to discuss, but Hope will be here any second. By some divine providence I have just finished typing up this manuscript. It might help. Take and read it this weekend, since you are now free men.

Bring it back to my house on Sunday. By then you will have officially graduated, and my endless committee meetings will be over. We can sit at St. Anne's and speak face to face at our leisure."

F: Absolutely, Dr. Reynolds, thank you! We'll be there, Sunday afternoon, we'll even walk in the rain.

A: "What is it? A book? A speech? Is this Plato?"

JM: "No, not Plato, I wish! It is a Platonic dialogue, written by me and a few friends. It's actually a transcript of a sermon and the discussion that followed, which happen to be about Holy Scripture and salvation by faith. I wrote out the recording and added notes from memory and turned it into a sort of dramatic philosophical dialogue. That's only the first draft, so you'll have to let me know what you think."

A: "So this is from when you were in college? It really happened?"

JM: "Most of it. I was in graduate school, though, not college. I finished at Robert Wesleyan and was studying with Al Geier at the University of Rochester. The sermon we heard under strange circumstances. I was in a Religious Studies class and the teacher assigned us to visit two churches or religious groups we'd never been exposed to. So Atheists went to Pentecostal churches, Buddhists went to Jewish synagogues, and us nice Christian boys of from West Virginia had to either visit another religion entirely or another denomination from their own. Of course, my friends from class wanted to go together but it turned into a controversy, since some were Catholic, some Protestant, some Unitarian, Mormon, and so on. There was about four or five of us who were united, however, by our zeal for truth. We were critically examining everything, discarding the false and acquiring the true. First, against some of our better judgment, we visited a Unitarian Universalist group, but found what we feared: a Christianity trimmed and clipped almost beyond recognition. Bishop Spong says, 'Christianity must change or die,?' But we didn't buy that. We had already considered and rejected materialism, naturalism, and scientism. So our second visit needed to be somewhere foreign. My dad, who is now Anglican, used to be an Elim Fellowship pastor, so I was already familiar with many Protestant denominations. Through study and friendships, I was also familiar with Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism. We had many friends in these various traditions, so we were at a loss. Someone pointed out St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church, which we had driven by many times since moving to Rochester—the building is very beautiful—but had never been inside. None of us knew many Orthodox people, nor had we ever been to a service, except for my friend John Paul. Thus, I persuaded myself and the others to go to St. John's. It turns out, the visiting speaker was a very popular monk, so the

pastors recorded his homily, and by chance recorded the conversation that followed, except for when they switched batteries, because, as you can see, it was long.”

F: He opened the door to Sutherland hall and walked out, but Andrew grabbed him by the arm in the parking lot and pleaded with him. Dr. Reynolds turned around.

A: “Wait! One last question. Why did you take the time to transcribe it all? Is this the conversation that convinced you to join the Orthodox Church?”

JM: “Quite the opposite. This is when I gave up on Jesus and served Athena. You’ve heard me say before that I am probably the only person you know who has ever actually prayed to her. This is why – I, and my friends, were raised Christians but we were unsure about the God of Love. Studying with Dr. Geier, we became very sure about the Goddess of Wisdom. We fell in love with her. Not only that, but it was a dark time, for my first fiancé had just walked away from me the week of the wedding. We decided that if Jesus were unreasonable, we would choose Her over Him, and thus slowly, reluctantly—but proudly—we turned our backs on Christ. Of course, if it weren’t for a class that same year with Dr. Geier, I might still be an unbeliever. I married Hope, and followed the *logos* wherever it leads, first away from Jesus to Wisdom, then back through Wisdom to Jesus. He *is* ‘the smartest man who ever lived,’ as JP often says. I made many mistakes those years that were evil and foolish, and my reconciliation did not come but after much time in the valley of the shadow of death. But I’ll tell you this: I am the only one from that group of five who is attending a traditional Christian church today. My former roommate uses his priestly role at an Episcopalian Church to fight for the ordination of homosexuals, my Roman Catholic friend ascended to the bishopric and fights to allow the ordination of women in the New York diocese. As for my many Protestant friends, most no longer believe in Jesus Christ or the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. One is a Hindu, and one other committed suicide. The buzzing of my phone alerts me that Hope is here. Go under the Mercy.”

F: He thus abruptly blessed us. we thanked him again as he walked away. Wasting no time, Andrew and I went back inside the building, sat down on the nearest couch. This is what we read:

CHAPTER 2: SALVATION BY WHAT?

JM: The sun shone brightly this breezy Sunday in January, the day after the feast day of St. Anthony the Great of the Desert (though I did not know it at the time). My friends and I were visiting an Orthodox Church for a graduate-level religious studies class. I carpooled with my Roman Catholic friend John Paul (named after the Pope); my roommate Henry, the staunch Episcopalian; and a few others. In the van rode a Baptist, several Presbyterians, an Anabaptist, a Lutheran, and a Methodist. Batched in the third vehicle, a Unitarian fellow, a Jehovah's Witness, and a Mormon all witnessed to each other. With them moped a few unbelieving friends who did not care to visit any religious buildings, but who (rather than going alone) elected to come with us.

We all arrived at the church early and learned that a monk named Father Seraphim Rose would be giving the homily. I did not know much about him, but had heard his name. He was very popular amongst people our age because of his kindly manner, his sharp intelligence, and his very affable approach to discussing religious questions. He was especially good with the kind of spiritual seekers who abounded in the 70s. Even those who didn't know about his wit or grace knew about his impressively long beard.

The church itself was beautiful from the outside, but even more beautiful inside. The narthex, or foyer, of the church was softly lit, and we entered quietly, padding like timid kittens across the hard, purple carpet. The walls were dark wood, like an old Victorian mansion, and lined with large and ornately-worked metal candle-holders, flickering red-gold in the dim light. Just to the right was a life-sized icon of John the Baptist. Above our heads as we entered the nave of the church was a large icon of Christ, from the chest up, with arms extended wide, inviting us into the ark of life. As we entered the *nave*—the light from stained-glass windows casting a warm glow—the scene took our breath away. The strong smell of

myrrh, like a hundred rose gardens, filled the sanctuary. A reverent hush lay on the people—illuminated by candlelight glittering in reflections on the walls and images. The walls themselves were covered floor to ceiling with icons of the prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament, in robes painted of richly-colored egg tempura and halos of shimmering gold leaf. (It wasn't until later that I learned that the value of all that gold leaf was well over ten million dollars. I confess when I first heard this, my first thought was, "Why don't they peel this off and sell it, distributing the money to the poor?") At the front stood the iconostasis. On the left, life-sized portraits of St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. John the Baptist, and Mary with Jesus watched over the congregation. On the right stood a portrait of Christ, and further right was St. Phillip. Ignatius and Phillip were flanked on either side by images of winged cherubim. Looking up, we were met by the intimidating gaze of Jesus. At the very top of the church loomed a dome, from which gazed an expertly painted (and quite overwhelming) icon of the *Pantokrator*, Christ the creator of all. Henry and I and several others gazed in quiet awe. Only John Paul seemed quite at home, taking it all in stride. "Churches are supposed to be beautiful, like a three-dimensional picture of heaven," he said, nonchalantly, and went about venerating the icons. We cautioned ourselves not to let our emotions rule or distort our reasoning. It was in this state of mind, standing in the middle of the church (there were no pews or chairs), that the service began, in the middle of which Father Seraphim gave this homily:

2.2 SERAPHIM'S SERMON

Father Seraphim Rose: "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen. Reverend Father Michael, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and my beloved children in the Lord, greetings to you all in our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank God earnestly for your faith, which I hear is strong and growing, and for your community, which I hear is breaking out of the tight ethnic bonds to include the pilgrims from this land, as well as your own. It is a delight to be here in New York, as a pilgrim from my current home in the woods of Platina in Northern California. I long to return home, to continue working out my salvation, but God's will is that I work here, with you, today. More so, I long to be at home with the Lord, for to die is gain. But to live is Christ, so it is good for me to be with you now and impart some spiritual blessing.

"Beloved of God, when Adam our first father exchanged his participation in the Divine Word for illicit knowledge of good and evil, he corrupted the human nature by which he was supposed to 'rule and

subdue the earth,’ ‘naming the animals,’ ‘multiplying and filling the earth,’ and growing along with Eve, the mother of all, more and more into the likeness of God. Human nature, though *by nature* corruptible, shared in incorruption through its share of the Word of God. And though Adam could not and did not destroy the image of God within himself, he forsook the path of likeness to God. Whereas man and woman, through obedience to the *Divine Logos* of God were ‘partakers of the divine nature,’ now through obedience to the deceit of the serpent & their overweening self-assurance, they partook of death. The natural energies of his soul — which God called ‘very good’ — fell that day. They became depraved and perverted; they began to bring corruption and death instead of everlasting life. Thus turned against his own nature, Adam turned in strife against his female companion, against the ordered *cosmos* in which he lived, and against his own loving Father, the source of life. Thus, his distorted love drove him along a short path not only to death but annihilation. Man and his descendants increasingly became the way the Divine Paul, when he says: their ‘foolish *nous* became darkened.’ They no longer enjoyed the sweetness of fellowship with God, which is the vision of His Divine Glory in purity of heart. The deep spiritual wound Adam and Eve inflicted on themselves and us was so great that they had to be cast out of the garden, lest they also eat of the tree of life, and remain fixed in their wretched state forever. As St. Gregory the Theologian says, ‘Here too, He provides a benefit – namely death, which cuts off sin, so that evil may not be everlasting. Thus His punishment is changed into a mercy.’ So they died. Not immediately, but they began to die spiritually and physically as they lost the purity of their *nous* and, consequently, the vision of God. Vision of God is life, as John says, ‘This is eternal life, to know you.’ They became blind and deathly ill. But the Most High and Almighty God, whose loving-kindness is from everlasting to everlasting, did not abandon his children to corruption, but also willed to deliver them from slavery, to heal their dreadful disease, and restore them to life. This restoration required the Incarnation of the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. By his Glorious Incarnation he united human nature to God in Himself, forever. Restoration required His Death and Glorious Resurrection. By his death he trampled down death, and restored unfailing life to the helpless race of men. Now through participation in his death, we participate in his Resurrection, and thus work with God to restore ourselves to our original incorruption. Not the death of the body only, but all of the unnatural bodily passions and desires which spring up in a fallen man must die, be buried, and raised up in Christ, the True Man. This struggle to mortify ourselves, to die daily, to walk as Christ walked, becoming true men and women, is the Christian life.

“Yesterday in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church we

commemorated the life of St. Anthony the Great. It is fitting to celebrate his life together, not only because the Wisdom of the Church leads us, but also because this early saint so perfectly died to himself and became a 'little Christ' in a way very difficult for modern man. We who would call ourselves 'Christians' in the twentieth century must see and imitate St. Antony, for 'It is later than we think.' We must imitate him *today* as he imitated Christ, in order to ensure that we 'avoid the snares of the evil one which so easily entangle,' and 'attain unto life everlasting.' We ask today for our *daily* bread, for we are not promised tomorrow. As St. Clement says, 'he who follows the saints will be sanctified.'

"St. Anthony of the Desert is the picture of radical faith, hope, and love we so conspicuously lack in North America today. He seems to us, with our modern worldview, to be a ghost, a specter, a marvel. Fighting demons and living alone in the desert? Is this not radical, you say? Really, this is not radical. Rather it is normal. St Anthony, *he* is normal. *He* is the true man, and we are the ghosts, the paralytics, the lepers. The desert is not abnormal, our modern world is a weird and abnormal place. It is abnormal that theologians more so model their 'theology' after positivistic so-called 'science' and dead skeptical philosophy; or that even non-academic people sense the hypocrisy and so forsake all intellectual authorities, trusting themselves instead. It is abnormal when ethics is no longer a science but a dry academic discipline consisting of many words by many sinners, but never the silence of a saint.

"St. Anthony, on the other hand, was normal, a real man. He was 'a doer and not just a hearer of the word.' When he heard, as a young man of twenty years of age, the words of Christ spoken in Church he immediately obeyed. 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all thou hast...' Unlike the rich young ruler thousands of years ago and unlike so many of us today, he did not pause to talk himself out of obedience to this divine command, but followed it, as well as all others. For is there any way to deny that 'partial obedience' is just another form of betrayal? He began that day the path of renunciation, 'hating brother and father and mother,' and 'retreating into his closet' to pray, and seeking only to do the will of God. What is the will of God? That we be healed of our sins, illuminated in our minds, and united to God in Christ.

"By struggling with his passions in solitude St. Anthony 'worked out his salvation with fear and trembling.' This battle he maintained for twenty years, speaking only infrequently with his fellow men, occupied only in 'prayer, without ceasing.' After these many years by the grace of Christ he conquered his sins with much 'prayer and fasting,' 'watchfulness,' guarding over his heart, 'For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies' [Mathew 15:19]

His ‘put on the *nous* of Christ,’ though not in the manner of educated men or wise men of the world, but rather the manner of Peter the humble fisherman. When a philosopher asked Anthony how he could endure his long solitude without the consolation of books, he replied, ‘My book is the nature of created things, which is present for me to read when I will the words of God.’ Waiting patiently for the Lord, and hoping only on his name, by the grace of Christ he learned ineffable mysteries, ‘which man is not permitted to speak.’ And when he emerged, by the earnest entreaty of his spiritual sons and the permission of the God to whom he had been so intimately united, they clearly discovered it to be true of St. Anthony what the Holy Apostle Paul said of himself, that ‘he lives not, but Christ in him.’ The love that shone forth from him like fire lighted upon all those in his presence, without restriction. The glory of the Lord, like sunlight, shone from him upon the good and the bad, the young and the old, the worthy and the unworthy. His good deeds were indeed visible before men, and many were converted to Christ by witnessing thereto, or brought back from the wayward paths of lawlessness. Such a grace of knowledge and charity had this glorious saint, that his fame shone forth like a beacon, and he was compelled by God again to retreat into the desert, this time deeper, where he completed the remaining part of his life in peace and repentance, a Christian ending to his life, painless, blameless, peaceful, and a good defense before the dread Judgment seat of Christ.

“Beloved sons and daughters in Christ: Love one another. Do we know our sins have been forgiven? Have we confessed them? ‘He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’

“Fathers and mothers in Christ: Love one another, even as Christ loved the Church, giving His life up for her. Do we love our neighbor, even these little ones, as ourselves? Do we feed the hungry in the name of Christ, and give water to the thirsty? Do we visit the prisoner, and comfort the widow? Do we clothe the naked and shelter the homeless? Do we visit the sick and give proper burial those who have fallen asleep in the Lord?

“Brothers and sisters in Christ: Love one another. Do we admonish sinners to repentance, and instruct the ignorant? Do we counsel the doubtful and comfort the brokenhearted? Do we suffer offense patiently and we bless those who mock, revile, and criticize us? Do we pray fervently for all of our brothers and sisters in the Lord?

“There is no sure means of salvation but this: ‘Fear God and keep the commandments,’ for against this there is no law. Let us keep the commandments not ‘in tongue or in word,’ but ‘in deed and in truth.’ For ‘foolish is he who hears these words and does not act on them, but one who hears and also obeys is like he who builds his house upon the rock.’ ‘If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who practices

righteousness is born of Him.' Whereas 'the children of the devil... do not practice righteousness,' nor 'do they love their brother.' And we know its truth in Sacred Scripture, that 'the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.' [1 Corinthians 6:9] Therefore, let us all together as the family of God hasten to do the good work of God. Let us renew our effort to 'fight the good fight,' 'running in such a way as to win the prize.' Let us remember our Father among the Saints, Anthony the Great, asking for his intercessions, imitating him as he imitates Christ, to the glory of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen."

2.3 OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE LITURGY

JM: When Father Seraphim descended from the pulpit, the service continued. Those of us visiting prayed, or watched with curiosity, especially the formal movements of Father Seraphim. Some of the service was familiar to me. For instance, when they got to the Nicene Creed, except the part where we said:

"And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father," Because they didn't say "and the Son." Whereas, at this moment John Paul, and Henry and I said, "*and the Son*," when the rest of the church paused for a breath – we looked at each other with some embarrassment, but no one seemed to mind. Besides this, there were many psalms that I knew and the Beatitudes were recited, but there was much unfamiliar. After, we milled out of the church and at refreshments, drank coffee, and talked in the fellowship hall. While we stood in a circle discussing the sermon, Father Michael approached us and said, "I told Father Seraphim about your class assignment, and he asked if you would be interested to join him in the Nave for a discussion." We looked around at each other with excitement. I told him, "Thank you, Father Michael. We're here for a religious studies class, and we're supposed to meet back on campus, but we have about an hour free, so we'd love to." Some people in the other car excused themselves, saying that they would see us Monday. The rest of us prepared our questions; his sermon had already ignited heated debates.

Eventually, we made our way back to the nave and sat in a circle with Father Seraphim. His appearance was even more striking up close. He was rather tall, and handsome. Clad in all black, like the priests, he also sported a brilliant golden cross around his neck. It hung on a generously-sized gold chain, glittering with five red sapphires, one at the top of the cross, one in the middle, on each end of the middle beam, and one on the bottom. The edges were ornately fashioned with smaller crosses or Celtic

swirls. The overall appearance was quite arresting. His face was even more so. He wore long black and silver beard extending almost to his belly-button, and piercing blue eyes that sparkled with depth and intention. They seemed, after talking with him for hours, to image a hidden joy folded deeply behind layers of sobriety, solemnity, and peace. His hair was long, and curly and bushy, spilling out from the cap over his ears and neck, and cascading down his face to join fluidly with his flowing beard. Except for the black cassock and golden cross on his belly, I thought he looked like an Amish man, or maybe a hippie. He never raised his voice or moved quickly, but sat quietly, gazing at each of the discussants with a slight upward turn at the edge of his lips.

2.4 FAITH & WORKS

JM: After Father Michael had introduced all of us to Father Seraphim, we thanked him for meeting with us.

FS: “You are welcome, John... do you go by ‘John’ or ‘John Mark?’”

JM: “John Mark.”

FS: “Very well, John Mark, and thanks to you, and all of you. I am more than happy to answer, and ask, questions with those who are eager to dialogue. As for time, I have set aside this entire afternoon for fellowship and conversation with anyone who is willing. Now, if Father Michael’s perception is right, then you are all very religious, and yet you are first-time visitors to the Orthodox Church and ignorant of many of her customs, beliefs, and practices. Thus you must have many questions, which I confirm by simply looking at you, for, whether you know it or not, your faces belie a great swarm of thoughts. Add to this that you are graduate students, so your questions and concerns will undoubtedly be intelligent and carefully thought-out. So let us talk, and do not disguise your interests behind academic masks.”

JM: “To be perfectly honest, Mr. Seraphim, I listened to your sermon with mixed emotions, both with strong interest and with some revulsion. I bounced between emphatic agreement and, well, concern. Let me tell you why: I was moved by your frequent quotations of Scripture, and the conciseness of your comments – some frustrating sermons are 30 seconds of Bible and 30 minutes of Pastor. But I was disturbed – let me say ‘perplexed’ – by your emphasis on works. In my twenty-two years in the church I have never heard a sermon so focused on works with so little mention of faith... As I think about it, my concern was not so much what you said – works are necessary – but what you left *unsaid*.

You hardly mentioned faith at all, and you didn't give any account of the delicate distinction between faith and the *evidence of faith*. I was concerned not only for my sake, but for those new Christians who might be here," I gestured to the now-empty church, "or the unchurched, some of whom are my friends and who already left, or for the mature Christian who obviously respects you and so might walk away today feeling a great pressure to *perform* to please God, despite the fact that 'by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.' I hope I don't offend, but my honest question is whether you even believe the Biblical doctrine that salvation comes through faith alone."

FS: "Here is a young man truly zealous for the faith. I commend you for your honesty, John Mark, and it seems that I was right about your intelligence. As to your question, it would indeed be right for one to question whether I believe that salvation comes through faith alone. But before I try to answer that question, may I make a request? Father Michael said you are the principal of a private Christian high school, so you are probably more experienced with making long persuasive speeches. I prefer to conduct inquiries in short speeches, questioning and being questioned in turn, if that is amenable to all of you."

JM: "Father Michael did not mention that my high school is not an ordinary school, but a classical school. So this method of asking and answering, which I call dialectic, is the very method we use to teach and to learn."

SR: "Very good! Then, 'come, let us reason together.' Where shall we begin?"

JM: "Well, I know salvation by works is a Roman Catholic dogma, but I confess I have never been to an Orthodox Church before, and perhaps know less about it than I thought I knew... Forgive my question, but do you believe the Bible is the Word of God?"

FS: "I certainly do," said Father Seraphim.

JM: "Do you believe it is inspired, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative?"

FS: "Absolutely."

JM: "Do you also agree that its message is about man's fall and his redemption, and its purpose is that men come to God to be saved?"

FS: "Yes, I do agree."

JM: "And that the consequence of ignorance regarding this path would be that we perish in our sins?"

FS: "Well put."

JM: "So would you agree that knowing the Scriptures and teaching exactly what they teach, without addition or subtraction, is a matter of life and death, not just the death of the body, but death of the soul and spirit, both for ourselves and those whom we wish to teach?"

FS: "Precisely."

JM: "Then perhaps you would agree with me in remembering Galatians 2:16, when it says that 'that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law.' As well as Romans 3:28, when it says, 'A man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.' Do these verses speak truly?"

FS: "Of course."

JM: "What about Romans 3:26? Do you agree that God 'justifies him who has faith in Jesus'?"

FS: "Yes, very much so."

JM: "Then also Romans 8:30, that 'those whom God predestined, he also called; and those whom he called he also justified'?"

FS: "Certainly."

JM: "And what about those who are justified by faith? Don't they 'have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'? [Romans 5:21]"

FS: "Certainly."

JM: "And would you agree with what Paul says in Galatians 5:18 that, 'if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.'"

FS: "I would certainly agree."

JM: "Now, I assume you would fully agree, 'Faith without works is dead'?"

FS: "Fully."

JM: "We can also both agree that 'a good tree bears good fruit?' [Matthew 7:19, Matthew 12:33]"

FS: "Yes, quite."

JM: "So one who is justified demonstrates this justification through the working out of living, active faith?"

FS: "I'm not sure I understand your question,"

JM: "Well, so, for the one who is justified, is it true that 'there is no

condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'? [Romans 8:1]"

FS: "Yes."

JM: "And this justification is not due to any merit in ourselves, but to Christ and his grace?"

FS: "We certainly do not have any merit."

JM: "As Ephesians 2 says, 'By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast.'"

FS: "Yes, boasting is antithetical to the humility of the gospel."

JM: "And there are many other verses besides to the same effect. But would you further agree, Seraphim, that salvation through faith, which is a gift of God, is not something that appeared on the earth brand new, as it were, with Christianity?"

FS: "Meaning what, John Mark?"

JM: "Meaning that salvation through faith, understood truly, is how the Jews and the Hebrews were saved? Romans says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness' [Romans 4:3]"

FS: "Ah, yes, quite correct."

JM: "So, in summary, we are no longer under the law of Moses, but the law of the Spirit of life, of which the perfect fulfillment is Jesus Himself."

FS: "Well said."

JM: "And since we are not under the Old Law, the works of the Old Law do not contribute anything to our justification?"

FS: "How could they?"

JM: "Nor does this mean that we ought to sin more, that grace may abound—"

FS: "—God forbid!" Father Seraphim interrupted, smiling.

JM: "—God forbid indeed. But since 'a good tree bears good fruit,' our works, *if* we have true, living, saving faith, will show forth that faith."

FS: "I suppose so."

JM: "And would you call those who are justified before God 'Christians,' or some other name?"

FS: "'Christian' is an excellent name for them!"

JM: “And Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of them?”

FS: “Yes.”

JM: “And the fruits of the Spirit... aren’t they obvious: Patience, love, peace, kindness, gentleness, and many others besides, not to mention submission, firmness in adversity, forgiveness, and so on?”

FS: “Yes, and what fruit!”

JM: “And these fruits demonstrate or prove the presence of saving faith and justification, rather than being the causes of saving faith and justification, do they not?”

FS: “It is on this point that I am having a little trouble understanding what you mean, John Mark.”

JM: “I don’t want to push the issue, really. I think the question I am really trying to answer right now you sufficiently answered. For we are in agreement that the justification itself comes about by faith in Jesus Christ, apart from the works of the law.”

FS: “Yes, on that we seem to be clear.”

JM: “And we are both in agreement, and in accordance with the Scriptures, that the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification by works is false.”

2.5 HEARING & DOING

JM: At this point my friend and sparring-partner John Paul entered the dialogue, saying:

John Paul: “If I may, Father Seraphim. John Mark and I have been over this before, but it seems he has forgotten the arguments. Come now, John Mark, let’s rehearse them again! You shouldn’t need to, since you know the Bible better than this, but answer me, and I will ask the questions for a time, and save Father Seraphim the breath.”

JM: “Go ahead, John Paul, but I’m not sure your confidence is well-founded.”

JP: “We’ll see. I know you do not accept the authority of the Church, so let me appeal only to the Holy Scriptures, as is your custom, since this is a common basis of agreement.”

JM: “Very well, my friend.”

JP: "You agree that all books of the Bible are inspired, not just some of them?"

JM: "Yes, definitely."

JP: "Well, you quoted extensively from Romans and Galatians, but I noticed you did not quote much from James. Why is this? Perhaps because you can offer no firm and convincing interpretation of it that fits with your Protestant tradition?"

JM: I chuckled a bit, and, shaking my head, leaned back in my chair. "We'll see. Go ahead and ask your questions!"

JP: "Fine. Do you remember what James says in chapter two, verse fourteen through nineteen?"

JM: "Not off hand... But I'm sure you'll remind me."

JP: "I will. The Apostle asks the rhetorical question, 'What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?' He asks a very good question, does he not?" J M : "He does."

JP: "He goes on to say, 'If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.'"

JM: "But I fully agree, John Paul, as you well know."

JP: "But listen to the next verse. He asks, 'Was not Abraham our father justified *by works* when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?' Does he say this or no?"

JM: "Perhaps we are equivocating, on the sense of the word, 'works.'"

JP: "Does he say it or no? I can open to it if you like. Does anyone have a Bible?"

JM: Charlie, my Methodist friend, the youngest of the group, rummaged through his backpack. I stopped him, saying, "Yes, yes, it says that. But what does he mean by works, there, and how does that jive with Paul?"

JP: "The apostle is perfectly clear, John Mark. Again he asks, 'Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works,

and not by faith only.' How much more clear could he be?"

JM: "Very much more clear. Or, say, James is clear within himself, but if he had known the exact words Paul chose to express himself with, he would have explained the proper sense in which these words harmonize with the Scriptures I quoted earlier. For the 'works' in this passage cannot be the 'works of the mosaic law,' which Paul refers to — Abraham lived *before* Moses!"

JP: "You are right there. For St. Paul speaks clearly in Galatians that 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but faith working in love.' Faith that is not working in love is dead, and faithlessness failing to work in love is pitiable. But you seem to think you have St. Paul in the bag. So let me ask you again, would you agree that *the gospels* are the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God?"

JM: "Stop mocking me, my friend, and get on with the inquiry!"

JP: "Just wanted to make sure. Jesus says, 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but *he who does* the will of My Father in heaven.' Does this not indicate that some work, namely doing the will of the Father, is necessary for salvation?"

JM: "*It seems* to. But don't forget the next verse in Mathew seven, when He adds, 'many will say to me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not done many wonders in your name?" And then I will declare to them, "Depart from me, for I never knew you."' Notice the key determinate. In *that* verse it is whether or not we *know* Him — whether or not we have a relationship with Him — that matters for salvation, rather than mere works we do in his name, even good works."

JP: "But *why* is it he 'doesn't know them'? You in turn can't forget the next part where he says, 'Depart from me, workers of lawlessness.' It is still by what *they have done*, or left undone, that they prove themselves to be faithless."

JM: "But that there is my point exactly, John Paul! Their lawless deeds are proof of their lack of faith; just as lawful deeds are a proof of the presence of faith. But their lawless deeds are not somehow the *cause* of their lack of faith any more than lawful deeds are the cause of the presence of faith. Does the tree become good when it bears good fruit? Or does the good tree *make itself known* as good when it bears good fruit? Does the tree remain neutral until the harvest comes, when suddenly, bad fruit turns it into a bad tree? No. We can't see into a person's heart, but by these outward deeds, these 'works,' whether lawful or lawless, we *can* know whether their hidden heart is good or bad."

JP: "I'm sorry but I can't agree with you fully on that, John Mark. For

in the very next verses Jesus says that ‘Whoever hears his sayings and does them is like a wise men who builds his house on the rock... and everyone who hears them and does not do them, he is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and when the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.’ Here again he emphasizes that the ‘*doing of the sayings*’ is the goal, not merely believing they’re true, or even *merely* believing in Jesus Christ.”

JM: “Again, John Paul, I would argue that the faith of the doer is what matters to Jesus, and the ‘doing of the saying’ as you say, is the *demonstration* or outward evidence of that faith, rather than, somehow, the fulfillment or actualization of it. This ‘Protestant *teaching*’ is the *Biblical* teaching, for it is perfectly consistent with the plain sense of the text, and harmonizes easily with Romans, Galatians, and any other New Testament text. It does not contradict them, it illuminates them.”

CHAPTER 3: OUR ONE TRUE DESIRE

JM: Father Seraphim had been listening with interest, at the same time his attention seemed stuck on something else, we knew not what. Here he interjected quietly:

FS: “I wonder, my young brothers, if we are consistent in our definition of salvation. We have somehow begun discussing *justification*.”

JM: “But aren’t justification and salvation the same thing?”

FS: “If you asked a child whether gold is the same as *aurum* or element 79, how could he answer without knowing what gold itself is? Start here: do you know *you* are saved?”

JM: “By God’s grace... Yes, I believe so.”

FS: “And do you know which of your friends and family are saved?”

JM: “I can’t say, Seraphim...”

FS: “Don’t worry about making a false step: if either of us mis-speaks, we can go back and correct ourselves.”

JM: “It’s not that, I just don’t want to judge another person’s salvation.”

FS: “But you have to decide whom to evangelize to, so you have some idea who *isn’t* saved, right?”

JM: “Yes, I guess so.”

FS: “Then what is the one thing, salvation, that you and all those who are saved share, but those who are not saved lack?”

JM: “Salvation is the purpose of the church, that is, to save unbelievers from the wrath of God, from hell.”

FS: “That is *an* answer, John Mark, so I thank you, but it’s not a good one. For if I asked you, ‘What is healing’ and you answered, ‘Healing is

bringing the body from sickness into health,' I might respond, 'Clever man! The word "healing" is a derivative of the word "health", both of which come to us from the Latin word "salvere" which is health. So tell me without riddles, what health is, and what its opposite, sickness, is.' In that case, you might have compassion on me and answer, 'Health is the excellent functioning of the body according to its purpose, that is, survival, movement, activity, growth, and reproduction. By contrast, sickness is its poor functioning, either due to external threats like disease or to internal defects, like bad genes or a broken bone. A sick body may not be able to reproduce, or grow new cells to replenish old ones, or may not be able to organize complex activities, or may not be able to move, or may be dying or may have died, or some combination of the above.' And if you answered that way, thoroughly and exactly, I would give you due gratitude. So be like yourself: Answer me, not about the *salve* of the body but the salvation of the soul."

JM: "I understand, Seraphim. In that case, salvation is being rescued from our sins, or the consequences thereof. It is freedom from slavery to sin; it is slavery to Christ. It is eternal life with God in heaven, and knowledge of God, as Jesus says, 'This is eternal life, to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.' It is not only knowledge of God, but self-knowledge, and also joy and love, for 'we shall see Him as he is, for we shall be like him,' who is love, glorifying Him forever. It is peace that passes all understanding, for we do not work for it; rather, it is a 'free gift of God', redemption from death and sin, and the hope of life everlasting, ever in his presence, ever worshipping him, ever thanking Him for such a priceless gift to his unworthy children."

FS: "For this second answer, too, I thank you, John Mark. You are generous, like God, for I asked for one definition of salvation, and you gave me many."

JM: "What do you mean?"

FS: "I wonder whether each of the eleven or twelve items you mentioned was a definition of salvation, or was only *one* the proper definition, while the others were attributes? Or were they all intended to point to some other definition beyond them all?"

JM: "You asked for a definition of salvation, and I thought I gave it."

FS: "You stated that 'salvation is being rescued from our sins,' right, and also 'freedom from slavery to sin.' What is the relationship between these two statements? For they are two different statements, aren't they?"

JM: "They are, but they're two ways of saying the same thing."

FS: "OK. Is 'knowledge of God', which you also mentioned, another

way of saying the same thing?”

JM: “Um, knowledge of God is a consequence of salvation, actually. But then, it is also a cause, for without knowledge of Jesus Christ, how can someone accept the gift of salvation?”

FS: “Good, at least you’re saying that knowledge of God is not *strictly speaking* a synonym for ‘salvation’ but comes as an effect, or maybe a cause, of salvation?”

JM: “Yes, that seems right, Seraphim.”

FS: “Would you say the same of self-knowledge, seeing ourselves in a mirror? And also joy and peace and love, are those also results?”

JM: “Yes, results as well.”

FS: “Salvation surely is a “free gift,” but not every free gift is salvation, right? God freely gives rain and sunshine as well.”

JM: “Fair enough.”

FS: “And you said salvation is ‘eternal life’ and the ‘hope of eternal life.’” –

JM: “—now let me revise one thing.”

FS: “Go ahead, John Mark.”

JM: “You’re going to ask me ‘how can salvation be eternal life and the *hope* of eternal life?’ so let me just say that after this discussion, I think salvation is most properly and biblically and accurately defined as *eternal life*, for this is not only attested by the Scriptures, but is commonly said, both historically and today.”

3.2 OBJECTION TO ETERNAL LIFE

FS: “Well done! So, our third hypothesis is that salvation is eternal life?”

JM: “Yes, and the opposite, damnation, is eternal death. Have we got it?”

FS: “Maybe.”

JM: “Uh oh, what now?”

FS: “It’s just that I see one possible objection rising up like a bully to make a fool out of us.”

JM: "What objection is that?"

FS: "Something to the effect that if we call salvation simply eternal life, we open ourselves to a ridiculous implication. Will we give this bully of an objection a hearing?"

JM: "I think our present definition is biblical and quite accurate. Let it do its worst."

FS: "Very well. It might start out in a caustic manner, saying, 'Thoughtless Christians, don't you believe the words of the author of Hebrews when he says that "it is appointed to man to die once, and after that comes judgment"?' [Hebrews 9:27] We would answer him, 'We certainly do.'"

JM: "Yes, we would."

FS: "'But you must not remember the line from your gospel,' the objection would continue, 'which says "For an hour is coming in which all who are in graves will ... come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."' 'What do you mean?' we would ask. 'If the Scriptures cannot be broken, as you attest, then by defining salvation as eternal life, without specifying the *quality* of that life, you include the damned in your definition of the saved. Fools! The opposite of eternal *life* is not eternal *punishment* but eternal *death*.' We might point out that we already agreed on that point. But it would gloat and say, 'Your own book says it is appointed man to do only once. So according to you, *all* men have eternal life, you brainless Christians! The second death can't refer to the souls' annihilation, because even those who do not believe are never destroyed, since men are by nature immortal and indestructible, being in the very image of the creator. This "second death" can only be a figure of speech referring to an everlasting punishment or pain. But when you wise men speak of "eternal life" like it is some grand and fine thing, desirable in itself, you never specify what *kind* of eternal life the Christian supposedly enjoys. What attributes does that eternal life have that the eternal life below doesn't? Don't just steal my word "Blessedness"! Go on to state clearly what blessedness consists of, and misery lacks. Then, and only then, will I cease from mocking you.' There John Mark, it made its case. We have to admit that this objection has a valid point, shouldn't we? Shall we answer it?"

JM: "We must, Seraphim!"

JP: "May I venture a question to our Protestant friend, Father Seraphim?"

FS: "Please do," he responded.

JP: “John Mark, human beings seek happiness above all things. In fact, we seek everything else for the sake of happiness—for if we were offered, glory, power, pleasure, and wisdom without happiness, we would reject it; whereas if we were offered happiness without those things, we would gladly take it. So let’s modify our definition of salvation by saying that it is eternal happiness, and that will answer the objection, and steer us towards the truth. With that, we know that God is the happiest being, and is indeed happiness, and when we have him, we lack no other good thing.”

3.3 ETERNAL HAPPINESS

FS: “What do you think, John Mark? *Eudaimonia*, is the Greek word, I believe John Paul is speaking of. Happiness, or literally, good-spiritedness.”

JM: “You speak Greek? Seraphim, before we continue, could you help me? I’ve heard several different pronunciations of the Greek word ‘logos,’ and I was wondering which is correct: *logos* or *logos*?”

FS: “Well, scholars disagree. Most pronounce it *logos* but a substantial group thinks it is best said *logos*. Of course, being a dead language, it’s hard to say.”

JM: “Thank you for that... Anyway, you pronounce ‘happiness’ as *eudaimonia*?”

FS: “More like *eudaimonia*.”

JM: “Thanks. I had always thought that happiness was a fleeting state of pleasurable satisfaction, whereas joy was a permanent state.”

FS: “If John Paul’s *logos* is correct, then we pursue even fleeting pleasures for this thing’s sake. Think of it this way... Do you know if God is happy?”

JM: “I would say so.”

FS: “The happiest being in the universe?”

JM: “It would be unfitting to say another being was happier than God.”

FS: “So, according to you, God is truly happy. And is it possible to be like God?”

JM: “Like Him in what sense?”

FS: “To share some of his attributes, to resemble Him in his image and likeness.”

JM: "Yes, that is possible, and What's more, it is the highest calling of man."

FS: "Then would being like Him mean also being happy, in a sense?"

JM: "Yes, that makes sense."

FS: "How then does one be like God?"

3.4 IMITATING GOD IN THOUGHT, WORD, AND DEED

JM: "If I am understanding you correctly, I think the way to become like God is simply to look at what he does and we copy what we see."

FS: "Very well. Now, is God loving?"

JM: "Yes."

FS: "Is he 'judging' if I may use the word? Does he judge people's sinfulness?"

JM: "Of course. Starting in Genesis, we see that God he loves Adam and Eve, but he does not permit them to stay in the Garden of Eden after they have sinned, but curses them and sends them out.

FS: "Does he curse them for their own good, or for what reason?"

JM: "Yes, it is for their own good, lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever in their sinful state."

FS: "So is this loving, or judging? I need to know which attribute is God's, so I can imitate it."

JM: "Well, it is both loving, and judging."

FS: "That is strange..."

JM: "God is always loving, and sometimes judging. I'm not sure how to say it..."

FS: "According to you, God is always loving, and so we must imitate Him in this."

JM: "Yes, exactly."

FS: "Perhaps you mean this love is only sometimes expressed in judgment."

JM: "Well, yes."

FS: "So God knows when it is loving to judge, and when it is loving to show mercy?"

JM: "Yes."

FS: "How do you or I distinguish between a loving act that is merciful and a loving act that is judging?"

JM: "I'm not sure what you mean."

FS: "Let me ask you a question: would you further agree that imitating God is necessary in all ways, and in all parts of being? I must imitate God in my thoughts as well as in my actions?"

JM: "Yes."

FS: "But how? Do you agree with the words of the Lord in Isaiah when he says 'My ways are not your ways; my thoughts are not your thoughts.'"

JM: "I don't need to know everything God knows, I just need to love others."

FS: "But once we have admitted that God's thoughts are higher than ours, we may not always know when a judgmental act is the most loving, and when a merciful act is the most loving."

JM: "True."

FS: "And if we do not know his thought, do we 'see' it in any sense?"

JM: "No."

FS: "And if we do not know it or see it, is it possible that we imitate it?"

JM: "It wouldn't seem to be."

FS: "Then either it is not possible to be like God (and, thus, happy), or else imitation of what we see is not the way to be like him."

JM: "I still think it is possible, but I don't know what to say."

FS: "Perhaps we can find recourse in the word of God?"

JM: "That is an excellent idea!"

FS: "To quote the Psalmist in Psalm 118: 'Happy are the blameless in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord...' perhaps simply by following God's commandments, or laws, or statutes, we *can* be like Him—even without knowing his thoughts."

JM: "That sounds right."

FS: "Now, there is a further difficulty, though."

JM: “What?”

FS: “There are many commandments in the Old Testament. There are the 613 commandments given to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Israel, to Moses, and the commandments given by Christ, by the Apostles, and the various other words and messages and commands given through the prophets and the writings. So perhaps we should narrow it down—say to the ten commandments? What are those?”

JM: “I don’t have a Bible with me, but they include: love the Lord your God, and worship Him only. Have no other gods before Me. Make no graven images, keep the Sabbath day holy, do not murder, steal, or bear false witness.”

FS: “And someone who follows these laws becomes more like God?”

JM: “Not exactly, Seraphim. I don’t think one can become more or less like God in this way. Rather, we need *Christ* to be like God perfectly, and to receive his likeness entirely by faith.”

FS: “I wonder if you will indulge me a question that might sound silly.”

JM: “What’s that?”

FS: “Does someone who is like God follows these laws?”

JM: “What do you mean?”

FS: “You do not believe that someone who follows these laws will become like God—but imagine someone who is *already like God* to some degree; do they follow these laws?”

JM: “I see what you mean, and I think the answer is ‘Yes, if only as far as is possible for human beings.’”

FS: “Did some of the Pharisees follow some of these laws?”

JM: “Yes, or so they thought.”

FS: “Did they follow them completely? Externally, I mean.”

JM: “Externally, yes, they seemed to follow them.”

FS: “Did they *actually* follow them?”

JM: “Well, they did not openly break them, but the problem is that they were hypocritical. They kept part of the law with their words and actions, but not with their hearts.”

FS: “Does the Mosaic law command them to keep the commandments with their hearts?”

JM: “Yes, it says, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart.’”

FS: “But does it command them not to murder ‘in your heart,’ or only not to murder in their deeds?”

JM: “It commands them not to murder in their deeds, but it is implied that this includes not murdering in your heart. I do not know whether they kept the law in their deeds. If I had to answer, I would say that they do seem to, but this is not the point of the law.”

FS: “Please, do not get upset. I agree with you that external conformity to the injunctions of the law is not the point of the law, but let us remain with the inquiry a bit longer. You answered that the Pharisees did keep the law in their deeds, did you not?”

JM: “I did.”

FS: “And yet they were not like God, as we both agree.”

JM: “Nope.”

FS: “So even if someone is not like God, it is possible that they might keep the Mosaic law, at least in their deeds.”

JM: “I suppose so.”

FS: “I then re-state my original question: How does one become like God?”

JM: “Seraphim, we have to look at Jesus Christ to answer that question. Not only is he the image of the invisible God, the radiance of his glory, and the fullness of the Godhead bodily, but also he teaches us the meaning of the ten commandments. I said before that we must look at how God acts, and then act like him. But I agree that sometimes God’s actions are not like our actions, so we cannot imitate them. You suggested that we take recourse in the commands of God, but we have seen that keeping them does not *make* one godly, nor is someone who keeps them necessarily godly. I would add that *not* keeping them does not necessarily mean one is ungodly, either. But now I realize where I made a wrong turn in the argument. I had been looking at the Scriptures but forgetting Christ. I still assert that we must imitate God, but we must imitate God the Son, and in this way we will become like Him. Furthermore, when we imitate Christ, we will keep spirit of the Mosaic Law, for he is the fulfillment of the law.”

FS: “Well, John Mark, are we going to run into the same problem as before?”

JM: “What problem?”

FS: “That sometimes Christ does or says or thinks or feels things that do not immediately make sense to us, and so can’t be confidently imitated.”

JM: "I do not see how this could be a problem. Christ is the visible manifestation of God's will, and so he *shows* us and *tells* us clearly how to follow God and keep his commandments."

FS: "Perhaps. But answer me this: was it loving for Christ to overturn the money changers' tables when he finds them selling wares in the temple? He was harming their business, their income, and potentially harming them."

JM: "On the contrary, he was being a good example to the faithful Jews, showing them they shouldn't put up with such greed and open debauchery in the midst of a holy place. It is as Augustine says, 'we must love God, and do what we will.'"

FS: "I agree on that point with you, and with Augustine, and whoever else asserts the truth. But my concern is an epistemological one: how do we know, like Jesus did, when love is kind and when it is violent, like God knew with Adam and Eve, being kind to the faithful Jews, but judging the money changers? We must not fail in our inquiry for lack of trying. For the greatness of the reward justifies the arduousness of the search. If there is any point left unexamined, let us return to it."

JM: "I find your question to be an important one, but I am at a loss. And unfortunately, it's been almost an hour so we should probably return to the University of Rochester to hear Dr. Sawah's last lecture and complete our assignment."

CHAPTER 4: A DREAM OF HOLINESS

JM: All those present raised their voices in protest, except for John Paul, the Jehovah's Witness, and the Unitarian. A heated debate ensued, some wanting to go and hear the lecture, others wanting to stay. Eventually, I took a vote. Most people voted to stay and hear the conclusion of the conversation. Those people who couldn't drive themselves grumbled, but agreed to wait another hour.

Father Michael came into the nave as we finished our vote and settled in. The battery on the tape recorder had run out, so we lost a small part of the conversation. He switched the battery, and the transcript resumes with me asking,

JM: "—do that, without getting stuck in the same dead-end?"

FS: "You agree, do you not, that following the laws of God would result in human happiness?" asked Father Seraphim.

JM: "Yes, that is what I think."

FS: "And you agree that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law?"

JM: "Most emphatically, yes!"

FS: "Tell me this: Do you think that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law only, or all of the laws and covenants we mentioned before?"

JM: "I have never thought of this before. Paul does say Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, but he does not specifically single out the Mosaic Law, and it makes sense that Christ would fulfill even the commandments given to Adam and the others. What do you think?"

FS: "I would agree with you. In that he is the tree of life, Christ is the fulfillment of the Adamic covenant; in that he is the True Ark through which a remnant of mankind is saved from the deluge of sins and passions,

he is the fulfillment of the Noahic covenant; in that he is the spotless son that would be sacrificed, and the ram that is supplied by God to replace our own human sacrifices, he is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant; he is also the seed through whom 'all nations will be blessed,' as was promised to our Father Abraham; in that he is the image of the invisible God, and kept all of the commandments of God perfectly, and is the rock out of which flow living waters, and is the perfect priest who delivers the messages of God to the people, he is the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law. In Him all things hold together."

JM: "Well put, Seraphim!"

FS: "And yet we agree that following Christ can't merely be a matter of watching his life, and imitating him, for he may do things whose motivations are hidden from us; or he may think things that are hidden from us; he may even pray in ways which it is necessary for us to pray if we wish to be like God, and yet are hidden from us."

JM: "But his private prayers are revealed in the gospels, like in John 17."

FS: "Some, but we can't be sure about all."

JM: "Yes, unfortunately, that seems inescapable."

FS: "Furthermore, we did not live in the first century in Palestine, so we can't watch his life first hand."

JM: "Of course."

FS: "But we *do* have access to his commandments, do we not?"

JM: "Yes, in the Scriptures."

FS: "If we follow the commandments of Christ, then, we will be happy?"

JM: "Yes! I am satisfied with this conclusion."

FS: "Wait, let us not cut off the inquiry before it is finished, John Mark. Which commandments ought we to fulfill? Just some of them, or all of them?"

JM: "All of them, of course!"

FS: "And should we fulfill all of them only some of the time, taking breaks every once in a while?"

JM: "God forbid!"

FS: "Should we fulfill them all the time in a cheerful way, or sometimes cheerfully and sometimes begrudgingly, depending on our mood?"

JM: “The former, if we wish to be totally obedient.”

FS: “So we can’t call it real obedience if a child does one thing his father commands, and not another, or does all of them only some of the time, or does all of them all of the time but only sometimes in the right way.”

JM: “Well put.”

FS: “And yet some of the commandments are greater than others, are they not? The greatest commandment, as he says, is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.”

JM: “Yes and the second is like it, to love our neighbor as our self.”

FS: “Good reminder. And this seems to accord with everything we have said before.”

JM: “How so?”

FS: “First of all, that God is a loving God all the time, even when he is judging and punishing.”

JM: “True.”

FS: “Also, that Christ is the fulfillment of the law, and not only the Mosaic law, but the prophets, and the patriarchs, and all that has come before, for Christ is ‘love incarnate,’ and always acted in love, always thought, felt, believed, willed, and imparted love, in his life and in his words and commandments.”

JM: “True as well.”

FS: “So being like Christ is being like God, and is happiness.”

JM: “It seems so.”

FS: “Well, I have a question, which I hope you won’t think a pointless subtlety or a play of words.”

JM: “Try me.”

FS: “Is keeping the commandments of Christ the way to attain happiness, or is keeping the commandments of Christ happiness itself? In other words, is the relationship between ‘keeping the commandments’ and ‘happiness’ one of cause and effect? Or is it one of identity?”

JM: “I’m not sure I understand the question yet.”

FS: “I hope it does not seem a question of mere semantics... Let me put it this way: We speak of two things, ‘saving your money,’ and ‘being wealthy.’ Saving lots of money is a way to become wealthy, is it not?”

JM: "Yes, it is."

FS: "I might begin to save my money, but not be wealthy yet, right?"

JM: "Right."

FS: "So there is a time delay between saving my money and being wealthy. For we wouldn't call someone wealthy if they had only just begun to save money and only had a few thousand dollars in the bank, or am I talking nonsense?"

JM: "That makes perfect sense."

FS: "Someone else might be wealthy already, and continue saving his money, thus perpetuating his state of wealth."

JM: "OK."

FS: "In both of these cases, saving money is the cause, while being or staying wealthy is the effect. Fair enough?"

JM: "OK."

FS: "We also speak of two things, 'doing the right thing' and 'being moral.' In this case, when I am presented with a choice, say, to keep a few hundred dollars I have borrowed from somebody instead of paying them back, I have a choice to do right or wrong. If I do right, then I am being moral, and if I do wrong, then I am being immoral, right?"

JM: "Yes."

FS: "But in this case, it seems that 'doing right' is *simply another name* for being moral. Doing right does not *cause* me to be moral; it simply *is* me in the act of being moral. If I do wrong, I am being immoral. In which case there is no such time delay between my wrong choice and my being immoral. Does this make sense?"

JM: "I think I understand what you mean."

FS: "So with the two *logoi*, 'keep my commandments' and 'blessed is he who keeps the word of God,' is this a relationship of cause and effect, or two different speeches for one reality?"

JM: "I think it is the latter. Otherwise we would have to say happiness is a feeling that comes from following Christ, or some future reward like a crown or a principedom in the kingdom of heaven. I think happiness is simply being like Christ, which is keeping the commandments by which Christ himself is who he is."

FS: "Bravo! So we are agreed, happiness is being like God, and Jesus is God, so being like Jesus Christ is being happy?"

JM: "To that we are agreed."

FS: "From this it follows, then, that the many various ideas about what happiness is are false, or at least incomplete. For instance, a few people think that happiness consists in knowledge, don't they?"

JM: "A happy few."

FS: "But doesn't Solomon correctly observe that the increase of wisdom brings an increase in pain and sorrow?"

JM: "Sadly, yes."

FS: "On the other hand, many more people believe that happiness consists in pleasure, do they not?"

JM: "A great many people believe this, and pursue it with their whole heart, too!"

FS: "Yet pleasure apart from fidelity to the commands of Christ can't be happiness, can it?"

JM: "Not in the least."

FS: "But keeping the commandments of Christ may involve pleasure, and often does."

JM: "That seems sure."

FS: "At the same time, keeping the commandments of Christ may involve pain, as it often did in the cases of the martyrs."

JM: "That is true."

FS: "But we are compelled to say, in conformity to the previous *logos*, that these obedient martyrs were divinely happy, blessed, joyful, or whatever other superlative word you like?"

JM: "Yes, by definition."

FS: "So, paradoxically, at the moment that Stephen was being stoned, feeling the sharp rocks rending his soft flesh, or clacking against the bones of his ribs and skull and spine, at this very moment, because he was witnessing to the truth of the Messiah and his resurrection, he was experiencing the blessed happiness that all men by nature desire?"

JM: "Paradoxical, maybe... definitely irrefutable, Seraphim."

FS: "In conclusion, then, salvation, according to our discussion, is the eternal life of happiness. Being like Christ through keeping all his commandments, in all ways, at all times. These commandments are especially to love God fully and love others as ourselves, and the keeping

of these commandments simply *is* happiness.”

4.2 THE (IM)POSSIBILITY OF HOLINESS ON EARTH

JM: “Wait a minute...”

FS: “What is wrong, John Mark? You look ill.”

JM: “I feel as if I am waking out of a dream.”

FS: “What do you mean, my son?”

JM: “I do not know by what art or science you have charmed me. But weren’t we discussing justification just a moment ago?”

FS: “Yes, we were.”

JM: “And then salvation?”

FS: “Yes.”

JM: “For some time now we have been talking about happiness and keeping the commandments of Christ, but we have not progressed one jot or tittle closer to our main goal, which is to understand how it is that men are saved. I still maintain—though I know you will challenge me—that justification is another word for salvation, but we have strayed far from the Scriptures indeed in our discussion, however interesting it has been. For we have been speaking, I realize only now, of *sanctification*, and not salvation at all. This explains the creeping feeling in the pit of my stomach when we spoke about ‘becoming more or less like God’ as parallel to ‘becoming more or less saved.’ For I do not know whether or not it is possible for men to be happy in this life on earth; I do know that it is not possible to become morally or spiritually perfect. This is why the free gift of justification by faith is so necessary for the Christian, and in addition, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. We have been speaking this whole time as if following the commandments of Christ were a matter of one’s own effort or strength, when in fact I can only follow Christ to the extent that he gives me the power to do so, and even then, I will fall far short, every day in every way.”

FS: “Do I understand you to mean that you believe sanctity is not at all possible for men?”

JM: “Not on earth, no. At least, not my own sanctity. The sanctity of Christ is indeed possible, and available to any person who desires it, at

any moment.”

FS: “I confess that I have not fully understood the Protestant tradition on this point: Do all Protestants feel this way?”

JM: “Some of them, most notably Wesleyans, argue for Christian perfectionism, but most of us recognize this view as legalistic and unrealistic, tending to lead to stress, guilt-mongering, disappointment, and spiritual delusion, not to mention an increased sense of independence from God. For if I can be perfect, what need have I for Christ?”

Charlie: “Excuse me, John Mark. I have listened with great eagerness and interest to the conversation so far, and have been more than happy to listen and not to speak. But I feel now that I could contribute something to the discussion. Tell me if not. My pastor often instructs us on this topic, and what he says is something similar to this: The first thing to understand is that there are only four options: either perfection on earth is impossible, possible but not actual, possible and actual, or necessarily actual. So, for instance, it is impossible to draw a square circle. It is possible but not actual that there is sentient life on other planets. It is possible and actual that we are sitting in a circle talking. And it is necessarily actual, or impossible for it not to be actual, that there is a first cause of existence. Now Jesus Christ commands us, I don’t remember where, to ‘Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect’ [Matthew 5:48]. Why would he command us to be perfect if it were not even possible? Also, II Corinthians 7:1 says, ‘let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.’ II Thessalonians 5:23 says, ‘may the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly.’ It does not say, ‘sanctify you partially,’ or, ‘may you sanctify yourself wholly,’ but ‘may God sanctify you wholly.’ To deny that Christian perfection is possible is not to affirm the infirmity of man, but it is to deny the omnipotence of God. First John chapter three is even *more* clear. It says: ‘Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known him.’ And later he says, ‘Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.’ Then a part I don’t remember... then, ‘He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.’ The Bible is very clear that we must walk as he walked. Not only is it possible for man to become perfect on earth, it actually happens if we are truly obedient. If you want deny this, you may contradict me and argue with me, for I am not yet perfect, but how can you contradict

so much plain Scripture?”

JM: “Context, context, context, Charlie!”

C: “What do you mean?”

JM: “I think you make some good points, Charlie, but I need to challenge you on most of what you said. I may have been too dogmatic, perhaps, in past conversations with John Paul when I have asserted that perfection is *impossible* even for Christians. It seems unjust for God to command perfection if it were impossible by nature for us to obey. But ‘let God be found true, though every man a liar!’ [Romans 3:4]. I fully agree with you that we ought to strive towards perfection, ‘running in such a way as to win the prize.’ But you are arguing, aren’t you, not only that Christians *can be* but that *some are* perfect in this life?”

C: “Yes, most definitely, John Mark.”

JM: “Are *you* perfect?”

C: “Me? God, no! Not yet.”

JM: “I know I’m not. So who is, according to you?”

C: “John Wesley was, at least for a time. You can read about it in the *Aldersgate Experience*.”

JM: “I can’t believe that he actually made it to perfection. Do you have any reason to think that he did, other than his own self-assessment? If it is impossible, then perhaps he was self-deceived.”

C: “But we’ve already agreed that Bible says it is possible—you must believe!”

JM: “I don’t know, Charlie. The Bible also says that ‘We all make many mistakes’ [James 3:2]. You are, of course, right that Jesus commands us to be perfect. But this command implies one of two things, for, as you pointed out, either we can obey the command, or we can’t. If we can obey it, then we must obey the command in order to be pleasing to God; if we cannot, or if we hypothetically could, but do not, then we must strive to obey it, and realize when we constantly fail how much we still need Jesus Christ. For without Him, we can do nothing.”

C: “Perfection does not mean that we cease from making mistakes, John Mark. In fact, a perfect person has many foibles, and may be ignorant of important truths, just like Jesus was as a child. He had his own distinct personality and I’m sure his own idiosyncrasies, features which are not right or wrong, but simply are. He also had to ‘grow in wisdom and stature,’ so it’s not as if he knew everything. But, like Jesus, a perfect person does not err in matters of morality towards his fellow men or piety

towards God. They really ‘walk as he walked.’ Else why would Jesus and many other New Testament authors tell us to do this?”

JM: “All I know is what God’s word tells me, Charlie, which is that ‘all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God’ [Romans 3]. Surely we must strive towards perfection, but that does not somehow necessitate that it is attainable in this life. The principle applies to the passage in Corinthians you quoted, where Paul is encouraging his listeners with a very high ideal of morality and character towards which they ought to *aspire*. Aspiration does not necessarily imply that achieving that goal is possible. The Thessalonians passage, for instance, shows Paul’s great love and good faith towards his flock in that he prays to God on their behalf asking the highest blessing he can imagine—‘that God would sanctify them wholly.’ But you must admit we don’t have to believe that God will necessarily grant our request before we can request it, at least not immediately. In fact, we are often admonished to pray for things that we know probably won’t come true, but we pray anyway, out of love, or hope, or because it is our duty.”

C: “What about the passages in John? Isn’t that clear that he who is born of God does not sin?”

JM: “The Greek there is present-tense, as Seraphim can confirm, and could be better translated ‘he who is born of God does not continue to sin,’ and ‘No one who keeps on sinning has either seen Him or known him,’ and ‘No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God’ [1 John 3:9, NIV].”

C: “I don’t understand. What’s the difference?”

JM: “1 John teaches that the life of the Christian is no longer characterized by habitual sin, or ongoing sinful behavior patterns.”

C: “Isn’t that just another way of saying what I’m saying?”

JM: “No, for although sin-patterns should be always decreasing, the Scriptures teach that this battle is ongoing as long as we are on earth. As it says in Romans, ‘we are not to let sin *reign* in our bodies,’ but that does not mean we won’t occasionally lose a battle here or there. As long as we are not allowing ongoing, habitual sin to be the norm for us, then we are doing the best that we can while trapped in these bodies of death and struggling with two natures. See, when we are converted, we exit the reign of sin and death and enter into the reign of life in Christ Jesus. Under this new reign, ‘we are a new creation,’ yet we still struggle with our old nature. The difference is we now have tools with which to fight. There is the old law and the new law, the flesh and the spirit, which war

constantly in us, and keep us from perfection until we are ‘freed from this body of death.’ In fact, the heavy weight of evidence in the rest of the Bible indicates that these verses ought to be understood in a like manner. How someone can claim to believe biblical teaching and go on to assert that perfection in this life is possible—or even if it were possible, that it is realistically attainable—is beyond me. The Old Testament, too, is not silent on this question. It says in 1 Kings 8:46 that ‘there is no man who does not sin.’ And Proverbs 20:9 asks, ‘who can say, “I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin?”’ Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, ‘surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.’ Further testimony, if it were needed, lies in the Lord’s Prayer in Mathew 6:11. Jesus commands the disciples to pray daily ‘forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.’ Why would we ask for forgiveness daily unless we were likely to be sinning daily?”

C: “I still think that the Bible teaches that we can and must be morally and spiritually perfect, by the power of Christ. And some people do walk this ‘narrow way,’ although they are few.”

JM: “Listen, Charlie, if perfection on earth were possible, surely the Apostles of all people would have attained to it?”

C: “Yes, John Mark. Most of them did attain to it.”

JM: “How can you say that? From the Bible, what do we certainly know of the Apostles? Paul, the first among Apostles, says, ‘the flesh wars with the Spirit, and the Spirit with the flesh. . . .What I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do,’ and asks, ‘who will save me from this body of death?’ He also clearly states, ‘All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.’ James, the brother of the Lord, says, ‘We stumble in many things.’ Peter, the rock, not only betrayed Christ before the resurrection, but after the resurrection and Pentecost he was Judaizing and avoiding sitting with the gentile believers, and had to be chastised by Paul. We can assume, from this precedent, that much the same is true of the other Apostles. This is indicated even in John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, when he says, ‘If we say we have not sinned, the truth is not in us.’ Yet somehow, in spite of the overwhelming weight of biblical evidence, some people are able to persist in the unscriptural belief that perfection on earth is realistically attainable.

“The reason I feel so strongly about this is because for some time in my Christian walk this argument actually held some sway in me. I longed to be perfect as my Father in heaven, and I strove diligently to uphold everything I knew to be right and holy and good. And by God’s grace I may say I did some good. But I discovered that in all my good actions, my motive remained impure. There was a core of legalism that I still harbored

deep in my spirit which wanted to be holy apart from Christ's saving work on the cross. How did I discover this? It wasn't by my own strength, that's for sure, for we can't even discover the depth and extent of our depravity on our own. I still fondly remember my wonderful youth pastor Randy, who was my mentor for the last two years of high school. He was funny and charming and gave entertaining sermons; and he was smart and godly and a sound biblical exegete. In addition to being personable and very loving, he seemed to have it 'all together' spiritually. He prayed daily, read his Bible a lot, tithed, lead worship, and preached weekly. Randy was 'all things to all people.' Whether they were there because their parents made them, or because they were serious about their faith, all the kids loved him, maybe too much! When I was having doubts about my faith, and personal struggles, he would reason with me from the Scriptures or counsel me with wise counsel. When my friend Candice's dad left her family, Randy organized a prayer meeting for her and gave her godly counsel. We all thought, 'That is where I would like to be in seven years.'

"I was in a small discipleship group with him and a few other youth leaders, and I'll never forget the day he shared with us his own struggles. He said that the closer he became in his relationship with God, the more he was painfully aware of the remaining sin in his life. 'And I'm only twenty-five, and have been walking seriously with the Lord for ten years,' he said. 'My mentor, and our mutual pastor, told me that he feels exactly the same way. He said once, "The closer I get to God, Randy, the more I am aware of my sins, however small or hidden. I've been walking with the Lord for thirty-five years now, and every year I need God's grace more and more" And that's what I pass on to you, John Mark.' I can't say how much I appreciated his honesty. I was immediately and gratefully relieved of a load of guilt and pressure that had been weighing on me and threatening my faith. For, if my wonderful and godly youth pastor still struggles with sin, then is it any surprise that I do?

"Randy didn't just talk the talk, but he walked the walk; he didn't just teach the biblical truth, he lived it. A few months after our discipleship group had finished, he was caught in the parking lot of the church with Candice, this time not giving her godly counsel. But rather than defend himself under the pharisaical guise of 'Christian perfection,' he did what Paul would have done, and said, 'My sin nature struggled with my redeemed nature, and I lost the battle this time. I am sorry. Please forgive me.' He did not resist discipline but admitted how he had been wrong, and before he stepped down from his position, he asked for forgiveness from her family, and the youth group, and the church elders. My head pastor was very angry with him, but Randy took responsibility for his own struggles, and in essence said, 'I'm still a sinner. What do you expect?' I respected that. He is working at a different church now, I think, and I hope

that he is teaching the truth to that youth group as well, liberating them from the burden of guilt and subjection to the law. I am still persuaded by what he said, and I honestly think that the root problem is a longing to be free from dependence upon God, to be able to stand before Him and say, 'Look, here are my works. I accomplished them in my flesh apart from your power. My own wits and will and power are enough for me. Thanks, but I don't need you.' Christian perfectionism, as it is so cleverly called, is in reality just another beautifully-painted mask for the age-old legalism of man. Non-Christians aim to work their way into heaven by being good," and even the Jews, the chosen people of God, lost sight of the true purpose of the law and began to hope in it for salvation rather than having faith in Christ's perfect sacrifice."

4.3 THE POSSIBILITY OF DECREASING SIN

JM: Charlie seemed distraught, but he did not say anything; he sat there looking at Seraphim and at me, apparently thinking up a response. He was on the verge of saying something, when John Paul came to the rescue.

JP: "John Mark, do you believe in the past tense and future tense, as well as present tense?"

JM: "What do you mean?"

JP: "Aren't you ignoring a plain fact in the grammar of those passages you were quoting?"

JM: "What are you getting at, friend?"

JP: "In John, notice the verb tenses: 'If we say we *have not* sinned,' then we are liars, not 'If we say we do not sin constantly, every day in every way, then we are liars.' Paul says, 'All *have sinned* and fallen short,' not 'All are always sinning and falling short.' Similarly the Our Father is to be recited at least once daily not only so as to ask for forgiveness for sins we may have committed that day, but to continually ask for God's forgiveness for all of our sins, whether present or past. This is still relevant, even to the sanctified person, for he has sinned in the past, and has now reformed his way of life, been transformed in mind and heart, and has become a 'new creation,' pure, perfect and sanctified. In this sense, John and Peter and Paul can even today in their glorified state say, 'I am a sinner,' and thank God for his grace. This is a fitting moment to take a small tangent and point out that perfection has two senses. The first is complete, whole, finished. The second is pure, holy, sanctified. I agree with what you said

earlier, that we have been discussing sanctification, so I think we should phrase the question, 'Is it possible for man to become sanctified on earth?' The word 'perfect' is ambiguous, and it is some question whether or not man even becomes perfect in the sense of utterly complete after death. Are you with me on this?"

JM: "For once I think I can agree with you. Let it be sanctified, then."

JP: "To pick up where I left off, your thesis is that the Bible teaches that all men are sinners, in the present, does it not?"

JM: "Exactly. And am I wrong?"

JP: "Not entirely. For apart from the Christ, it is surely impossible to be freed from slavery to sin, but it is faithless to assert that even with Christ we remain slaves to sin, even a little bit. We must not yield to sin, according to you?"

JM: "As much as humanly possible, given our sinful nature."

JP: "And the flesh and the spirit war, and we are continually fighting this war, sometimes winning, sometimes losing?"

JM: "Yes."

JP: "And according to you, John teaches that he who is born of God does not *continually* sin, is not in the habit of sinning?"

JM: "Yes, John Paul, that's exactly what I think."

JP: "Let me tell you a story, John Mark. Imagine that you were in the archery club at the University of Rochester, and I was your coach. Your first assignment was to shoot 100 arrows at a target. But here's the catch. If you missed a single arrow you'd fail. You had 100 arrows, and you had to shoot them all, every day, for the first quarter. I told you that sometimes you'd hit, sometimes you'd miss, but you had to empty the quiver.

"That first quarter you failed the class. You protested that the assignment was impossible. You said, 'I don't have the right bow, the feathers are scratched and broken on some of the arrows,' and so on.

"I told you, 'Don't complain to me; I have high standards. You must strive for excellence!' And I made you keep shooting 100 arrows a day for the second quarter.

"But you couldn't muster any motivation to try. You shot at clouds or the field in front of your face, to amuse yourself, rather than aim for a target that was impossible to hit every time. I asked you, 'What's the problem, you don't care about my commands? You don't care about your grade?' And you responded, 'No, I care very much, but I just can't do it.'

Then I gave you a pep talk and you tried again—until I moved the target 100 yards farther away, and you gave up entirely. I turned red in the face and yelled and threatened, but you just kept shooting the quiver into the ground, or another person's target, or whatever else met your fancy. And you failed the second quarter, just like the first.

“The third quarter, as a compassionate and merciful coach, I changed the rules. I brought the target back to where it was, and I based your grade not on how many times you hit the target, but on how hard you tried. I gave you 100 arrows a day, every day, to shoot, but I said, ‘A real archer is the one who does not continually miss. You may still miss on any given day, but the amount you miss must be less than yesterday, or last week, or last month, or last quarter. Therefore, unless you are missing less and less continually, you are not truly an archer and my student. And you will fail the class.’

“Then you took my mandate, and shot the target fifteen times out of 100, missing only 85. Then the next day you hit 20, and missed 80. The third day you hit 25 and missed 75, and so on. At that rate, you thought, ‘I’ll be hitting 100 out of 100 in only 17 days!’”

“But one day you hit only 15 again. You were afraid you’d fail the class, until you remembered that I said you must be improving *up to the last day of the semester*. So you became careless for a while and didn’t worry about improving too much, lest you raise the bar too high for yourself.

“Then, a few weeks later, you got bored and started practicing in earnest. You started hitting 30, 40, 50, even 60 arrows out of 100, on average. The target was small, and far away, but your arm got stronger; you got a better bow and better arrows.

“But then you hit a plateau. By the fourth quarter, you were hitting 70 to 80 bull’s eyes every day. You began to worry: ‘Is 70 hits on average enough? It’s certainly better than where I started, but I’m no longer improving. I “continually miss” 30 arrows a day.’

“And my mandate, you remember, was either to hit the target 100 times per day, or, if you couldn’t, not to continue in a habit of missing, which means, unless I am mistaken, to continually decrease the percentage of missing. So by the third quarter you are stuck hitting the target about 75 times per day. Have you begun to fail at my mandate? You were worried, and thought yes.

“Well, practice doesn’t make perfect, but practice makes improvement, you thought to yourself, and kept trying. The end of the fourth academic quarter was drawing nigh and you were consistently making between 80 and 90 hits. You didn’t have unlimited more days to practice, and you were

afraid that even if you hit 100 you might slip back to 90 hits, and thus fail my command. ‘Bowling professionals often bowl a perfect game, so why can’t I shoot a perfect round, every time?’ you wondered to yourself.

“At the end of the semester, I failed you again. You hadn’t hit a perfect game every time, and furthermore, you stopped improving. You continually missed. You went and complained to the department head that I was being unjust. You told him, ‘He said never miss a single arrow. When I complained he said, “Fine, you can miss, but you must not miss continually. You must not make a habit of missing. You must continually hit more and more.” But, these amount to the same thing. Because unless I drop the class right when my improvement is at a high, I have to hit the target every time in order to keep the command. Either I can get 100 hits, in which case I can keep both commands, or I can’t get 100 hits, in which case, I can’t keep either command. So both are unjust.’

“The point, John Mark, I can tell you already see, is this: In the real world, the mandate to obey God must mean either to obey Him completely, or to disobey Him less and less. If the former is impossible, as you claim, then the latter is, too. But if the latter is possible, then the former is too. And not just theoretically possible, but some people do this, earlier or later, eventually reaching a state of constant obedience, ‘doing nothing of [themselves] but as [their] Father teaches [them], speaking these things.’

“I think this argument is sufficient to refute you, but I would like to address another excellent question you asked, John Mark, about the Apostles. They were indeed sanctified, along with many thousands of other Christians throughout history. Charlie has done a fairly good job presenting this thesis from the Holy Scriptures, but you attempted to refute it. So I will begin by refuting your refutation. In Romans 9, which you quoted, Paul is employing Greek rhetorical convention to tell the story of redemption from the time of Abraham and Israel until Christ and the Church. First, before the Law and the Messiah, people were sinful but did not know it except when their own conscience testified against them. They did not so greatly struggle against their sin. Second, after the Law but before the Messiah, the Law made sin more clearly known and even increased sin, without affecting freedom or obedience. This effect resulted in Jews like Paul being caught in a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. Thus, in character, Paul speaks for all of Israel, illuminating this effect of the Law on the sinful *sarx*, which was his former state. Third, after the Law and the Messiah, the Law passed away or, rather, the Law was fulfilled in Christ. The effect of the advent of the *Cristo* is that knowledge of sin increases, struggle against sin increases for a time, and by the power of grace through the faith and love of Christ, sin and death are destroyed

in him who believes. This is proven, as you say, by the text that follows Paul's rhetorical question, 'Who will save me from this body of death? Thanks be to God in our Lord Jesus Christ.' You are right, therefore, that all *have* sinned, but not right that all *continually* sin. For if all continually sin, even those with repentance and faith and baptism and love, then we must contradict Paul when he calls certain people 'sanctified,' 'saints,' 'holy ones,' and many other superlative titles. And what reason do we have for even trying to keep all the commandments, or in trying to keep more and more of them indefinitely?

"Applying this to Peter should be easy. He did betray Christ, and later he did Judaize. But he repented deeply for his sins each time. Why would his epistles still be included in the Scriptural Canon if he did not? And eventually by God's grace he was made complete and sanctified, having added to his faith virtue, to his virtue knowledge, to his knowledge self-control, to his self-control perseverance, to his perseverance godliness, to his godliness brotherly kindness, to his brotherly kindness love, and thus he became a partaker of the divine nature. We can conclude, not only from this precedent, but from Church Tradition, that the same is true of the other Apostles, as well as many of their disciples, such as Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna, if only to name a few. Now, as to the nature of sanctification, we can get into that if you want, but first let me point out one simple fact. Christians are sanctified only by Cristo, with Cristo, and for Cristo. 'There is no such thing as sanctification apart from Christ; who is holy, holy, holy. This explains why the quotations from the Old Testament are more despairing about human depravity.

"The author of Kings agrees with me that there is no man who does not sin, at least some times in some ways. But Kings knows nothing of the empowering grace of the Christ, by which I am slowly saved from all present mortal sins. Solomon asks, 'Who can say, "I have made my heart clean"?' And the correct answer is 'No one.' However, I ask, 'who can say, "Christ has made my heart clean"?' The correct there is, 'All the great cloud of witnesses.' Solomon also states that there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins, and this is correct. The righteous man who does good and never sins is in heaven. That man is also God, and his name is Jesus Christ. The persons who are righteous on earth and never mortally sin are all followers of God and his Word made righteous by faith and works. After the Messiah these are called saints or the sanctified. Before the Messiah they are called saints or patriarchs or kings or prophets. Of the former I have already given examples. Of the latter take Job for instance. Job asserts his own righteousness before God. God implicitly accepts this assertion when he offers Job as an example to Satan of someone who is not just following God because of his material success. God does chastise Job in Job 32 for overstepping his bounds in

his questions. This is a mistake, but not necessarily a sin. But God also implicitly accepts Job's righteousness by only correcting his mistake and not convicting him of some sin, past or present. Noah, as well, is called righteous [Genesis 6:5]. Abraham, of course, was righteous by faith and works, as James teaches [James 2]. I could also call to the stand Lot and his wife, David by the end of his life, and many others. This seems to indicate that some Old Testament saints were sanctified. Let this, then, suffice both as a refutation to your thesis and support for the opposite thesis."

4.4 THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF HOLINESS ON EARTH

JM: "To be honest, John Paul, while you were talking I had a hard time paying attention. The way you marshal text to the unwilling support of such a non-biblical belief makes it difficult for me to believe that you really are taking the Bible seriously. Add the fact that I am suspicious about the real stance from which you are probably coming, which is not a belief in the sole authority of the Holy Word of God, but in the traditions of men, specifically the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. I'm not ignoring your arguments; I'm just saying why it is hard for me to really take seriously a conversation that I feel like we have had many times before. Let me state four objections to what you've said. I will appeal not only to the Bible, which is our common basis of agreement, but to philosophical arguments, which is your custom.

"You and the Roman church assert that man can be sanctified on earth. Firstly, I still think that the passages from Romans and from the Gospels show clearly that Paul was not sanctified, and that Jesus does not expect us to be perfect on earth. For not only have 'all...sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,' in the past, but there is in the present 'no one is righteous; no not one.' Scripture is clear, but this does not seem to be enough for you. Secondly, if it is possible, where are all the righteous people? Even if I consent to what you and Charlie agree upon, that it is *possible* for man to be sanctified, how can you persuade me of the further point that there are *actual men* who are sanctified? You appeal to the Apostles, and Old Testament saints, but the scriptural data seem inconclusive, if not weighted heavily on my side, that the followers of God were, are, and always will be sinners to the heart. The historical data, on the other hand, are certainly conclusive. Extra-biblical data is never sufficient to establish an infallibly certain truth of God, but I bring up the history because you already broached it. Since the time of Christ and the Apostles Christians have been sinners through and through, utterly

depraved in mind, heart, soul, and strength. Even in the first generation of believers after Christ's ascension, Paul can tell Timothy in II Timothy 2:16, 'Shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. As Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth, men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith.' And James 4:1 can say, 'Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasures that war in your members?' II Peter also says, 'But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies.' And II John 13:7 says, 'Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves that we do not lose these things we worked for, that we may receive a full reward.' Even the Gospels say, 'O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?' Jude is also strongly opposed to the legion of falsehood and wickedness that springs up in the fertile soil of the church, for he says, '... the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe... Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil [over] the body of Moses... said "The Lord rebuke you!" But these speak evil of whatever they do not know.' There are many more examples from Scripture besides these. I need not mention any of the passages from Revelation, Acts, or the Old Testament. Like Israel of the old covenant, we Christians are constantly experiencing the pattern of falling away from God and returning to God, or rather being returned back to God by His own gracious loving-kindness. From the false teachers of the first century to the Arian heresies of the fourth century to the Roman Catholic confusion of the sixteenth century, we have proven ourselves to be hopeless without God's help. If it weren't for His faithfulness, we would certainly be lost. And even with his constant providential provision we remain his stumbling, bumbling, foolish, unfaithful, licentious, legalistic people. We are and always will be God's 'leprous bride.' Thirdly, a philosophical objection: The Bible also says that the obstruction in our vision, the obstacle between us and holiness, is our flesh—as I'm sure John Paul would agree..."

JP: "Properly interpreted, yes."

JM: "But 'blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'. Contrarily, miserable are the impure in heart, for they shall not see God? When I die, isn't it true that flesh dies with me? And thank God, for man cannot be happy in the flesh, neither the deeds of the flesh nor this earthly frame. This is a problem for your position."

JP: "O John Mark, you are so close, yet still mistaken. The Holy Bible teaches that man *can be* sanctified on earth. But there is a last step, an

ultimate blessedness, which consists of vision of the divine essence of God. Vision of God is only possible to one purified of sin through moral virtue, and enlightened through intellectual virtue, and released from the entrapment of the corrupted *corpus*. As a purely spiritual being, before or after the attainment of the resurrection body, vision of God is possible for the purified and virtuous and holy soul. The addition of the resurrection body does not increase one's blessedness intensively but extensively. Either way, this intellectual vision is eternal life, and not life only, but eternal happiness, as Father Seraphim was arguing earlier."

JM: "I'm sorry, but I think we clearly understand where we don't agree, John Paul."

FS: "What about your fourth point?"

JM: "Well, if I were to accept John Paul's hypothesis, I suspect that I would eventually be compelled also have us accept that people who are becoming perfect—"

JP: "—*Sanctified*."

JM: "—that people who are in the process of becoming sanctified, but have not yet reached this fantastic goal, are not justified. Or if they are in fact saved, they can lose this salvation. Both of these possibilities are non-scriptural, and so I reject the antecedent. But John Paul and I have been over this before. I am rather more interested in our earlier discussion, when we confused salvation with sanctification, and I still haven't heard from Seraphim whether or not he thinks justification and salvation are the same or different."

4.5 JUSTIFICATION IN THE BODY

FS: "I am very willing to resume a discussion of justification, unless John Paul objects...? I would like hear what you, John Mark, mean by justification. Then perhaps I can properly distinguish justification, sanctification, and salvation."

JM: "Very well, Seraphim. Start here: Can we agree that man is fallen?"

FS: "Yes, certainly."

JM: "And this fallenness applies not only to Adam but to all men."

FS: "Yes."

JM: "And being rescued from this fallenness is properly called salvation?"

FS: "Quite so."

JM: "I earlier agreed to defining salvation as 'eternal life' and then 'eternal happiness.' I would like to revise this statement."

FS: "Revise away, my son."

JM: "Well, on my view, justification is the step in the Christian life that can be most properly called salvation, for it is by being *justified* that we are rescued from the consequence of sin. This is truly salvation, for without being justified we would be dead in our sins, guilty before God, and condemned to eternal punishment. This justification takes place after a moment of *regeneration* when God imparts spiritual life to us, and after our response of repentance and faith in Christ's sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Romans 3:26 says, 'God justifies him who has faith in Jesus.' But this justification itself has two parts, each of which must be distinguished to give a proper account of salvation. Justification is first of all God's legal declaration that we are guiltless and forgiven. Our sins have been propitiated and our debts paid for. 'There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.' [Romans 8:1] Secondly, it is God's *imputation* of Christ's righteousness *to us*—reckoning us righteous on his account. 'Abraham believed, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' [Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3] See, when Martin Luther realized the truth of justification by faith alone, in that moment he became a Christian truly. In that moment he overflowed with the new-found joy of the gospel. In that moment, for him—as well as for anyone who believes—justification occurs; as soon as justification occurs, sanctification begins. We become children of God, Christians, and heirs of eternal life. While sanctification ought to continue, it is not necessary for salvation—although if it is not continuing then we should question whether or not the salvation took place at all. And while sanctification does continue in those truly born again, it is not possible for it to be completed in this life, as I have argued already. This alone is salvation, and our definition of eternal happiness jives only because sanctification which follows it allows us to be like God, and enjoy Him forever."

FS: "I see. John Paul, you disagree with this reading?"

JP: "Not with the Holy Writings themselves, Father, but with that analysis. The view of justification just propounded by my friend is strange and unheard of in all of Holy Writ, Church dogma, and the history of mankind. Justification according to Holy Scripture is the *sanctifying and renewing* of the inner man. Paul asserts in Romans 2 that 'not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.' How can justification be a legal declaration of guiltlessness if it is only those who end up doing the law that *will be justified*, future tense?"

JM: “Simple: Justification has two senses in Scripture. One is to declare righteous; the other is to demonstrate or to reveal as righteous. The verse you just quoted is using the second sense.”

JP: “Many more verses show that justification *begins* with the instrumental cause of baptism, but must be replenished and nourished by love, as I have already argued. Justification includes the confession of the all divine truths of revelation, and not only personal faith but also public repentance, love of neighbor, progressively stronger hope in God, humility, sincere contrition, and cheerful almsgiving.” Turning to Father Seraphim and the others, John Paul continued, “my Protestant friend may not accept this as Protestant dogma, but it is certainly biblical dogma. For James says that ‘faith alone does not justify.’ [James 2] What else along with faith *does* justify? Jesus gives the formula, ‘Repent and believe.’ So belief *and* repentance bring eternal life, and all the other benefits. Furthermore, Saint Paul says, ‘Faith, hope and love remain, but the greatest of these is love.’ Not faith but *love* is greatest. He also says that ‘we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope.’ Holy Scripture says, ‘Do not exalt yourself, lest you fall and bring dishonor to your soul,’ [Wisdom 6:2], so we cannot assume that our faith alone saves us—but that prayer is good when accompanied by fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness. . . It is better to give alms than to treasure up gold. For almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. ‘Those who perform deeds of charity and of righteousness will have fullness of life’ [Tobit 12:8-9]. Perhaps some of you want to count on justification by faith without giving alms, or fearing the Lord, or humility, or hope, or love, but I for one would rather trust the Holy Writ.”

JM: “I am not saying that any of these are *bad*. Repentance and the rest are *consequences*—maybe even *inevitable* consequences—of saving and justifying *faith*. Does the effect of faith have to be somehow a part of saving faith, or *necessary alongside* faith before God justifies us? Certainly not. ‘For while we were yet sinners Christ died for us’ [Romans 5:8]. He did not wait until we were giving our money to the poor, or purchasing indulgences, or feeling sorrow over our sins. To constantly insist that he requires us to be perfect before justifying us is tantamount to ascribing cruelty, hatred, and insanity to the most high God!”

JP: “How can I convince you of what is true, my friend? We are talking past each other again, and I am ready to be done.”

JM: “Perhaps this is because of how deeply entrenched in your own viewpoint you really are. You can’t even see that the sale of indulgences is absurd, unBiblical, and *wrong*—the Reformation settled this almost 500 years ago, yet you bring them up, even today.”

JP: “Although the sale of indulgences has been formally ceased in the Catholic Church, because of certain abuses of it which did take place, its timeless purpose remains clear: To *continually apply* God’s justification to the believer—without them, God’s mercy would be bound.”

JM: “Oh but John Paul, do you not agree that justification is the substitutionary payment of our debt by God to God?”

JP: “I do. But do *you* not see that sanctifying works contribute to our restoring a state of justice before God?”

JM: “I see that they contribute to a state of some sanctity, but not justice—for to be justified is not *to be made just*; it is to be *declared righteous* on account of Christ.”

JP: “How you can *say* that after the verses I just quoted is beyond me.”

4.6 JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

JM: “Look, John Paul, I grant that there do *seem* to be *some* Scriptures that teach the necessity of works as a part of justification. But we must apply this test.”

JP: “What test?”

JM: “We know that salvation can’t be lost. Sanctification, on the other hand, can be lost and regained. The *ongoing* part of the Christian life is either justification or sanctification. If it’s part of justification, then it cannot be lost. If it’s part of sanctification, it can be gained and lost. Conversely, if it *can* be lost, it is not salvation. Now, sanctification *can* be gained and lost and regained, *without* affecting one’s eternal state before God. Therefore the ongoing part of the Christian life is sanctification—hence, likewise, sanctification and justification or salvation must be different.”

JP: “Whoa... Wait a minute. That’s not certain to me. Are you so sure salvation, once obtained, cannot be lost?”

JM: “The Scripture is very clear on this point. It teaches that ‘All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day’ [John 6:37ff]. ‘And they whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace;

but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved' [Westminster, chap. 17, sec. 1]."

JP: "Oh, dear. I believe we have been over this before as well, my old friend. Shall I respond to your latest misquotation for the sake of those listening?"

JM: "The Scriptures are response enough. If you can't read them but through the lens of Roman theology, how can one man break through?"

FS: "Little children, love one another. Let us abide in the argument, with kindness. John Paul, I for one think it's important to hear what you have you say on this topic. What is the will of the others?"

JM: They all said they wanted to hear the argument.

CHAPTER 5: E UNUM PLURIBUS

JP: “Very well. For those of you in this circle who are not yet so indoctrinated with *Reformation* theology as to be unable to interpret the Holy Scriptures freely and clearly and deeply, thinking about the relevant issues both from natural revelation and from each area of supernatural revelation, let me walk through the much misunderstood question of whether someone can lose their salvation.”

JM: “For the argument to be complete, go ahead. But you should know you’re far outnumbered by Protestants, and we stand united.”

Charlie: “Again I would beg to differ, John Mark. I appreciate your willingness and ability to stand up for all of us against John Paul’s assertions, but I can’t agree with this ‘once saved, always saved’ idea.”

JP: “Charlie, since you confess the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, why don’t you be my interlocutor. You and John Mark agree on the essential points of your faith and doctrine, so you’ll accurately represent the Protestant tradition, and you will not allow me to appeal to Roman tradition, as John Mark calls it. John Mark and all those listening must decide who is more clearly biblical.”

C: “OK, John Paul.”

JP: “To begin, then, John Mark asserted that those whom the Lord has in his hands will not be snatched away—do you agree? Do you assert this about those whom the Lord *definitely* has in his hands? But cannot those in the Lord’s hands, even if they are not snatched away by a demon or a false teacher, choose to walk away? If we have a will and if we are free to choose this or that, good or bad, then even those who have followed could stop following. Judas followed Christ for some time, but then stopped. We could all furnish examples, I’m sure, of apparently *saved* Christians who stopped following Christ, lost their salvation. But we mustn’t just settle the issue on inductive grounds, but deductive.

“The case includes many arguments, many tired Scriptural passages, batted around fruitlessly for 400 years. For instance, the one John Mark has already said, and many more, like ‘nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.’ [Romans 8:38] Let’s point out that to prove his point, John Mark must assume that being *connected* to the love of God means, vaguely, being *saved*. Without stating this assumption, he would try to use ‘nothing shall separate us from the love of God,’ as if this proved that nothing could possibly prevent God from saving someone whom he wanted to save. In addition to the John 6 verse, he quoted already, he might quote Philippians 1:6, where Paul says, ‘Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.’ Nor would he forget many other such passages from Paul’s epistles, like 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, where Paul says ‘And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.’ Or Romans 8:29, where he says, ‘For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.’ Nor also Romans 11:29, where he says, ‘*For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable, nor* Ephesians 2:10, ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.’ Like a good detective, he would search out evidence in every part of the New Testament, like in 1 Peter 1:5 where the Holy Apostle says that ‘the elect *by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*’ And in 1 Peter 1:23, he says, ‘Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever,’ and John Mark would interpret this as assuring us of eternal security in salvation. Now I’m really getting going—not content with such indistinct statements of the truth, John Mark would be compelled to speak loudly, lifting his voice and saying clearly that ‘God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from his own people, even in their melancholy falls; nor suffers them to proceed so far as to lose the grace of adoption, and forfeit the state of justification, or to commit the sin unto death; nor does he permit them to be totally deserted, and to plunge themselves into everlasting destruction. For in the first place, in these falls he preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing, or being totally lost; and again, by his Word and Spirit certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore his mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.’ And

if this were not enough he would bring to the stand many of the Protestant creeds, or Confessions of Faith as you call them, which articulate the dogma of perseverance, such as Dordt, the Westminster Confession of Faith [Chapter XVII], the London Baptist Confession of 1689 [Chapter 17], and other Reformed Confessions. He would say something like, ‘Our fathers confessed it. We must. It is the comfort, hope, assurance of the church’—though he would not put all the weight of testimony on these humble confessions, of course, but would call to the stand many other beautiful verses besides.

“Bringing all these verses to bear, it would be right to also bring out a few other passages—perhaps insignificant passages—such as Hebrews, where the author says, ‘For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.’ And we would remind him of Romans 11: ‘And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them... Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed lest he also spare not thee.*’ And, gaining confidence, we would certainly not forget I Timothy 1:18-19, ‘Holding faith, and good conscience, which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck; of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.’ Nor II Timothy 4:7-8, ‘I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.’ We couldn’t omit Galatians 6:9—‘And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we don’t give up.’ Nor, ‘Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial,’ as James [1:12] says, ‘for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.’ If even this weren’t enough, we would quote 2 Peter 1:10, ‘Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure.’ One might think it’s enough to convince him, but not if we suppose that he is a very spiritual man who demands a great deal of evidence. So we’d have to put the last nail in the coffin, which of course is Matthew 24:13—‘the one who endures to the end will be saved.’ It is clear from these verses that Paul believes it is possible to be cut off from the olive tree, and that we must persevere by ‘fighting’ and by ‘finishing the course.’ Though John Mark might quibble with this or that, this much clear to you and me, Charlie, at least—that sanctification is a necessary part of salvation?”

C: "Yes, John Paul, for otherwise, the temptation is much too strong to settle for cheap grace. You can see this in my friend's Calvinist church. They seem very reasonable, but repentance and good works are downplayed and sin is not upbraided."

JP: "Why is that, do you think, Charlie?"

C: "Because some such churches—not all of them, but some of them—have ignored parts of God's Word in favor of other parts of God's Word. They focus on the passages that talk about faith and ignore passages that talk about the ongoing renewal of the mind, the putting on Christ, the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, as I have already talked about."

JP: "Good point, Charlie. But don't you think there is something in it? This is, after all, the position of many of our mutual friends, and most of the people in this room. They're not speaking total nonsense, are they? But they are marshaling a great deal of Holy Scripture to their support."

C: "Is there something in it, intellectually, you mean?"

JP: "Sure."

C: "There is fear in it, definitely. A fear of exercising our God-given free will in the pursuit of virtue and holiness; a fear of obedience turning into legalism; a fear of the overwhelming power of sin and death; a vague fear of error and deception in which we are at risk and, one I share, the fear of falling into greater error and deception by submission to the Papacy, if you'll not take offence. But if you ask me, the Wesleyan tradition has faithfully restored God's teaching in Protestantism about the importance—necessity—of sanctification for salvation, but has avoided the corruption of God's teaching in the Catholic confusion of sanctification and justification."

5.2 FREE-DESTINATION AND PRE-WILL

JM: "Wouldn't you agree, though, Charlie, that some people are predestined by God to salvation, and others are not?"

C: "That depends on how you mean it," he said.

JP: "Oh, dear Lord, don't start this conversation again!"

FS: "Why not? What's wrong?" asked Father Seraphim.

JP: "Have you not heard of the legion of vehement debates this question provokes? Are you not aware that brother turns his back on brother, churches schism, entire nations split apart, even wars break

out as soon as the question is asked, whether man chooses God or God chooses man?”

FS: “I have heard of such controversies, yes. But it has been many years since I participated in them.”

JP: “Oh, blessed man! For Catholics they are purgatorially difficult—for Protestants, infernally impossible.”

FS: “We can’t leave off the argument mid-way, can we?”

JM: “John Paul is right: If we start this tangent, we may never return.”

FS: “Why don’t you draw up the main points? You must argue for both sides, as John Paul did before, to ensure we won’t misunderstand each other.”

JM: “I’ll try, Father Seraphim. Though how we’ll avoid the real disagreement, I don’t know.”

5.3 GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

JM: “Where shall we begin? The question is whether God *sovereignly chooses* to save us, or whether we *freely* choose to be saved by him. The answer must be one of four logical options: Either God chooses man apart from man’s will; or man chooses God apart from God’s grace; or they both choose each other—one willing, the other giving grace—or neither of these. Either Calvinism, Arminianism, Pelegianism, or none of the above. For instance, a Buddhist or materialist might argue that *no* one chooses, but all happens according to fate, or to nature.

“That’s the question, those are the options. To answer, we must lay down some principle from which the rest of our argument may be analytically derived. The principle we seek for can be found in Scripture, and it is this: In all things God *sovereignly brings about his own glory*. This should be obvious, but let’s lay out some Scriptural proof. For instance, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’ So, then, it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but to God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you, that my name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills he hardens. God chooses whom to harden, and whom to soften. Furthermore, Acts 13:48 says that ‘when the gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained

to eternal life believed.' They were *ordained* not by themselves but by God. Ephesians 1:4 says, '*He chose us in Him* before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He *destined* us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of *his will*, to the praise of his glorious grace.' This is clear that he that he chooses us for his glory, though later in Ephesians it says, 'We who first hoped in Christ have been *destined* and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.' Elsewhere, I Thessalonians 1:4 states that, 'we know, brethren beloved by God, that *he has chosen* you; for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power...' Also, in II Thessalonians it says, 'we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, *because God chose you from the beginning to be saved*.' II Timothy makes an important point, that this election is *not* based on our works, but on *God's* purpose and unmerited grace. It says, in chapter 1, 'who saved us and called us with a holy calling, *not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose* and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago.' I Peter and Revelation also speak explicitly in terms of election and predestination. Revelation, for instance, says in chapter 13, 'And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on the earth worship it, every one whose name has been written before the foundation of the world in book of life of the Lamb that was slain.' It also speaks of the book of life in Revelation 17.

"But Charlie and others might ask, 'how is it consistent with God's glory that he sovereignly chooses only *some* people to be saved?' Firstly, predestination glorifies God because the elect may find comfort in election. The elect are able to be 'anxious for nothing,' knowing that their salvation is secure, not resting *in any sense upon their own works* or self-motivated faith. The elect may find humility in election. For when God is electing, regenerating, and granting faith and justification as a free gift, what do we have to boast about? Thirdly, the elect owe God thanks. God is glorified because the only appropriate response to being elected is unlimited gratitude, praise, and glory. The verse I quoted from Ephesians states, 'We who first hoped in Christ have been *destined* and appointed to *live for the praise of his glory*.' Isn't this quite clear? Our destiny is to live for the praise of God and the glorification of God alone. This is a high destiny, for which we are immensely grateful, and deeply humbled. Fourthly, election ensures our calling: We are to spread God's glory throughout the earth in obedience to the great commission, as Paul models. II Timothy 2:10 says, 'I endure everything for the *sake of the elect*, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory.' Here we see that all Christians are to endure hardship for the sake of those who are *elect* but *not yet saved*. Their salvation brings about the glory of God, which is his purpose, as we have stated. Nor does he bring

about his glory through sovereignly accomplishing their salvation, but God in his infinite mercy allows us, his simple creatures, to be his tools in accomplishing that purpose. I could go on to develop the case in more detail, but let that suffice as the opening comments.”

5.4 BREAKING DOWN

JP: “Good job, John Mark. Now we need to hear the opposing side. Charlie, why don’t you take up the argument?”

C: “I don’t know if I feel up for it. I don’t have as much of a problem with the idea of pre-destination as with the idea of *pre-reprobation*. That God could predestine certain people to eternal *punishment*, for no sin of their own, I cannot bide.”

JP: “But it’s not that God chooses them for punishment, or wrath, for no reason. Rather, since ‘all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,’ and since he foresees this, it would be just for Him to allow all men to perish and receive his wrath. The remarkable exception is that he chooses some to save from their sins, according to his unmerited favor.”

C: “Why doesn’t he choose all men to salvation? Doesn’t the Bible say ‘God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’? Is God glorified by the damnation of some men?”

JP: “God is glorified by having both noble and ignoble vessels. Romans is as clear as day: It asks, ‘Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory by the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?’ Sure, as John Calvin says, ‘the decree is dreadful indeed, yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree.’ God’s glory is increased in the vessels of mercy because of the presence of the vessels of wrath.”

C: “I can’t picture God with two opposing wills. Is he double-minded?”

JP: “Although he wills that none should perish, if they so choose, he more *truly* wills, you would say, that all men should choose freely for themselves.”

C: "I suppose you're right about that."

JM: "I knew this would happen. John Paul, we are leaving the main track."

JP: "Charlie, can't you do as we agreed and give an outline of the basic points of the Wesleyan doctrine for Father Seraphim? We don't have time to carry out the whole discussion. Or shall I take the ball?"

C: "You take it, John Paul."

5.5 GOD'S LOVE

JP: "Very well. Again I speak for you, and you Protestants, though we disagree so strongly.

"I'll follow John Mark in laying down a principle from which the rest of my case may be analytically derived: That principle is simply this: God is love. Of course, John Mark, Charlie, and any Arminian wouldn't contend this principle, if properly understood. But let Father Seraphim decide which application to the specific case of predestination of souls is more fitting.

"The scriptural justification,' as you call it, of this principle is obvious. Besides I John, I will add John 3:16, where John says, 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.' A first corollary may be that God is glorified by and through his loving acts, not by any *arbitrary* or hateful judgments. He is only glorified by 'judgment' and 'wrath' and such when these are holy expressions of his love, as we discussed earlier.

"Now, how does the interplay between predestination and free will demonstrate the love of God and consequently glorify him? Consider this: God in his infinite love created all kinds of things, each to exemplify some attribute or aspect of himself. The angels are sentient intellectual (immaterial) substances; the minerals and rocks are non-sentient material substances; the plants and trees are non-sentient but living material substances; the animals are sentient material substances. All these creatures image forth God—but creation lacked a creature made *in the image and likeness* of God. So He made man and woman, the crown of creation. They were sentient intellectual and material substances, both (as Pascal puts it) angelic beasts, or beastly angels. Where rocks just exist, plants exist and grow, animals exist and grow and feel, but do not think, and angels exist and think but do not grow or feel; man exists, grows, feels, and thinks. Thus they were to incorporate all matter below them and all

spirit above them into persons like the Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity.

“Yet God is a free person who chooses between goods, so he made the free persons who also choose. The angelic persons made one fateful choice, long ago. The men were to be free through time, they were to make ongoing choices, that is, the ability to choose and the ability to change their mind, or else keep going. (The animals had an appearance of choice but not the substance, since their movements are determined by natural desire.)

“This lengthy tangent is to make the point that, when Holy Scriptures speak of predestination, they cannot contradict the fact of man’s choice, because his freedom which constitutes his unique role in the kingdom. Since God’s plan was to fill the plenitude of beings— and to disturb any creature’s uniqueness, by humanizing animals or humanizing angels, would be to violate this order. Rather, so the argument goes, they must speak of a God’s *foreknowledge* of man’s choice.

“Now, to refute John Mark’s view, I only point out that election as he presented makes human choice irrelevant in the salvation process. Seeming-choices would make us somewhat less than his image and likeness, which would pervert his design. Even if you say they are ‘real’ choices that God ultimately wants us to choose, how is this different from saying they are seeming-choices? Either way would be unloving of God and would pervert his design—both of which are impossible.

“So much for the objections. To refute his principle leaving God’s actual sovereignty intact, I must say that having mercy ‘on’ someone is not identical to saving against the will ‘of,’ as he assumes. Even the phrase ‘hardening the heart’ does not refer to ‘causing to once and for all reject Christ and salvation,’ but rather to a kind of momentary stubbornness and inclination to reject *a specific item* in God’s will at that time.

“As for the idea that being unconditionally elected is humbling, I see no reason why it shouldn’t also, and for the very same reason, be exalting. For if the elect cannot lose their salvation, then once I know I am elect I may feel grateful—or I may freely sin, laugh at God, and eat, drink, and be merry, knowing that I am fore-ordained to paradise. If I can’t take pride in my goodness, neither can I have shame for my wickedness. Secondly, while it is indeed fitting to respond to election by thanksgiving, this is the fitting response to *any and every* divine action, however painful or insignificant—I should praise God for the damnation of the sinner and the creation of a new insect on earth. Since all proceed from the infinite love of God, how is the unconditional application of salvation to some cause for any more praise than the mere conditional offering of salvation to all? Much the same response goes for the next point: Christians are to

evangelize the gospel and spread the glory of God throughout the earth *regardless* of whether they are who they are because of God's choice or their own choice. Let this be our preliminary response, Father Seraphim, however inadequate. Someone like Charlie might give a better one, if he were feeling up to it. John Mark, have I successfully presented a plausible case against the position?"

JM: "Bravo, John Paul! You are perfectly compassionate, when you decide to give your opponent's side the benefit of the doubt. I could almost forget, while you were speaking, that you *also* believe, with me, the biblical doctrine of predestination. Now, Father Seraphim, we have heard both sides—how shall we proceed?"

5.6 GOD'S WILL(S)

C: "—Sorry to interrupt, but how can you two say that God desires something else more than the salvation of his people? I find that so offensive! Is God a loving Father or a tyrant and a monster?"

JP: "I see that my account has struck a chord, Charlie. Can you refute God's predestination by appealing to his love? His glory and his love are identical with his Divine Essence, so the activity of glorifying himself is no different than the activity of loving creatures, even those whom he created towards an ignoble purpose."

C: "But how would you refute John 3:16? It clearly teaches that 'whosoever believes,' not just some elect elite, will have eternal life."

JM: "Let me take this objection, Charlie. That is a very common error made by evangelicals—I'm afraid the point goes to John Paul and me on this one. Some would like to insert the concept of *man's merit and ability* into the term 'whoever,' so that when we read 'whoever believes in Him shall not perish,' you think 'whoever' means 'whoever *chooses* to believe;' this is not the plain meaning of the text at all. In fact, the literal reading of the text in question is so that 'all the ones believing may have eternal life.' There simply is no word 'whosoever.' Instead, the passage is more properly saying that the Son of God was given by the Father so that *every person* who believes in Christ will have, as a result, eternal life. The passage does not even *allude* to the idea of man's merit or his abilities. It does not say all have the capacity to exercise saving faith; it says eternal life is *guaranteed to all believers*."

C: "I don't believe I could follow the god you are talking about. He sounds like an arbitrary, childish, unpredictable and narcissistic brat."

JM: “Charlie, watch it! I understand that this is difficult, but perhaps you should work on increasing your faith in what God says in the Scriptures.”

C: “The Scriptures teach God’s love and his sovereignty much more clearly! The Arminian view is more consistent with scriptural principles. For instance, John Paul’s principle—God is love. But the god you’re describing is anything but loving. He deceives me into thinking I have free choice, when I do not. He chooses heaven for me, which, even though a good thing, isn’t my choice. And he chooses hell, or permits it, for billions of souls whom he could just as easily save; all for the shameful prize of the unimaginably petty self-esteem you call *glory*.”

JM: “Choice is real, Charlie, but it’s the kind of choice wherein God sovereignly brings about his purposes *through* it. What makes you assume that choice must be free of God’s over-arching purpose in order to be genuine and free?”

C: “Is God sovereignly working through all my choices, without exception, whether I like it or not?”

JM: “Yes, without exception.”

C: “What about when I sin?”

JM: “That is different. He permits us to commit actions for which we are morally responsible, without doubt. Scripture is clear on this point.”

C: “How does that make any sense? How could that possibly make any sense!?”

JM: “I don’t know. But I know that His ways are not our ways, Charlie. ‘Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!’ [Matthew 18:7]”

C: “I still don’t see how your position is logical or biblical.”

5.7 SOLIDARITY BETWEEN CHRIST AND MAN IN PRE-DESTINATION

JP: “Charlie, John Mark, my friends, we are losing sight of the most important person, and that is Christ. Jesus Christ is the exemplar in all things—if we followed him, this and many other confusions would be resolved. For instance, if Christ is an example of predestination, then we could accept that Christians are predestined. If Christ is an example of freedom, then we could accept Christian freedom. Our *ordo salutis*

must follow our *ordo theologiae*, and both must begin—and end—with Christ. And he is himself the most illustrious light of predestination and grace. By what preceding merits of human nature—in either works or faith—did the Logos assume it into Himself? By none! And why did Christ submit his will to God at Gethsemane? Was it, as the Arian heretics maintained, that Christ's will was really opposed to God, and therefore that he was not really God? Certainly not. Was it, then as St. Gregory of Nazianzus maintained, that Jesus is God, and so the *apparent* opposition between the will of the Son and the will of the Father must not have been *real* opposition? No, for the opposition was not between God and God but between human nature and divine nature. St. Augustine, correctly maintained that Jesus is both God and man, having two natures, but that his human nature would have been naturally opposed to his divine nature—the nature of God. God therefore predestined him to have a nature that submits to divine will. This is the model of Christians, who by virtue of predestination follow Christ in submitting to God by God's will. For without such predestined grace, even Christ's human nature would have stayed in a state of rebellion against the Divine Nature in Him. If this is true of Jesus, the God-man, how much more so must it be true of merely human persons?

“Even though he received a sinless human body through the Blessed Virgin, his human nature required grace before it could be worthy to be joined with the Divine Nature. This grace was foreseen, fore-ordained, and predestined.

“Logic confirms this deliverance of St. Augustine's theology: God foreknows who will be saved. And foreknowledge is an attribute of God. Because all God's attributes are identical with his Essence. But he is not ‘good’ and ‘just’ like creatures are good and just. Rather, he is the perfection of these attributes. He is Goodness Itself, and Justice Itself. When we predicate these attributes of the Divine Essence, we are making logical distinctions to better understand he who is Himself immeasurable and incomprehensible. He is the perfection of all things, but he is not a multitude. Rather, he is absolutely one. Hence those attributes we ascribe to Him are really simple, and really only Himself by Himself. Then his foreknowing, viewed at its deepest level, is the same as his fore-ordaining. And both of these, as well as his love, justice, and sovereignty are one in God, Who Is Who He Is.”

5.8 OUT OF ONE, MANY

FS: “Now *I* am sorry to interrupt, but my son, does the same hold

true for the Persons of the Trinity? Do we ascribe them verbally or conceptually to the Divine Essence, but really they are One?"

JP: "No, that would be heresy, Father."

FS: "Then help me understand what you mean."

JP: "The unity of Essence and diversity of Persons in the Essence is something we accept, not because we arrived at its truth by some rational inquiry from indubitable premises, but because it is the teaching of the Holy Catholic Church. Then faith seeks understanding and we make what sense of it we are able. St. John [16:13-15] gives the words of Christ: 'What things so ever he [the Spirit] shall hear, he shall speak...he shall receive of mine, and shew it to you. All things whatsoever the Father hath, are mine.' Here a double consideration is in place. First, the Son has all things that the Father has, so that He must resemble the Father in being the Principle from which the Holy Ghost proceeds. And, by the way, John Mark, the fact that this statement was missing from the Creed is what caused you and I to speak out of turn earlier."

FS: "I am seeking understanding, John Paul, but so far you have not given what I asked."

JP: "What am I still lacking?"

FS: "Do the attributes of the Persons apply to each other, since they are identical with the Essence, and the Essence is common to all three Persons?"

JP: "Yes, that is right."

FS: "So the Father is loving, and the Son and the Spirit are also?"

JP: "Exactly."

FS: "But the Father is the begetter, and the son is not begetter. Why do they not share this?"

JP: "The Church gives us limits in which to work. For instance, we know that the Persons share all attributes, except for those you mentioned. This is why we knew that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son as from one Principle, since they have all, with few exceptions, attributes in common. This is also why I am confused by the way the Creed was recited, without the phrase, and the Son."

FS: "An important question, my son, and astute. Though to answer it adequately may take us far afield from our primary question."

JP: "Do you, then, not hold that the Spirit proceeds eternally also from the Son?"

FS: "Certainly not, for this is not the teaching of the Church in the Creed nor in the Fathers."

JP: "I find this exceedingly strange, Father Seraphim, for I believe I was specifically taught otherwise, not only in catechism as a child, but by several patriarchs and teachers of the Faith. It must be a misunderstanding, perhaps a linguistic or conceptual difference. Let us please discuss this issue in depth at another time. In the meantime I'll speak with Father Simon and attempt to fully understand the Roman Catholic position."

FS: "If possible, my son."

5.9 THE LAST WORD

JP: "As for our dangling disagreements, John Mark, Charlie, and everyone, about the nature of salvation, justification, sanctification, and predestination, I think it is adequately clear by now that mere rationality has exhausted itself. Still we are devoid of an answer, devoid of any semblance of Church unity. All of these deep misunderstandings of the Scripture are painfully unnecessary to witness. Scripture-fencing, flinging verse after verse at each other is not the answer. We need a judge and arbiter between our various interpretations of Scripture. That authority is the Roman Catholic Communion. In the name of peace, in the name of love, in the name our common Lord Jesus Christ, I implore you: Will you listen, not to me or to reason alone, but to my appeal to the Church Fathers and the Authority of the Vatican?"

JM: "You can appeal to them, if you wish to state your opinion, my brother, but not if you wish to persuade me. For I am not persuaded by any traditions of man, but only by the Word of God. You need to read the Scriptures, my friend. Or rather, you need to read them, understand them, interpret them correctly, and apply them properly."

JP: "That is funny. I was going to tell you exactly the same thing."

FS: "On that much, at least, you two are of one mind."

JP: "Father Seraphim, I am frustrated. I don't know how to proceed. As Protestants, John Mark and Charlie won't listen, but they won't speak clearly either. They keep saying their position is the more *biblical*, but they don't stand on the authority of the Church, nor consistently stand upon the authority of their own tradition."

FS: "Perhaps it is equally important to be loving as to be right, John Paul. Consider what your namesake would do."

JP: "He would if there is any real reason to deny the authority of the Church."

FS: "If no reason were received? Remember the word of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' [Acts 20:35]. What would he give?"

JP: "He would lovingly give an invitation to his friends to submit to the authority of the Vatican, without which there is no salvation."

FS: "And if they declined?"

JP: "He would reason with them from the Scriptures."

FS: "And if they did not see the light?"

JP: "He would warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him [Titus 3:10]. He wouldn't eat with them, but treat them as a publican and a tax collector!"

FS: "Would he not capture the conscience of the king, so to speak, with a play or a parable?"

JP: "I think that play has already been performed, Father. All the world's a stage, and the production is called the Protestant Reformation. It has been prattling on for almost five hundred years, entangling the emotions, thoughts, and desires of Germany, France, England, America, and all the nations of the civilized world. I would be compelled to call it a comedy, for I watch it and laughing uncontrollably; but my laughter turns to tears, and the sobering reality of its dreadful chaos, war, death, and the grossest heresy compels me to call it a tragedy, and I am at a loss. If it is a comedy, it is a macabre one, for I suppose even death is sometimes good for a bitter laugh."

FS: "But a comedy, classically defined, is not only a story which makes you laugh, but a story which ends in a wedding."

JP: "The ending has not yet been written."

FS: "Then oughtn't we to reserve judgment? Wherever the Lord's mercy reigns, and repentance is an option, there hope is alive."

JP: "Then I will content myself for now to laugh, and try to reserve judgment, Father, for your sake. But I already see the ending, as if in a vision or a dream. There are many unhappy endings, more like horror than tragedy—nightmares, dark and dreadful. And there is the only one happy ending: It is the re-unification of the Church, Orthodox, Protestant, and even all those spiritual but not religious people who love God under a different name or a different tradition, joining all with respect and tolerance under the authority of the Roman Pontiff, who is the Vicar of

Christ on Earth, and the presbyter of us all.”

JM: With this he withdrew to the lobby of the church, taking about a third of our friends with him. As they walked away, I heard him sustaining an apparently persuasive argument that the *filioque* clause necessarily entailed the authority of the Roman Pontiff, by whose authority, he explained, these issues could be speedily resolved, if only we would just listen and obey.

CHAPTER 6: BORN AGAIN (SECOND SAILING)

JM: Those of us remaining discussed whether to stay or go. There was a great disagreement, some saying we should vote on it, others arguing that (like the military) Father Seraphim should decide. I don't remember exactly what was said, and the tape on the tape recorder was being replaced. I do remember Henry wanted to abandon the evening class meeting for the sake of continuing the conversation, but others wanted to save their grade, rather than be stuck in a long conversation that seemed far from resolution. Eventually Henry joined my cause and I prevailed in arguing that we should take up a vote, although some were indifferent and refused even to vote. I presided over the proceeding and we decided to divide the two remaining cars into two groups. My friend Peter said, 'Besides class tonight, I just bought a new property in Upstate, and renovations begin tomorrow,' and he excused himself. The Jehovah's Witness among us said, 'I am buying a new car from my cousin; I need to go to his house to test drive it before it gets too late.' Russell, one of my Mormon classmates, said, 'I told my wife I would be back for dinner. But thank you for an enlightening conversation.'" Turning to me, Father Seraphim turned asked a pointed question.

FS: "What about you, John Mark? Do you have to go, too?"

JM: "Where can I go? We are dialoguing about eternal life."

FS: "Very well, let us continue then, as long as God wills."

JM: "Did you see how he tried to argue that the sale of indulgences is still a valid practice? It left us no choice but to pit the Word of God against the prideful opposition of the traditions of sinful man. The terrifying view of justification he holds were the reasons for the Reformation in the first place. Even the Vatican has conceded some of Luther's points, but John Paul is still blind to them. Then, at the end, he has the nerve to assert the

authority of the Pope over all of us. It is unbelievable.”

FS: “So why do you think, John Mark, that our disagreements were so intractable?”

JM: “Simple: I hold to *sola Scriptura* and he does not.”

FS: “What do you mean by that? Is that a particular method of interpreting the Scriptures?”

JM: “You don’t know *sola Scriptura*? Don’t you affirm it, or do you agree with John Paul? For some people claim they trust the Word of God alone, but really follow the traditions of man. And others (though rarely) claim to be traditional Christians, when really they test everything by Scripture and trust it alone.”

6.2 SERAPHIM’S SECOND SAILING

FS: “You know, John Mark, I feel now as I once did, about twenty years ago, when I was your age. After leaving the Methodist church I grew up in, I was living a very worldly and sinful life, enslaved to many passions and disobedient to God. My intellect was strong like a purebred horse, and arrogant. I alternately thought I could prove anything to anyone who didn’t know, and that I could disprove anything to anyone who knew. I sometimes was drunk on my own joy and wisdom—other times I felt suicidal. Anyhow, my friend and mentor Alan Watts once pulled me aside after he heard me arguing about the existence of God. He said he liked me, and then said my way of life was wretched. When I asked him what he meant, he said I was a slave to reason, and the key to happiness was to get in touch with my spirit—to go beyond mere reason. This, he told me, I could do with psychedelic drugs. He said the peace and happiness afforded by such experience would leave scholars squabbling on earth. ‘There is more,’ he said, ‘to your awareness than *rational* awareness. Rational awareness is what is aware of words and concepts and chains of argument. But spiritual awareness is aware of much more than this—your problem is that you think rational awareness is the way to happiness, whereas I know, and many of my friends have learned, that only spiritual awareness brings the peace you seek. This spiritual awareness we taste in good dreams, in moments of quiet in nature, in deep conversation with a loved one, in the heights of the pleasures of love, when all words, thoughts, and images are left behind. Once you feast on a full banquet of spiritual awareness, this petty reasoning will seem small and useless. You can have it permanently, or almost, if you just have the right tools.’

“This is more or less what he told me that day. Being young and foolish then, unlike you, I did not test this spirit more thoroughly, and was persuaded—not only by his arguments, but his person; he was a kind and enjoyable older man whom I respected, and whose opinion I trusted. Later that week I tried some very strong drugs. He was right, partially, for my spirit became very aware—more aware than was healthy—and I became addicted to yet *another* unholy substance. During that season I was subject to passions that multiplied daily, and, when I fell in with this new group of friends, my body was given over to Satan. My addiction to rational thinking was, in fact, somewhat mitigated, as he promised, but I was wretched. Eventually I discovered the other half of his argument, namely, that although drugs artificially boost one’s spiritual awareness, they don’t keep it there permanently. And the desire for the transcendent peace that Paul speaks of is a desire for a permanent peace. This permanent peace is only brought about by other means: by a purity of the heart, unmixed with passionate thoughts, and by an inward disposition of pure prayer which illuminates the heart and unites the person with God.

“Why do I say all this to you now? To prove to you that I am the kind of person who ‘follows the *logos*, wherever it leads,’ as Socrates says in *The Republic*. I don’t believe it is wise to participate in a conversation without honestly considering the argument, even if it seems new and unfamiliar, or radical, or even possibly dangerous. However, we must be as thorough as we possibly can, and act on this, praying that God will fill the gaps of the argument.

“So, please, let us examine *sola Scriptura* together in earnestness and good faith, stating clearly what it is, and putting it before a tribunal, to see whether it is true, or false, or some mixture of the two. For if there is any question, on this or any doctrine, we cannot assume its divine origin, but must ‘test every spirit,’ examining it as if it were a defendant before a judge, to see if it confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

“And if we can persuade ourselves of the truth, then all those listening will join, not only in believing this doctrine but teaching it to others, first in New York, and the United States, then throughout the entire world.

“But if we are refuted, let’s not be like children are, when they react angrily or stubbornly, just because it is uncomfortable to stop believing the thing we were taught earliest. Rather, let’s agree to believe the thing that we have been taught best, and be persuaded by the truth.”

JM: “Yes, we ought to test it, Seraphim. I may not be the ideal lawyer to make the case, yet with God’s help we will see that it holds up under the harshest examination.”

FS: “Do not be anxious—we will trust the arguments. If you or I err,

then someone listening will correct us, for they will know that our mistake is not out of bad intention or intentional deception, but ignorance. And we will thank them, especially if they supply what we lack, for this is no purely abstract topic, but one concerning our lives, our salvation, and the salvation of those we love.

JM: "If anything is certain, then what you say is true."

FS: "Then let us begin in earnest. But shall we begin like school boys do, randomly grabbing at arguments as they come into our heads, or following the traditional method of the lovers of wisdom?"

JM: We must certainly begin as wisely as possible—but what method are you referring to, Father Seraphim?

FS: "To define the doctrine, first gathering together all the various meaning of "sola" and of "Scriptura," then rightly dividing them—then, having proper definition of our subject, asking the question we truly want answered. With a clear question, we can state our answer as a hypothesis, laying it down as true and proceeding to examine what implications flow deductively from it—then in turn, laying it down as *untrue* and proceeding to examine what implications flow deductively from this, finally testing whatever conclusion we come to by the opinions of relevant experts. This may not be the shortest course, but any hypothesis which survives this gauntlet deserves our hearty trust."

6.3 TRIAL RUN ON GLORY (THESIS)

JM: "Seraphim, but I am a bit confused. Could you give me an example of the kind of examination you are referring to?"

FS: "Explanation is less illuminating than illustration, why don't we undertake a smaller inquiry in the manner I am suggesting, and let it serve as a model for the more important. Would that help?"

JM: "Very much so. But what should be our inquiry?"

FS: "Earlier you posited that the purpose of life, or human happiness, was to glorify God forever. The Holy Bible also refers many times and many places to the glory of God, does it not? Not the least reference of which is John 17, when John records Jesus saying, 'the glory which you have given Me I give to them.' Now, you would agree, I think, that it would be very important to know what glory is, if the activity of glorifying is in some way related to human blessedness, and if we are to share in it"

JM: "I agree very strongly."

FS: “Then we can start by rightly dividing the word of God, when He speaks of glory, collecting together into one shape and dividing into distinctive types of the glory of God. For, although we have the name in common, we might be referring to two different things. In this case, as in any case, if we want to think and speak scientifically, we must be in agreement about the thing itself by means of a verbal explanation, rather than blundering about without any such explanation and disputing over names.”

JM: “That seems wise.”

FS: “Then I think I divine a glorious question for us start with is whether the glory of God is created or uncreated.”

JM: “That is a strange question.”

FS: “Its importance, I see, is not clear to you—it will become more so. Henry, why don’t you serve as my interlocutor for this test run, to save John Mark some energy?”

JM: Henry was quite eager to comply, though I was sad to take a break from speaking. Father Seraphim continued:

FS: “Now Henry, I will ask, and you answer.”

Henry: “Carry on, Father.”

FS: “Glory is something, isn’t it? It does not seem to be *nothing*, otherwise many hundreds of verses of Holy Scripture be meaningless.”

H: “Yes, it is something.”

FS: “For everything that is said to *be*, must it be either created or uncreated.”

H: “Those are absolutely the only options.”

FS: “So if we are to find the thing itself, we may accurately start with this division. So our first hypothesis might be that glory is uncreated, examining this, and its implications, and the relations between them?”

H: “Sure.”

FS: “If God’s glory is uncreated, it must have existed in the beginning, before the creation of all things, right?”

H: “I suppose so.”

FS: “But in the beginning ‘*God created*,’ right?”

H: “Right.”

FS: “Is it right to say that God was alone?”

H: "I'm not sure what you mean. He was alone with himself."

FS: "When you say 'with himself,' what do you mean?"

H: "What John 1:1 means, that the 'Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God in the beginning.'"

FS: "Is God one or many?"

H: "I'm having a difficult time with your question."

FS: "Isn't God one in essence?"

H: "Yes."

FS: "While God the Father is not God the Son, right?"

H: "Right."

FS: "And yet they are not two Gods?"

H: "No."

FS: "The Son is not the Holy Spirit?"

H: "No."

FS: "And the Father is not the Holy Spirit?"

H: "Nope."

FS: "So there is real distinction between the persons?"

H: "Yes."

FS: "But there is no real division within the essence?"

H: "No."

FS: "So God is one in one respect, and many in another respect."

H: "One in respect of essence, and many in respect of persons?"

FS: "Right. So if the glory is uncreated, it must be either essence, person—*hypostasis* or *ousia*— or some third thing?"

H: "What would that something else be?"

FS: "Glory, in this case."

H: "I don't understand. God is absolutely the only being uncreated."

FS: "Agreed. And yet we also agree that God is both one and not one?" Rather, doesn't God teach us in the Holy Writings and sayings of the Apostles how to speak accurately about the ineffable Trinity?"

H: "Surely."

FS: “For, if we insist that the distinctions between the Persons are merely in our understanding and not in the Trinity Itself, then Jesus, if he is really God, is the same essence and person as the God the Father, and the image in the written gospel of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit descending as a dove at the baptism of Christ is not showing a real Trinity of Persons, but three modes of one Person, like three beams of light refracted through a prism. But this is heresy.”

H: “Yes, yes.”

FS: “So must we admit, if we are to confess the Christian faith, that in God there is real distinction, though it is distinction without division; namely, the distinction between the Father and Son and Holy Spirit without division of essence.”

H: “OK.”

FS: “So, according to the argument thus far, we may let in another such distinction?”

H: “I suppose we might, if we were to follow this argument.”

FS: “So, if the glory is uncreated, then it must be with Him in the beginning, right?”

H: “Right.”

FS: “We said earlier that in the beginning God was alone, meaning, only God was there, and though we admitted there is some distinction within the Godhead.”

H: “OK.”

FS: “So, if glory is uncreated, it must be truly God, though not from the Persons or the Essence?”

H: “That is indeed a strange and perhaps even a blasphemous conclusion.”

FS: “Yet not stranger than saying that God the Son is distinct from God the Holy Spirit—for they share one divine essence, so there is only one God.”

H: “But if the glory is not a person or the essence, what else could it be?”

FS: “The energetic procession of the divine glory from the divine essence. The Holy Authors do speak of an unapproachable light in which he is surrounded from eternity.”

H: “That is true.”

FS: "And in II Corinthians 4:6, Saint Paul says, 'God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Christ.' Note the distinction between 'face,' 'knowledge,' the one speaking, and the glory... if the glory is knowable, then it must be some thing?"

H: "That makes sense."

FS: "If the glory is truly of God, then it is divine?"

H: "Yes."

FS: "And if divine, then uncreated, too?"

H: "But doesn't this imply that the glory is another God?"

FS: "Not unless Jesus sharing the same divine essence as the Father, and the Father the Holy Spirit, implies that Jesus is a second God or the Holy Spirit a third. But perhaps another implication will illuminate this hypothesis. Perhaps the glory of God is like the will of God, distinct from His Person but belonging naturally to him."

H: "I don't rightly know, Father."

FS: "Do you know whether Jesus prayed, 'Not my will, but yours be done'?"

H: "Yes, he did."

FS: "And so don't the Fathers of the Sixth Council affirm that Christ had two wills, as he had two natures, a divine and a human?"

H: "Yes."

FS: "So don't the divine Persons share a common will, the will being an attribute of the nature rather than the persons? Otherwise we would have to assert that, because there are three Persons in God, there are three wills in God, which is false."

H: "Indeed."

FS: "And yet if the divine will is simply another name for the essence, then we must conclude that the will never changes, since the essence never changes."

H: "We would."

FS: "And if the will never changes, then it is impossible to reasonably maintain that God wills to create the world? It is unfitting of God to say that he *had to* create, or that he was *eternally* creating as if it were his very nature, and not a free action."

H: “That does seem unfitting.”

FS: “The first hypothesis, then, is that the glory, like His will, is uncreated. If this is true, then the glory must be truly divine, since only God exists before the world was. If it is truly divine, it must not be the Divine Essence, for this is single; nor the divine Persons, for they are three only; but a light and glory existing eternally with the essence and distinct from it, in a like manner as God’s will and his foreknowledge and other activities such as loving-kindness and self-contemplation.”

H: “What an abundance of activities we have stumbled across!”

6.4 A TRIAL RUN ON GLORY (ANTITHESIS)

FS: “Now let’s look at the other half of the argument, so to speak, and see what follows if we *affirm the opposite hypothesis*, saying that it is created. The first thing I notice is that it must be some one or the other kind of created thing.”

H: “I notice that, too.”

FS: “Consider this: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth by the Word, who was with Him in the beginning. First created was light, and the heavens and earth; then the celestial bodies; then the creatures, those that ‘swim in the air,’ those that walk on the ground, and creep on the ground, and swim in the water. Then man and woman were created. If glory is a creature, it must be one of these things created, must it not?”

H: “Unless we maintain that it is an ongoing creation...”

FS: “A fair point, but even so—new creations probably belong to a pre-existing genus.”

H: “That makes sense.”

FS: “In which genus should we look for glory? Isn’t it obvious?”

H: “The only obvious genus is the first, namely light.”

FS: “That seems to be the one. So our first category in which we might find created glory is simply light.”

H: “But do you mean physical light or intellectual light?”

FS: “You tell me. For God says, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And yet it was not until the fourth day that he said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night.’ So does

the light on the first day which is distinguished from the darkness seem to be one with the light by which I am seeing your face?"

H: "No, they seem to be two different kinds of light, one intelligible to the mind, and the other visible to the eyes. And this fits with Augustine's interpretation of Genesis, so I can see the truth of what we have said."

FS: "Let's not stop with the first category, but complete the argument by adding hypothesis to hypothesis, examining each, and making our judgment at the end."

H: "OK, sorry."

FS: "Now the authors are of divided mind on the following question."

H: "What question?"

FS: "Where belongs—in the order of God's creation—the angelic spirits?"

H: "That is a tough question."

FS: "Should we follow Augustine in also ascribing the creation of angels to the first verses of Genesis? He says that the phrase 'heaven *and* earth' may not refer to the 'heaven *of* earth,' the stars and planets and such, nor the material earth, on which we are sitting right now, but to the 'intellectual heaven of heaven.' Without being coeternal with the Trinity, he suggests that this 'heaven of heaven' participates in God's eternity, contemplates God, and rests in perpetual immutability."

H: "We should follow Augustine on this point, in my opinion at least."

FS: "The angels therefore might be contained in a covert meaning of 'heaven' and 'light.' For this 'heaven of heaven' is actively contemplating, according to the blessed Augustine, so it would not be mere impersonal light. This is confirmed by the words of Jesus when he says that 'the guardians of children are constantly beholding His face' [Matthew 18:10]. Furthermore, the angelic hosts are described in the Old Testament sometimes as 'God's thrones,' sometimes as 'heaven.' Of course, they often function as messengers, and luminaries, so light would be a fitting description of them."

H: "That makes sense."

FS: "Now the angels are immaterial, are they not?"

H: "They are."

FS: "But they are not formless, but each has an exact and particular nature, distinguishing it from the other orders in the celestial hierarchy?"

H: "No, they are not formless."

FS: “So ‘glory’ could be a synonym for ‘immaterial formlessness.’”

H: “That is right. But are there any other options we ought to consider?”

FS: “I suppose that angels are formed out of this immaterial formlessness. For this heaven of heaven is one light, but also many lights, as there are many hierarchies, as described in Sacred Scripture under different veils of visible form, like beasts, or wheels, or fire, or men.”

H: “That also is consistent with Augustine.”

FS: “And this, I think, is what Augustine means by heaven of heaven. So, if glory is a creation, perhaps it is immaterial form as a whole, without particular reference to this or that spirit.”

H: “That is likely, Father Seraphim!”

FS: “To recount, now we have four options, since the glory seems to exist. We can either say that it is uncreated or created. If it is uncreated, it must be either God as *ousia*, God as *hypostasis*, or God as *energeia*—being, person, or activity. But it is not the essence, which is the source of Light; nor the Persons, for, unlike the glory, they are each distinct. Therefore, it is likely to be a Divine Light or action that proceeds from the Divine Essence, distinct but not divided from the Nature and the Persons, even before the creation of the world. If, on the other hand, it is created, it is unlikely to be merely visible light. It may, therefore, either be a heavenly intellectual light, which is a metaphorical reference to mysterious *formless immateriality*, if I may coin the term, out of which individual angels are formed, or else a metaphorical reference to a formed angelic immateriality.”

H: “Are we not ignoring a fifth option?”

FS: “What option is that, my son?”

H: “That the glory of the Lord is not a thing in itself, but is the human experience of God himself when God pulls back the veils of his divinity, so to speak. In the account of the Transfiguration, it says, ‘When they were fully awake, they beheld his glory.’ I’ve heard that interpreted, by my priest, I think, as meaning that he was always glorified, but they couldn’t see it until their minds were ‘awake’ to that reality.”

FS: “That is possible, I suppose, but doesn’t it seem more likely that heaven and earth are full of something?”

H: “What do you mean?”

FS: “The angels sing, ‘Holy, holy, holy art thou, O Lord God Almighty; heaven and earth are full of your glory.’ This seems to be true, even when

some people on earth are not perceptibly aware of God's unveiled divinity, doesn't it?"

H: "Yes, I suppose."

FS: "Also, in the verse in John we quoted earlier, Jesus promises to give to those who love Him the glory which the Father has given Him. I don't suppose that what the Father gave to Christ was merely an open awareness of unbridled divinity? Or that Christ is going to pass on mere awareness of God, rather than the weighty thing itself?"

H: "But I can't imagine what in the world this glory could be!"

FS: "That remains our task. Let us examine each of the remaining possibilities in turn. The glory spoken of in the Old Testament does not seem to exclusively belong to the activity of angels."

H: "Why not?"

FS: "For Moses says in Exodus that 'the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD's glory.' And some people fell down and were terrified, and the impure were slain."

H: "That is true, Father, but consider that whenever angels make themselves visible to men, their appearance is usually accompanied by terror. Also, the angel of death brought death to the first-born children in Egypt."

FS: "You are correct, my son. Well said. But there is further evidence. For instance, 'and the glory went up from the cherub,' rather than 'the glory was a cherub.'"

H: "That is true."

FS: "So the glory here does not seem to be the Father Himself, nor a created effect, but something real and weighty, deriving from God himself, but glowing, glorious, and strong, like a cloud of incense."

H: "I had never thought if it that way."

FS: "Furthermore, Ezekiel [3:12 LXX] cites the angels as saying, 'Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place.' If the angels simply are the glory of the Lord, then wouldn't it be silly for them to sing, 'Blessed be us?'"

H: "That would be kind of absurd."

FS: "And if glory is not any one angel or class of immaterial spirits, is it likely to be the whole of them?"

H: "No, Father."

FS: "For David says in Psalm 25 that 'he has loved the beauty and place of the habitation of the glory of my Lord.' If the angelic hosts are 'the place of the habitation' of the Lord and his throne, then they cannot themselves be the glory which rests in that habitation. Unless we are committed to saying that the angels are the home of the angels!"

H: "No."

6.5 SERAPHIM OF SAROV AND MOTOVILOV

FS: "Now we have reached a conclusion of the inquiry by way of conversation and mutual question and answer. This is the manner in which we must walk, even in a more lengthy and difficult topic such as Holy Scripture itself. But the last touch will be to test our conclusion by the testimony of the Holy Oracles of God, wiser and better than ourselves. For these, if they agreed, would add some weight of confirmation to this argument."

H: "I don't see why not, Father. Who do you have in mind?"

FS: "John records when Jesus says, 'Now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.' If we take the 'world' to mean all of creation, then this passage indicates that the glory of God is uncreated, and yet shared in common between the two Persons, and in fact all three."

H: "Fascinating!"

JM: Father Seraphim stirred in his chair, and smiled with a hidden joy. After a pause, he reached into his black cassock and pulled out a small, well-worn volume, with a cracked paper cover and yellowing, dog-eared pages.

FS: "Have you heard of St. Seraphim of Sarov? He is my namesake, and a very well-informed student of this subject. His book, or rather the book of his disciple, Nikolas Motovilov, recounts an experience of this divine and ineffable glory. I always keep a copy of this book with me, and will read from it to you, if you wouldn't mind."

JM: We all urged him to open and read.

FS: "Father Seraphim is speaking with young Motovilov, his student, about the purpose and aim of the Christian life. He says,

'It was Thursday. The day was gloomy. The snow lay eight inches deep on the ground; and dry, crisp snowflakes were falling thickly from the sky when Father Seraphim began his conversation with me in a field adjoining his near hermitage, opposite the River Sarovka, at the foot of the hill which slopes down to the river bank. He sat me on the stump of a tree which he had just felled, and he himself squatted opposite me. "The Lord has revealed to me," said the great Elder, "that in your childhood you had a great desire to know the aim of our Christian life, and that you continually asked many great spiritual persons about it." '

And after many exchanges, Father Seraphim Sarov prays that God would reveal His glory to Motovilov. Listen to the way in which he speaks from experience about the glory of God."

JM: He flipped open and read the following four pages from that book:

"...I will tell you something else, so that you may understand still more clearly what is meant by the grace of God, how to recognize it and how its action is manifested particularly in those who are enlightened by it. The grace of the Holy Spirit is the light which enlightens man. The whole of Sacred Scripture speaks about this. Thus our holy Father David said: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path" [Ps. 118:105], and: "Unless Thy law had been my meditation I should have died in my humiliation" [Ps. 118:92 LXX]. In other words, the grace of the Holy Spirit which is expressed in the Law by the words of the Lord's commandments is my lamp and light. And if this grace of the Holy Spirit (which I try to acquire so carefully and zealously that I meditate on Thy righteous judgments seven times a day) did not enlighten me amidst the darkness of the cares which are inseparable from the high calling of my royal rank, whence should I get a spark of light to illumine my way on the path of life which is darkened by the ill-will of my enemies...? Thus the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God appears in an ineffable light to all to whom God reveals its action.'

"'But how,' I asked Father Seraphim, 'can I know that I am in the grace of the Holy Spirit?'

'Father Seraphim replied: "I have already told you, your Godliness, that it is very simple and I have related in detail how people come to be in the Spirit of God and how we can recognize His presence in us. So what do you want, my son?'

"I want to understand it well," I said.

“Then Father Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said: “We are both in the Spirit of God now, my son. Why don’t you look at me?”

“I replied: “I cannot look, Father, because your eyes are flashing like lightning. Your face has become brighter than the sun, and my eyes ache with pain.”

“Father Seraphim said: “Don’t be alarmed, your Godliness! Now you yourself have become as bright as I am. You are now in the fullness of the Spirit of God yourself; otherwise you would not be able to see me as I am.”

“Then, bending his head towards me, he whispered softly in my ear: “Thank the Lord God for His unutterable mercy to us! You saw that I did not even cross myself; and only in my heart I prayed mentally to the Lord God and said within myself: Lord, grant him to see clearly with his bodily eyes that descent of Thy Spirit which Thou grantest to Thy servants when Thou art pleased to appear in the light of Thy magnificent glory.” And you see, my son, the Lord instantly fulfilled the humble prayer of poor Seraphim. How then shall we not thank Him for this unspeakable gift to us both? Even to the greatest hermits, my son, the Lord God does not always show His mercy in this way. This grace of God, like a loving mother, has been pleased to comfort your contrite heart at the intercession of the Mother of God herself. But why, my son, do you not look me in the eyes? Just look, and don’t be afraid! The Lord is with us!”

“After these words I glanced at his face and there came over me an even greater reverent awe. Imagine in the center of the sun, in the dazzling light of its midday rays, the face of a man talking to you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes, you hear his voice, you feel someone holding your shoulders; yet you do not see his hands, you do not even see yourself or his figure, but only a blinding light spreading far around for several yards and illumining with its glaring sheen both the snow-blanket which covered the forest glade and the snow-flakes which besprinkled me and the great Elder. You can imagine the state I was in!

“How do you feel now?” Father Seraphim asked me.

“Extraordinarily well,” I said.

“But in what way? How exactly do you feel well?”

“I answered: “I feel such calmness and peace in my soul that no words can express it.”

“‘This, your Godliness,’ said Father Seraphim, “is that peace of which the Lord said to His disciples: ‘My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you’ [John 14:21]. ‘If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you’ [John 15:19]. ‘But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world’ [John 16:33]. And to those people whom this world hates but who are chosen by the Lord, the Lord gives that peace which you now feel within you, the peace which, in the words of the Apostle, ‘passes all understanding’ [Phil. 4:7]. The Apostle describes it in this way, because it is impossible to express in words the spiritual well-being which it produces in those into whose hearts the Lord God has infused it. Christ the Saviour calls it a peace which comes from His own generosity and is not of this world, for no temporary earthly prosperity can give it to the human heart; it is granted from on high by the Lord God Himself, and that is why it is called the peace of God. What else do you feel?’ Father Seraphim asked me.”

“‘An extraordinary sweetness,’ I replied.

“‘And he continued: “This is that sweetness of which it is said in Holy Scripture: “They will be inebriated with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy delight” [Ps. 35:8]. And now this sweetness is flooding our hearts and coursing through our veins with unutterable delight. From this sweetness our hearts melt as it were, and both of us are filled with such happiness as tongue cannot tell. What else do you feel?”

“‘An extraordinary joy in all my heart.”

“‘And Father Seraphim continued: “When the Spirit of God comes down to man and overshadows him with the fullness of His inspiration, then the human soul overflows with unspeakable joy, for the Spirit of God fills with joy whatever He touches. This is that joy of which the Lord speaks in His Gospel: A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. In the world you will be sorrowful; but when I see you again, your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you [John 16:21-22]. Yet however comforting may be this joy which you now feel in your heart, it is nothing in comparison with that of which the Lord Himself by the mouth of His Apostle said that that joy “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for them that love Him” [I Corinthians 2:9]. Foretastes of that joy are given to us now, and if they fill our souls with such sweetness, well-being and happiness, what

shall we say of that joy which has been prepared in heaven for those who weep here on earth? And you, my son, have wept enough in your life on earth; yet see with what joy the Lord consoles you even in this life! Now it is up to us, my son, to add labours to labours in order to “go from strength to strength” [Psalm 83:7], and to “come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” [Ephesians 4:13], so that the words of the Lord may be fulfilled in us: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall grow wings like eagles; and they shall run and not be weary [Is. 40:31]; they will go from strength to strength, and the God of gods will appear to them in the Sion” [Psalm 83:8] of realization and heavenly visions. Only then will our present joy (which now visits us little and briefly) appear in all its fullness, and no one will take it from us, for we shall be filled to overflowing with inexplicable heavenly delights. What else do you feel, your Godliness?”

“I answered: “An extraordinary warmth.”

“How can you feel warmth, my son? Look, we are sitting in the forest. It is winter out-of-doors, and snow is underfoot. There is more than an inch of snow on us, and the snowflakes are still falling. What warmth can there be?”

“I answered: “Such as there is in a bath-house when the water is poured on the stone and the steam rises in clouds.”

“And the smell?” he asked me. “Is it the same as in the bath-house?”

“No,” I replied. “There is nothing on earth like this fragrance. When in my dear mother’s lifetime I was fond of dancing and used to go to balls and parties, my mother would sprinkle me with scent which she bought at the best shops in Kazan. But those scents did not exhale such fragrance.”

“And Father Seraphim, smiling pleasantly, said: “I know it myself just as well as you do, my son, but I am asking you on purpose to see whether you feel it in the same way. It is absolutely true, your Godliness! The sweetest earthly fragrance cannot be compared with the fragrance which we now feel, for we are now enveloped in the fragrance of the Holy Spirit of God. What on earth can be like it? Mark, your Godliness, you have told me that around us it is warm as in a bath-house; but look, neither on you nor on me does the snow melt, nor does it underfoot; therefore, this warmth is not in the air but in us. It is that very warmth about which the Holy Spirit in the words of prayer makes us cry to the Lord: Warm me with the warmth of Thy Holy Spirit!” By it the hermits of both sexes were kept warm

and did not fear the winter frost, being clad, as in fur coats, in the grace-given clothing woven by the Holy Spirit. And so it must be in actual fact, for the grace of God must dwell within us, in our heart, because the Lord said: The Kingdom of God is within you [Luke. 17:21]. By the Kingdom of God the Lord meant the grace of the Holy Spirit. This Kingdom of God is now within us, and the grace of the Holy Spirit shines upon us and warms us from without as well. It fills the surrounding air with many fragrant odours, sweetens our senses with heavenly delight and floods our hearts with unutterable joy. Our present state is that of which the Apostle says, The Kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit [Romans 14:17]. Our faith consists not in the plausible words of earthly wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power [I Corinthians 2:4ff]. That is just the state that we are in now. Of this state the Lord said: There are some of those standing here who shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come in power [Mk. 9:1]. See, my son, what unspeakable joy the Lord God has now granted us! This is what it means to be in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, about which St. Macarius of Egypt writes: I myself was in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.” With this fullness of His Holy Spirit the Lord has now filled us poor creatures to overflowing. So there is no need now, your Godliness, to ask how people come to be in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Will you remember this manifestation of God’s ineffable mercy which has visited us?”

“I don’t know, Father,” I said, “whether the Lord will grant me to remember this mercy of God always as vividly and clearly as I feel it now.”

“I think,” Father Seraphim answered me, “that the Lord will help you to retain it in your memory forever, or His goodness would never have instantly bowed in this way to my humble prayer and so quickly anticipated the request of poor Seraphim; all the more so, because it is not given to you alone to understand it, but through you it is for the whole world, in order that you yourself may be confirmed in God’s work and may be useful to others.”

[from *Little Russian Philokalia*, St. Seraphim of Sarov’s Conversation With Nicholas Motovilov]

CHAPTER 7: *DEFINING THE DOCTRINE*

JM: Father Seraphim put the book gingerly back into his cassock pocket, his eyes somewhat glistening with tears in the candlelight.

FS: “Now, my sons, after this lengthy quotation from my spiritual namesake, we are in a position to resume our inquiry... When undertaking such a difficult task, even pagans have enough pious feeling to invoke the help of the Divine.” He stood up and faced the front of the church, saying, “let us, therefore, open with a prayer to the All Holy and Good and Life-Giving Spirit, who gives wisdom to all men liberally, without chastising: In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Glory to Thee, O God, glory to Thee. O Heavenly King, O Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art in all places and fillest all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of Life, come and dwell in us and cleanse us from every stain and save our souls, O Gracious Lord. Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. O Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us; O Lord, cleanse us from our sins. O Master, pardon our iniquities. O Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for thy name’s sake. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. O Christ our God, who at this hour didst stretch out thy living arms upon the cross that all men might be gathered unto thee, help us and save us who cry out to thee. Glory to thee, O Lord. Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us. Amen.”

JM: We all said, "Amen."

FS: "Now, using the previous examination as a model, in a larger discussion, we will be guided to our prize. Having done so, we ought to return, from our examination to the original questions we started with. Then we can help John Paul—who is very rational after all—to untangle our earlier disagreements, and come to some truth about salvation, sanctification, predestination, as well as the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father and Son. And, building momentum, we should continue on, I think, to clarify whether children should be baptized, the nature and definition of worship of God, the proper use of the Holy Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist—in this way our conversation will not be for us only but for all the church."

JM: "We mustn't leave any of those out, even if it takes a very long time."

FS: "So we need to carefully define what is *Scriptura*, and also what you mean by *sola*, then—"

JM: "That shouldn't be too hard: *Sola Scriptura* basically says that the Holy Word of God is the *only* authority for Christians in all matters of faith and practice. All other guides, however helpful, useful, or insightful, are human and therefore ultimately flawed, and cannot guide like the Bible, which is divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative. All Scripture is God-breathed, and useful for instruction, reproach, and the preparing of the saints to all good works. The traditions of man, on the other hand, always retain the taint of man. However holy or beautiful or true they begin, very often, the depravity of man completely perverts whatever goodness is attained in human traditions. For example, Constantine's supposed conversion and the subsequent synchronism between Church and State, which subjugated holy things to earthly things; the incorporation of pagan religious elements, such as pagan holidays like Easter and Winter Solstice; the insistence upon Aristotelian metaphysics turning communion into some kind of magical sacrifice; the idolatrous veneration of saints and their relics, and so on. Such malignant corruption grew and metastasized throughout the Middle Ages. And, of course the penultimate instance of this is the abuses and reprehensible doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church during the medieval era, which continue in a somewhat abated form today. Of course, this doctrine is not explicitly stated in Scripture, in detail, but it is either implied by Scripture or else it is the best statement of what Scripture assumes, when all Scripture is considered. It is certainly not inconsistent with any Scripture. And so Christianity rightfully returned, and remains faithful, to the very Word of God. This is, at its root, the meaning of *sola Scriptura*. You can agree, if you like, to build your house on solid rock; if you prefer the traditions

of man, then feel free to build on sinking sand.”

FS: “Beautifully spoken. But I have a clarifying question. When you say, ‘return to the Word of God,’ you mean Holy Scripture—right?”

JM: “Precisely.”

FS: “But is Scripture is the only Word of God in existence?”

JM: “Are there other *Bibles*? No.”

FS: “Wouldn’t you say that there are many who claim to be counselors of God, and all of them think they speak for their God?”

JM: “Yes, exceedingly many, but there is only one true God, and only one true Word.”

FS: “Very well. Let’s dialogue with those who admit there is only one God: If God speaks, the speech is trustworthy, right? If God were to speak from heaven some word of command or knowledge, or if God were to make himself heard on earth through some medium or voice, whether the stars in the heavens pouring forth their speech, or through some other aspect of the cosmos, or through a prophet or oracle or king, or even an animal or plant, like Balaam’s Ass or the Burning Bush, then to this word we would be accountable. Where they disagree, I suppose, is about where exactly God’s speech is on earth?”

JM: “That is very well said, Father Seraphim.”

7.2 GOD’S WORD AND WORDS

FS: “Isn’t God’s Word many and not one? I don’t suppose you think that God has only spoken one word, but agree that he has begotten only one, but spoken many others.”

JM: “How do you mean?”

FS: “We can agree, I think, that God has spoken personally to some of our Fathers long ago, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. These men were obligated to obey the word they heard. Besides this direct personal address, God has spoken through the prophets, the patriarchs, the oracles, the priests, and the poets of many years ago. For ‘the Lord put his word in their mouth,’ as Moses says, and ‘I have put my words in your mouth,’ as Jeremiah says. David, too had ‘the spirit of the Lord come upon him,’ and he sang songs of glory and beauty to the Lord which were themselves inspired by the Lord. All these spoke with the voice and language and authority of God on earth. And whether God’s

speech is actually communicable in human speech, we ought to leave aside for the time being, I think; if God who transcends all is able to become flesh, then he is also able to become vibrations in the air. Though some speech may be spoken ineffably and known miraculously as being beyond comprehension, some speech at least is spoken in such a manner as to be understood by humans, while remaining in reality divine speech. Next, we observe that some of the speeches of God are written. Some of these writings were ‘written miraculously by the finger of God’ [Exodus 31:18] in stone, and preserved by Moses and Aaron. And others of these prophetic utterances were written down by Moses or the other prophets or their scribes. And so these writings, including the law and the prophets along with the wisdom literature, formed the Hebrew Canon, which we call the Old Testament. And in the fullness of time, it pleased God to reveal his Son, Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily, being conceived of the Blessed Theotokos by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the mystery of God, revealed to the ages. All things before Him pointed forward to him, and all things after Him point back to him, the cosmos being the procession of his mouth, Holy Scripture an image of his face, and the Church his Body.”

JM: “Quite so!”

FS: “And Jesus Christ came bodily, but did not remain bodily, but ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father. So God in his sovereignty and mercy delivered us an additional body of writings regarding the coming of the Messiah, his work and teaching?”

JM: “Yes.”

FS: “And were these writings written by Christians, or by some other men? Members of the Church of Jesus Christ, his living Body?”

JM: “Yes, Christians.”

FS: “And just as the Hebrews existed as God’s people before the Torah, didn’t the Christians exist as God’s people before the New Testament?”

JM: “I suppose so, Father: The church was established, in a sense, by Christ while he was living. But the first book composed—probably I Thessalonians—came into being about 51 A.D., and the authority of the apostles was *transferred* to their writings. By following these writings, we may hear of God, understand his ways, follow Him, and thus please Him all the days of our life, and even into the next life. Scripture alone can do this.”

FS: “So there are many spoken Words of God—all authoritative?”

JM: “I suppose you could put it like that. But there is only one Written

Word of God.”

FS: “I don’t suppose you mean there is only one book in the Holy Bible?”

JM: “No, of course not. But all together, as a whole, they alone are sufficient for our knowledge of God unto salvation.”

7.3 HEARING THE WORD

FS: “A quick question about that: When you say, ‘alone,’ you don’t mean that no other people or books are needed in hearing the word of God, do you?”

JM: “I’m not sure.”

FS: “In order to know God, I must believe in Him, hear his Word, and obey, right?”

JM: “Yes.”

FS: “Don’t make fun of me: Suppose I believe in God, and a Jewish Rabbi is reading his word aloud. If I were deaf, wouldn’t reading would be useless to me.”

JM: “I won’t make fun of you, Father. Yes, it would be useless just to listen, if you were deaf.”

FS: “Now suppose that I can hear, and this Rabbi is reading his word aloud in the original Hebrew. Can I obey this word?”

JM: “Not really.”

FS: “So mustn’t I also have it translated into my own language, and then hear it and obey it? Otherwise I must learn Hebrew and Greek, and a little bit of Aramaic, mustn’t I?”

JM: “That is a trivial point, Father Seraphim. We are assuming that the word is written in a language you can understand.”

FS: “So you’ll make fun of me after all, calling the point trivial as though it were not worth mentioning!”

JM: “I didn’t mean to make fun of you, I just thought that was assumed.”

FS: “Do you also assume that the translation of the Holy Bible into English is an effortless endeavor?”

JM: "I believe it is possible, by God's grace, to produce an accurate and faithful translation, if that's what you're asking."

FS: "Not exactly. Don't you notice that there are many translations into English?"

JM: "Yes."

FS: "There are the translations of Wycliffe and his friends, the Authorized Version, or King James, the Revised Standard, the Douay-Rheim's Bible, the Quaker Bible, the translation of Joseph Smith, the Darby Bible, the American Standard, the Revised Standard, the New American Standard, the Young's Literal, the Jerusalem and New Jerusalem, the English Standard, as well as the International Version and the New International Version, the Living Bible and the New Living Bible, the Message and many others besides."

JM: "Yes, what's your point?"

FS: "If you asked me what the Chinese word 'Ma' means, I would tell you, 'horse,' and you would be satisfied, would you not?"

JM: "Yes."

FS: "But if you asked me what the Chinese word '*dao*' means, I would tell you, 'direction, way, method, road, path, principle, truth, reason, skill, a measure, word, to say, to speak, to talk.' What does the multiplicity of answers show?"

JM: "That it has multiple meanings?"

FS: "And don't multiple meanings mean that no one of my answers is quite adequate and accurate enough to stand alone?"

JM: "That seems right."

FS: "Isn't a multiplicity of translations similar? Doesn't it likewise show that no one translation is adequate for all people in all places at all times, but that new translations must be created for new people, or newer versions must be created for the same people in a new time, or new translations must be created when missionaries evangelize a new place? For instance, Tyndale translated the Bible for modern English-speakers, but the Authorized King James Version is an updated version of the same, for a different people in the same place at roughly the same time. Then the New King James was made because English speech and English speakers have changed. And, of course, the Bible is always being translated into new languages by Wycliffe translators."

JM: "That seems to be the inference."

FS: “So in the plain task of *hearing* the word, we need Holy Scripture and some good translation, or else a good manuscript of the original?”

JM: “Yes, I’m OK with that.”

FS: “Then let’s take the next step in understanding the ‘*sola*’ part of ‘*sola Scriptura*.’”

JM: “Which way should we go, Father?”

FS: “The parable of the Good Samaritan comes to mind. ‘A lawyer stood up and tested Jesus, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And he said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” So he answered and said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor...?”’ Do you see how this marvelous passage bears a remarkable resemblance to our task?”

JM: “How so?”

FS: “Jesus asked him two questions, ‘What is written in the law?’ which is interrogating him on the *plain sense* of what is written, and ‘What is your reading?’ which asks for his *understanding* of the basic meaning. In answer to the first question the young man could have perhaps quoted extensively from the law, but in his reading of it only a small portion was especially relevant, and Jesus affirms that that small portion is right. As for *interpretation* of it, they at first *seem* to agree. Then Jesus tells him to *apply* it. ‘Do this and you will live.’ Rather than obeying Jesus, however, he goes back to ask about interpreting it, specifically, the word ‘neighbor.’ So far, our conversation follows a similar path. We are trying to define *sola Scriptura* like we earlier defined glory, and we agree that in order to *hear* Holy Scripture, we need a manuscript or translation. The next question then, I suppose, is what is needed to help us grasp the basic meaning of the Word we hear. Following this young lawyer, once we have grasped the soul of ‘*Scriptura*,’ we can *interpret* it, and, God willing, *apply* it.”

7.4 UNDERSTANDING THE WORD

JM: “So the next task is to how understand the basic meaning of Scripture, Father Seraphim?”

FS: “And whether we can understand it alone.”

JM: "To this question I think the answer is more certain. Sometimes my parents helped as a child to understand difficult words or sentences, but for any rational adult, the words are plain. For, since the Bible is written by God Himself in the Holy Spirit, it is clear enough to be read and understood by itself, so that he who reads is accountable to obey what is therein commanded. Otherwise II Peter 3:15 wouldn't condemn those who twist the Scriptures to their own destruction. If many people can read and grasp the newspaper, which is written by mere human authors, can God not write in such a way as to be basically understood?"

FS: "Has it been so long that you have already forgotten our many disagreements with John Paul and Charlie?"

JM: "What do you mean?"

FS: "Our discussion of salvation lead us to wonder what the holy Scripture teaches salvation is, and whether the entire process of justification and sanctification, or justification only, assuming we know what they intend by that word. Rouse yourself, O sleeper!"

JM: "But Father Seraphim, I still think Scripture is clear, though John Paul's eyes are blinded by other teachings: For instance, II Peter says 'Salvation is life, godliness, and partaking of the divine nature.' This agrees with our earlier discussion that salvation is eternal happiness, or being like God."

FS: "Fairly spoken, but does this answer our question about whether salvation is sanctification and justification or justification alone?"

JM: "What honest disagreement could you have with this verse, Father, if we are both reading it and taking the plain and common sense."

FS: "How does one understand 'thoughts higher than our thoughts'—the thoughts of Almighty God—with common sense? How does one contend with a Word mighty and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword? Have you not noticed that, owing to the depth of Holy Scripture, not all accept it in one and the same sense, but one understands its words in one way, another in another; so that it seems to be capable of as many interpretations as there are interpreters? For Novation expounds it one way, Sabellius another; Donatus another; Arius, Eunomius, Macedonius another; Photinus, Apollinaris, Priscillian another; Iovinian, Pelagius, Celestius another; lastly, Nestorius another."

JM: "That is too true, Father, but in this case how is II Peter's statement so profound that we can't understand it?"

7.5 INTERPRETING THE WORD

FS: “If I did not trust other authorities, I would assume that ‘partaking of the divine nature’ means *being divine as God is divine*—whether by justification or sanctification. I doubt you would accept this as the accurate sense.”

JM: “Most certainly not!”

FS: “So if you end up disagreeing, how would you propose to resolve our disagreement?”

JM: “Well, we would simply expand our scope and take in the whole counsel of God on what salvation is.”

FS: “And by the whole counsel of God you mean the rest of the pages of II Peter?”

JM: “Yes, but not II Peter only, but all the books of the same genre, which in this case is epistles of Peter—and after comparing similar words and phrases, we would take into account the rest of the New Testament epistles. If this was not sufficient, we would look at the New Testament as a whole, and eventually, as needed, the whole Bible.”

FS: “And suppose that we both read all the same passages, in the original language, and couldn’t agree on the correct understanding of ‘partaking of the divine nature’ even then?”

JM: “To get out of that bog, we would let the clear passages interpret the unclear. Although all things in Scripture are not equally plain in themselves, nor equally clear to everybody, those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the educated, but the uneducated, by making appropriate use of common sense and a few good Bible commentaries, can acquire sufficient understanding of them [The Westminster Confession 7]. I admit that the phrase ‘partaking of the divine nature’ is a bit ambiguous, especially if we refuse to take it in a blasphemous sense. But if we read the rest of Peter’s epistles and the rest of apostolic teaching on this issue, this will inevitably determine the most likely sense in light of this data.”

FS: “I don’t suppose by ‘clear’ you mean most numerous, do you?”

JM: “What do you mean?”

FS: “For instance, one way of determining what *divine nature* might be is to look at all of the references to the *word* in the Old and New Testaments, and whatever definition seems to apply to most of these

references we would inductively apply to all the others.”

JM: “No, that wouldn’t be quite the safest way to do Bible study.”

FS: “Then you would propose the most clear in some other sense. But I don’t suppose you would restrict this study to a mere word search, but would want to search for the concept of divine nature across the whole counsel of God, right?”

JM: “Right.”

FS: “But then, consider this hurdle: The Old Testament speaks of Moses shining with God’s glory, or Abraham being justified by faith. The question arises whether we are to consider both of these an instance of partaking of the divine nature, or only one of them, or neither. The word is not explicitly used, but it’s possible that Moses was sharing in God’s attribute of glory, or that Abraham was sharing in God’s attribute of trust.”

JM: “You have chosen a very difficult example, Father Seraphim.”

FS: “I will remind you that you chose it, and we both bear responsibility of understanding it. But if the method of interpreting the unclear in light of the clear does not work here, is it likely that it will work in even more difficult issues, like understanding the nature of the Eucharistic feast? Would we to continue with this method, or try something else?”

JM: “I suppose I don’t know what we would do.”

FS: “But I think you *do* know, my son. Wouldn’t you ask your pastor what salvation was, if it came to such a disagreement? Wouldn’t you ask him long before such an intractable argument? Haven’t you already asked him such questions?”

JM: “Well, yes. But I am not asking him what *salvation is*, just what the general consensus is amongst educated people as to what the Bible says.”

FS: “Fair enough. But you admit that such a conversation with him would be helpful?”

JM: “It could be, yes.”

FS: “And he might comfort you in your doubt. He might admit your question is a difficult one. If you asked him what influences have helped him form his thoughts, he might tell you about similar conversations he had with his pastor, might he not?”

JM: “Definitely.”

FS: “Or he might point to Calvin and Luther—for there are certain *helpful clarifications* of unclear passages that have been passed down from person to person within the churches.”

JM: “From person to person?”

FS: “You know the kind of person I mean—those who have never read or even heard of *Two Kinds Righteousness* or *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, but have managed to understand their doctrines passed on person-to-person, and who proceed to teach them. Or haven’t you met such confident fellows?”

JM: “I have, now that you mention it. I didn’t read Luther until my first year of Bible College, though I knew pretty well by high school what he taught.”

FS: “Precisely. And you probably learned not only from your pastor, whom you know and trust, but any other Christian pastors or scholars whom your pastor recommends. Or did you not, like I did, pore over commentaries at a young age?”

JM: “I certainly did.”

7.6 APPLYING & ENFORCING THE WORD

FS: “And thank God for them. But in the issue of *applying* what we understand, is some outside help also helpful? Or do you try out different ways of obedience to see what’s right?”

JM: “In the case of application, Father, the most important Scripture to apply is ‘Love God and love people.’ Of course, we can’t love people without other people, and we can’t love God for long without the help of our community. The Scriptures themselves command us not to forsake the gathering together. In this way, each person has a responsibility to obey the Scriptures and live them out.”

FS: “I agree with what you have said. But what about the statements in Holy Writ that are important, but not as clearly applicable? I’m thinking of passages such as ancient prophecies, proverbs, genealogies, greetings, narratives, that don’t have *commands* to obey, or other passages where the commands are obscure.”

JM: “Like what to do with the Old Testament ceremonial laws?”

FS: “Or like what St. Paul tells the Thessalonians: ‘To pray without ceasing.’ You may be aware of the long and beautiful tradition of attempts to obey this command. Some re-state the meaning of ‘prayer’ to something like ‘being aware of God’ which is easier to do without ceasing—though still difficult to do in sleep. Others change the definition of ‘without ceasing’. One school thinks that this is a hyperbolic suggestion rather than

a literal command; in other words, ‘pray often, deeply, and regularly—don’t ever stop praying at regular times.’ Another school takes its plainest, simplest, *literal* sense, and considers it transgression of the Word of the Lord ever to cease prayer.”

JM: “But that’s absurd!”

FS: “I don’t think being sensible is their idea of obedience to the Word of God. They do sleep; one person always stays up and prays for the others. Rotating like this, they creatively apply what they insist is the obvious application of a difficult verse.”

JM: “Well that’s admirable, I guess. But each school seems me to have something of the truth, Father Seraphim. Why can’t we just say that they each have valid applications and should follow their conscience as it pleases God?”

FS: “That might be attractive, my son—but I failed to mention *another* school you may *not* approve of. These think it impossible to ‘pray without ceasing’ and so don’t try. They reason with themselves like this: ‘This absurd command must be a part of the old law, like “do not boil a calf in its mother’s milk,” or “do not do work on Saturdays.” In fact, such commands are given by Paul *not* to be obeyed, but to make us aware of our sin, to remind us to trust more fully in Christ, who intercedes for us. Or, such commands are given by Paul as examples of the old law to which we have absolutely no obligation, since it was fulfilled in Christ.’ The result of this, of course, is that they deride those who stay up all night in an attempt to *literally* pray without ceasing, calling them foolish, or Judaizers, or other names. They themselves do pray, but not regularly, not often—only as the spirit leads, as the saying goes. Do these seem like acceptable applications to you?”

JM: “No, that seems foolish, and contrary to other commands in Scripture.”

FS: “So we can’t simply assert that whatever application one wants to derive from a particular passage is acceptable.”

JM: “Of course not.”

FS: “And we need some standard by which to apply what we are taught?”

JM: “Yes, a scriptural standard, if possible. Perhaps we should comb the New Testament, beginning with the writings of Paul for some ideas.”

FS: “That reminds me—why do so many pastors start with Paul? You said earlier this afternoon that your pastor will preach a sermon on a verse or a few verses from a book, right?”

JM: “Yes.”

FS: “In what order does he preach on which books? My pastor growing up had some order, but I could never discern it. This also must be settled if we are to apply not only the Scriptures but our study of them.”

JM: “Hm... I don’t know. My pastor preaches often from Galatians, and Ephesians, and Romans. He loves Acts, since it speaks so clearly and instructively about the New Testament Church, and he is currently doing a series on the Revelation of John, which is following and adding to a series he did last year on end times prophecy in Daniel, Ezekiel, the Gospels, and Revelation. I am not aware that he uses a particular system.”

FS: “I wonder if there is not some system underneath that you are not aware of. For instance, does he preach on the Old Testament?”

JM: “Yes.”

FS: “Does he alternate Old and New Testament books, or does he preach from many Old Testament books in a row?”

JM: “Yes, he did a series a few years ago on the Minor Prophets.”

FS: “And he will probably return to them at some point, yes? Isn’t there a small cycle he is following, whether it is obvious at first or not?”

JM: “I suppose there might be, if I kept track and thought about it for a while.”

FS: “Does this seem like a biblical way to preach the Bible?”

JM: “I don’t see why not. Why—do you see something wrong with it?”

FS: “I don’t know about that particular order, but I do think there are wrong ways to go about preaching from the Holy Bible.”

JM: “What wrong way might that be?”

FS: “I once heard of a pastor of a church in California who reasoned to himself that the Psalms and Romans are the most important books of the Old and New Testament: Psalms because it promises Christ’s death and Resurrection so clearly; Romans because it is purest Gospel. ‘The Psalms,’ he said, ‘picture Christ’s kingdom and the conditions and nature of all Christendom so well that it might well be called the little Bible. Whereas in Romans, we find the richest possible teaching about what a Christian should know: the meaning of law, Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, justice, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross. We learn how we are to act toward everyone, toward the virtuous and sinful, toward the strong and weak, friend and foe, and toward ourselves. Paul bases everything firmly on Scripture and proves his points with examples from

his own experience and from the Prophets, so that nothing more could be desired. Therefore it seems that St. Paul, in writing this letter, wanted to compose a summary of the whole of Christian and evangelical teaching which would also be an introduction to the whole Old Testament. Without doubt, whoever takes this letter to heart possesses the light and power of the Old Testament. Through it the preacher is able to reveal the law and sin, to rebuke and turn into sin everything in life that does not have the spirit and faith in Christ as its base. Therefore each and every Christian should make this letter the habitual and constant object of his study, so he said regularly and repeated to anyone who asked him.' Having so concluded, this pastor decided that preaching on any other books in the canon would be unnecessary—even unethical. When questioned, he persuasively argued, saying, 'The Holy Word of God is deep, wide, and long. There are hidden and humanly unplumbable depths in every chapter and even every line and word of Holy Writ, let alone every book. Why would you criticize me for preaching deeply in Romans rather than widely in the New Testament, when all of the core truths and guidance of the New Testament are contained most succinctly, most clearly, most beautifully, and most powerfully in Romans?' Many tried but were unable to change his mind, and he preached on Romans or a Psalm every week for more than twenty years. His church congregation dwindled at times, but also grew with congregants who were persuaded by his strategy, and were glad to hear from someone with such conviction and purpose. What do you think of his system?"

JM: "I think it is quite obviously ridiculous, Father Seraphim. How could he deprive his flock of the nourishment in Ecclesiastes, in the Gospels, in Genesis and Exodus, in the other prophets and epistles? What pastor was this?"

FS: "Never mind his name. But don't let's judge him hastily, but say exactly what is wrong with his system, if it is wrong. He certainly had strong reason—you can't criticize him for being thoughtless—even in the face of much anger and criticism, not only from his parishioners, but from other pastors and teachers as well. Yet he was able to win every argument, in his own mind at least."

JM: "I think his reasons are foolish. The Bible as a whole was written for our salvation, instruction, and eventual glorification. God did not inspire sixty-six books only to have man edit them down to two. So to focus exclusively on two, even if they are two very significant and microcosmic books within the Bible, is contrary to the will of God."

FS: "That is perhaps an excellent reason. Can you say by what faculty it is that you identified it?"

JM: "What do you mean?"

FS: "Well, the argument you just presented is nowhere found explicitly in the Holy Scripture, is it?"

JM: "OK. Do you think I am being unreasonable?"

FS: "Quite reasonable, rather—which answers my question. The faculty by which you would argue against this pastor's application of Holy Scripture is the faculty of *reason*. Do you see that?"

JM: "OK."

FS: "So if my spiritual children, or your students, asked us, 'I know I am supposed to read the Bible, but which Scriptures, in what order, and how often?' We would not tell them, 'however you would like, child, is acceptable. There are no mistakes. As long as you are reading the Holy Bible daily, then you are pleasing God,' for they might focus on one book to the exclusion of all else, which seems unwise, in the final analysis. Rather, we would tell them, 'Read some portions in a reasonable order and reasonable frequency. There are millions of foolish orders and frequencies, but there are several reasonable ones as well. So, read it front to back, once a year. Or read the Old Testament for a year, then the New Testament for a year. Or focus on the Pentateuch for four months, and then the Major Prophets for four. Or focus on the Minor Prophets, as your pastor did, and the books of prophecy. Or focus on the Gospels for four months, and then the Pauline Epistles. Or focus on the Johannean corpus, or on Luke and Acts. Or read one Psalm daily, and a chapter from a Gospel daily until you finish it, then start over, and then switch the gospel every three months, starting with Mark on January 1st, and picking it up again the next January 1st.' There are a variety of reasonable options we might tell them, unless you would say something different?"

JM: "That is just what I would say."

FS: "Then perhaps you can answer him again, if he were persistent, saying: 'Teacher, you told me, "We believe the Bible is the Word of God partly because the Bible says it is the Word of God." But when I asked you why we should believe it when it says that about itself, you said, "Because we trust that God has revealed himself to us, and that is enough for you, my child, for now." And when I asked you, "Has God revealed himself to us in the Qur'an and the Book of Mormon?" you said, "No, child! Our faith discriminates between the false revelations of man, or of unclean spirits." And when I said, "Does God reveal himself in the writings of the wise men of history, the philosophers, the logicians, the mathematicians, and the scientists?" you said, "Yes, but not as inspired prophets; only as reasonable men who exercised their God-given faculties for the discovery

of truth.” And when I asked, “Is it these reasonable men who assure us that the Bible is the Word of God?” you told me, “No, child! The Word of God transcends the wisdom of man as far as the sun transcends the little candle-flame.” And so I am now confused, teacher. You say there is truth outside the Bible, but not inspired truth. When I ask you which parts of the Bible to read, in what order, and how often, you tell me not to look for supernatural reasons, but to do what is merely reasonable? You’re saying God has revealed supernatural truth, but as for reading it, we must use merely natural reasons?’ You answer, John Mark: What would you tell this precocious student?”

JM: “I would tell them that God leaves some things up to us that we can figure out for ourselves, but other things, supernatural matters of sin and salvation and the resurrection of his Son, he has graciously deigned to make clear to us in the Holy Scriptures.”

FS: “Very well, and perhaps our student would thus be satisfied.”

JM: “I hope he would, for there is nothing else to say on that matter. Scripture does not reveal an order in which to read itself, except for perhaps the arrangement of the canon itself, which suggests that it should be read starting with Genesis and moving through to Revelation. Also the Psalms are in a certain order.”

FS: “But if he had more questions, we would be obliged to at least attempt to answer him through conversation, and not just point them to the Holy Scriptures as if they would tell him in what order to read themselves.”

CHAPTER 8: TRADITION & SCRIPTURE

JM: “Yes, Father, but I am confused. The fact is that the Scripture alone is sufficient for salvation and our knowledge of God, and the essential practices of our faith. When we have these conversations with pastors or whomever, it may help, but it doesn’t equate to the authority of the Word of God.”

FS: “We agreed earlier there are many Words of God—but then you said the apostles’ authority was transferred to writing: Is it possible for authority to rest in writing?”

JM: “I think so. Why do you ask?”

FS: “Think about an analogous case. A soldier in the Army has to learn how to march. There is a rulebook—somewhere, I’m sure—with proper instructions. But a sergeant on duty tells the soldier exactly how to march—doesn’t the soldier learn in obedience to the word of his sergeant? Or have you ever seen a soldier march correctly in obedience to a military rulebook which sits silently on a table?”

JM: “Never heard of it.

FS: “And did the sergeant learn to march correctly from the book, or from the general? I am not asking whether the book contains a written description of what the general teaches, but whether the sergeant learned from the book.”

JM: “No, he probably learned from the general.”

FS: “Similarly, we read in the Divine Book rules for how leaders are supposed to enforce godly behavior?”

JM: “Certainly.”

FS: “And so the ‘Christian sergeant’ in authority obey these Holy Commands when he is enforcing obedience by another Christian soldier.”

JM: “Definitely. Not to do so would be unbiblical.”

FS: “And if he does not, his pastor or overseer will remind him, gently or harshly, not to be ungodly while helping others to be godly. And yet what is enforcing obedience to the Holy Mandates in the first place?”

JM: “The general, in this case, is following the rule book itself.”

FS: “But how is the Rule Book going to notice if I am being a bad person, since it is without eyes and ears, or hands with which to enforce obedience?”

JM: “What else would?”

FS: “Another pastor, perhaps older. Or any godly person, whether my brothers and sisters or the children of the parish, who holds me accountable to doing what it says? Having a written text that *seems to know* what it’s saying doesn’t help if you don’t obey it, but they will keep on exhorting me not to sin, in the same way, over and over, if, that is, I continue to read it, understand it, and interpret it correctly. With a live person, if you do not obey correctly, they can continue the conversation by asking you a question. Won’t they tell me if I am enforcing scriptural mandates in an unloving manner?”

JM: “That seems right, Father. For my teachers and employees at my high school correct me if I am out of line, not the school behavior code itself. Though they do hold me accountable to keeping the school code as it is written. Even my students will speak up, if they are feeling bold, to remind me of a policy I may have transgressed.”

FS: “But the person is the place the authority rests—whether to correct you in your keeping the commands, or helping you to understand what means, or translating it for you, or reading it to you.”

8.2 INSPIRED HELP OR NOT?

JM: “I for one, Father, am uncomfortable with saying that these sources of help are *divinely inspired* in the same sense that the Holy Writers were divinely inspired.”

FS: “What about this: Are we comfortable saying that they are God-given?”

JM: “I don’t see why not.”

FS: “If someone helps us in reading the written Word of God—either by translating it into modern English, or by preaching a sermon on it, or

by writing a commentary, or just conversing with us: either this assistance is from God or it is not, right?

JM: "Sure."

FS: If it is not from God, then it ought to be rejected and replaced by assistance that *is* from God; it is impossible to go completely without assistance."

JM: "Impossible to keep the truth."

FS: "If it is from God, then we must say it is in some sense *inspired* by God?"

JM: "That's where I disagree. Not every time that God helps someone is that person *inspired*. Inspired makes it sound like the persons themselves have divine authority; only the Scriptures are God-breathed.

FS: "But the question remains whether the book, which is inspired, has authority, or the living persons. I understand how authority can rest in a person or an office—Jesus says, 'All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth' [Matthew 28:18], and he tells Pilate, 'You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above: therefore he that delivered me to you has the greater sin' [John 19:11]. We see both divine authority and human authority resting in persons. The general and sergeant are persons; your students and bosses are persons."

JM: "Yes. But what about writings? A written letter from the president bears his authority, or a CEO."

FS: "Writing *does* bear a strange resemblance to the person who writes it, as if the person has become—no longer a person—word and page, ink and paper. If only I wrote myself down in a biography or a story, whether playfully or seriously, I would live forever. And paper will survive my body. So, having a likeness of my thoughts inscribed, the hypothetical *me* will outlive the factual *me*."

JM: "So, do you agree that the authority of a person can rest in writing?"

FS: "I'm not sure whether the *dunamis* of a person resides in such a hypothesis or the *hypostasis*."

JM: "I don't follow."

FS: "Consider this hypothetical: If someone were to record our conversation and make a transcript of it, if only to think about it later, at their leisure, and if there is any authority in this conversation, would you say that the written version of this conversation also has authority?"

JM: “I guess it has only as much authority as the original speaker had. In this case, you have some authority as a priest, and I have some authority as a high school principal. So that authority would carry over.”

FS: “I agree somewhat—but would we more accurately say that *the written word itself*—the book, the pages, the document in which the words are written—has authority, or that the book somehow transmits, like a pipe, an authority alien to it—namely the authority of the person, which remains in and with the person only?”

JM: “It depends on the intentions of the person. If they die, then, in a sense, like a will, the person never has as much authority as the Written Word.”

FS: “I’ll remind you the question is whether the *writing* has any authority at all.”

JM: I was confused and sat thinking for some time. My friend Henry, who had been sitting patiently the whole time, listening to John Paul and me arguing, finally decided to contribute. He raised his hand slightly, smiled, and said:

H: “Technically, Father, the written word would be a *rule*; the authority would be a presiding body of interpretation. They don’t authoritatively interpret, but they do apply and enforce what is commanded in the letter. This is why I think the answer to our second question is already clear. The Bible is not the only authority; rather, it needs a living body of readers for interpretation and execution.”

JM: “I don’t know, Henry. I don’t like this at all—Doesn’t the Old Testament teach that the final authority in matters of faith and practice was in the written word?”

H: “I don’t think so, John Mark,” he said.

JM: “Think about it: The Mosaic Law was written down and given the authority of God. Moses and Aaron and the Aaronic priesthood used these laws to teach the children. ‘They meditated upon them day and night,’ and ‘wrote them on their doorposts’ and constantly used them in instruction. When there was a dispute, it was the written Scripture to which they would turn for an infallible guide to the Lord’s governing authority.”

H: “Ah, John Mark, that is a common mistake you are making. But you are an educated person, so I am surprised to hear you also making it. Don’t you know that it was years before the Mosaic law was written down?”

JM: “Yes, of course.”

H: "In the meantime Moses was the person, and Aaron and their disciples, who had the authority. You know that they had 'the law of God written on their hearts.' What else is this but their memories, by which they exercised authority, enforcing obedience to the laws according to their own word?"

JM: "I don't disagree with you, Henry. But you are forgetting the stone tablets, which were written by the hand of God himself, and delivered to Moses."

H: "You mean the mere ten? What about the remaining six hundred and three commands? Where were they before Moses wrote them down? Where they not in their minds and memories?"

JM: "I suppose."

H: "Well, then, are you not consenting to the thesis that the authority of God was in Moses and Aaron and the other people, and that the rule by which they exercised this authority was, in some cases, the written word?"

JM: "Not at all, Henry."

H: "I don't understand."

JM: "Chronological priority does not establish logical priority, does it?"

H: "What do you mean?"

JM: "If *earlier in the time line* equaled *logical priority*, we would have to say that God's words to Adam and Abraham and Israel and Noah were more authoritative than those written down later by Moses."

H: "I see. And I wouldn't necessarily affirm that. But we agree that Moses and Aaron and the priests had authority. God's communications with Adam and Abraham were authoritative at the time, and remained so down through many dozens of generations before Moses wrote them down. So that puts the burden of proof on your assertions that the authority was transferred somehow to writing? You seem to have conceded my point!"

JM: "Well, Henry, you remember the words of the angel in Isaiah 30:8 when he said, 'Now go, write it on a tablet before them And inscribe it on a scroll, That it may serve in the time to come as a witness forever.' This is God himself saying the book is better than the man. Psalm 119 is also an excellent example of the high priority of the written law in the Old Testament. God commands the people to do whatever is written. From this we can see clearly that the authority which was retained originally in the ears and mind of Moses who heard and understood the message

of God was transferred, by divine will, into not only the tablets but the documents preserved for clarity, objectivity, and lastingness.”

H: “I’m afraid you’re begging the question, my friend. Why do you think that the Law in Psalm 119 is the written law? The psalmist says things like, ‘Establish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear,’ but he does not speak often about the *reading* of the law, but with whole-hearted devotion *performing it*. You emphasized that God commands people to do what is written. This is exactly my point. The ruling body sitting in the seat of Moses *enforces* what is written. The laws function as a constitution and a legislative branch, if you will, where the people function as an executive and a judicial branch, not only applying what is written but judging authoritatively between varying applications when disputes arise. As for preservation, what better way to ensure that the Scriptures are communicated from generation to generation than to inscribe them deeply on the heart of your children and your children’s children? For not every family had their own copy of the written Scriptures; they were read publicly, and memorized in school and synagogue. In this way those blessed statutes the psalmist speaks of find their way not only into one’s heart of hearts, but into the next generation as well. As further proof that the written laws were never meant to exist apart from the body of living men in authority, consider that the original Torah in Hebrew was written without vowels or punctuation. It was understood that each generation of rabbis learned the entire Torah by heart. That way, when they read it without vowels, they understood what it said, being reminded rather than instructed by what was on the page. This oral *paradosis* was passed down from generation to generation, and was eventually partially written in the Mishnah Torah in the 2nd century A.D.”

JM: “I couldn’t disagree more, Henry. Not with your history, but with the inferences you draw.”

H: “Well, that’s fine by me. You see, Father Seraphim, some of us Protestants heartily *endorse* the idea that the church can, does, and must make authoritative decisions. We don’t hold that Scripture is the *only* authority; however, we do affirm it is *first*—it holds a privileged place within the church.”

JM: “I don’t know how you can hold that position, Henry, and not capitulate to John Paul’s claims. The Old Testament is a written deliverance of the Word of God, and the Apostles and Jesus himself referred to it, not to the rabbis and Pharisees, as infallible.”

H: “You studied Plato with Dr. Geier didn’t you, John Mark? Remember the Phaedrus. He was quick to correct lawgivers and speech-writers, whether individuals or political officials, who believed that

there was any great certainty and clarity in their ability to write laws and treatises. For, unless such people, when asked, can explain what the writing means, then their writing is their disgrace, whatever people say. For not to know the nature of good and evil, of uncreated and created, and not to be able to distinguish the hypothetical from the actual, can't be anything but embarrassing, even though they have the applause of the whole world."

JM: "Humans may not be able to transmit reality onto the written page, but the inspired word of God? Isn't that different?"

H: "I'm not denigrating the writings, John Mark, but the people who use them poorly. In the written word there is necessarily a lot which is not serious. Neither poetry nor prose, spoken or written, is of any great value, if, like verses in memorization books, they are only recited in order to be believed, and not with any view to instruction or criticism. But they who think that even the best of writings are just remembering what we know... they who think that there is clearness and perfection and seriousness only in principles of truth and goodness communicated orally for the sake of instruction and written down in the soul (which is the true way of writing)... these are the right sort of men; and Father Seraphim and I would pray that we may become like them."

8.3 SPEAKING AND WRITING IN GENERAL

JM: "Whatever you argue about Old Testament laws and poetry, with the New Testament the data is more clear, Henry. The Lord clearly teaches in the Apostles' writings that the written authority is the only authority, or at least the final. Like in II Timothy, where *Scripture* is God-breathed, not human words."

H: "But you know as well as I do that Paul is not assuming a canon of sixty-six books, as you just did, but a canon of forty or so Old Testament Scriptures. At the time he wrote that, the New Testament hadn't even been written."

JM: "It's the Holy Spirit speaking through him anyway, Henry. It could be a prophecy."

H: "Elsewhere the New Testament clearly sets up *writing* as authoritative: Mark 7:1-12 records Jesus' clear warning that the *oral* teaching (or interpretation) of Israel's leaders can't supersede or subvert the *written* canon.

"John Mark, do you notice that you are *here*, arguing in person, for

that interpretation of the text? It is not a given that Jesus is establishing the writing over the oral teaching. In fact, if that were what he was arguing, then his argument would be self-refuting, for it is an argument that he made orally. Or, if that were his point, it would not have been true until Mark wrote down the saying and converted it from an oral to a written teaching. Right?"

JM: "OK..."

H: "I'm not sure it's a question of written versus oral teaching—for Jesus supersedes their oral interpretation of the law, which was bad, with his own oral interpretation, which was better. Wasn't his spoken word as authoritative at the time as the Old Testament writings?"

JM: "Yes, of course, of course—"

H: "—And if he taught that to the disciples, and commanded them to teach it to others and someone contradicted this teaching, whether in speech or in writing, couldn't they with equal justice respond that they ought not set up the writings of man against the speech of God? Even then, I can't see a way around Father Seraphim's question about authority resting in writing. I think the authority of the Scripture is actually the authority of the Holy Spirit, in or outside the writings."

JM: "I can't see through it, my friend. If the authority were not in the writing, where would it be?"

H: "Just where you and I have been saying—in the authoritative interpreters and enforcers of the writing."

JM: "You mean the Church and its traditions?"

H: "Not man-made traditions, friend!"

JM: "What other kind are there?"

H: "God-made traditions. We already said there are many Words of God—we only want to follow the Word of God. You agreed with Father Seraphim that the Word of God spoken to Abraham outside a written text must be obeyed. Yet you are now scrambling to justify that the written text is the only one that must be obeyed. You are worried, I suspect, about being under Roman tyranny ever again—as am I. But thank God, 'Returning to Egypt' is not our only option... We may remain sojourners in the desert under the priesthood of Melchizedek, whose priesthood the author of Hebrews argues is the divine priesthood of Christ."

JM: "I am worried about disobeying the one High Priest spoken of in Hebrews, in favor of some other self-styled priest." Father Seraphim raised his head again—he had been looking down at his chest—and

pointed something out:

FS: “We still have not yet defined Scripture. We agree extra-biblical sources, written and spoken, are helpful, but perhaps we can return to this.”

8.4 THE SCRIPTURAL CANON

JM: “I for one would be relieved to change the subject.”

FS: “If we are to follow our previous model, we must know exactly what we mean by *Scriptura*, mustn’t we?”

JM: “Certainly. I think we already know what Scripture is, but I’m sure you won’t hesitate to challenge me.”

FS: “Suppose we have three kinds of food in three cabinets. The cabinets are labeled ‘Holy,’ ‘Earthly,’ and ‘Hellish,’ respectively...”

JM: “OK, I am supposing.”

FS: “...The food from the Holy Cabinet brings life, from the Earthly Cabinet will neither nourish nor harm, but the Hellish Cabinet brings sickness and death.”

JM: “What strange cabinets, Father.”

FS: “They are like our books; though we call some writings ‘Holy’ we must not only agree on names but upon real beings. Similarly, even if we agreed such and such *alone* has authority, we still must understand exactly which books alone have authority.”

JM: “That makes sense. But what disagreement is there? You accept and admit the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, do you not? Or do you doubt them?”

FS: “I accept them. Do you accept the words of Sirach—?”

JM: “—But that is not in the Bible; it is Apocryphal.”

FS: “Forgive me, but this is the very question we are discussing. For you and Henry and your friends assert that it is not *Scriptura*, whereas John Paul and I and our friends assert that it is *Scriptura*.”

JM: “I must protest that the placement of any other such books, however historically accurate or edifying they might be, on the level of Holy Scripture is a foolish and potentially even a dangerous enterprise. For the Beloved Apostle John in Revelation 22:18 says, ‘I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything

to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.”

FS: “Amen. And let us not forget the following verse, ‘And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.’ So it is tantamount we determine *accurately* the words of the book, both Revelation and the whole Bible, correctly.”

JM: “The books are not determined to be Scripture, if by that word ‘determined’ you mean defined or chosen. The church is, as I have said before, first of all a listening church, and its first duty is to hear and recognize the Word of God when it is uttered. The Hebrews did not *decide* what was Scripture; the content of the Old Testament writings was so persuasive that they were recognized as authentic, trustworthy, and authoritative testimonies to the Word of God. The Church did not *decide* what is Holy Scripture and what is not any more than the Church ‘decided’ that Jesus Christ died for our sins, or rose from the dead in the flesh, or that God the Father is the Creator of all. Rather, we hear, see, and know to be true what God has spoken. God in his sovereignty chose the Apostles as vessels of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and through them produced Holy Scripture. The Church, even from its earliest days, simply recognized this, and responded accordingly, in obedience, in respect, in deference.”

FS: “Well said. May I ask one small question?”

JM: “Yes, of course.”

FS: “You say the Church recognized certain books as Holy Scripture?”

JM: “Yes.”

FS: “Did the Church also recognize certain other books as not Holy Scripture?”

JM: “Yes, as far as I know, there were plenty of uninspired writings circulated around in first-century Jerusalem, Greece, and the surrounding cities.”

FS: “You mean, I think, books such as the *Didache*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, which were sometimes thought to be Holy Scripture, but were eventually discarded as pious but not totally-inspired texts?”

JM: “Yes, and rightfully so.”

FS: “How is that a book is recognized to be Holy Scripture or not Holy Scripture?”

JM: “That is a good question, Father Seraphim, and one to which

providing an adequate answer might take some time...”

FS: “Am I right in thinking these are the only two possible options for answering the question?”

JM: “Which options?”

FS: “The *internal* or the *external*, so to speak.”

JM: “How do you mean?”

FS: “The recognition of Holy Scripture is something that takes place ... *inside* a Christian person—and this recognition could come from the satisfaction of certain criteria within the person recognizing, or from the satisfaction of certain criteria by a piece of writing such that it is apparent to the Christian what is Holy Scripture, and what is not.”

JM: “I’m not quite clear yet about your distinction.”

FS: “Think of it this way: Either you know Scripture when you hear it, because of *the way you are*; some fact of it resonates with certain people, and you are one of those people—or you know Scripture, even before you hear it, because of *the way it is*. Some external facts clue you off, and could be recognized by anybody. For example, imagine this scenario. You and Henry go to pick up a distant cousin of yours from the airport. Neither of you know what she looks like, but you know she is the daughter of your aunt. You both look for several minutes. You see someone who looks like your aunt, and hail her, ‘Hello, my family!’ You recognize her as being like *you*, though you know little else. This is internal recognition, and Henry, being outside the family, can’t use it to discover her. In the case of external recognition, say you both got to the airport to pick up this distant cousin, the child of an uncle you’ve never met. You and Henry *both* know she has dark hair of medium length, is about 5’6”, and will be wearing a dark green blouse, black Capri pants, and carrying black luggage. You both search, checking each person of that height who seems to be wearing green to see if they fit all the descriptions. Finally, Henry sees her, without her luggage, and her hair is up, but still, she fits most of them, so he stops her, ‘Excuse me...’ In this case, you see, neither of you has an internal pattern by which to intuit the identity of your cousin, so you are both using external criteria to identify her.”

JM: “I think I see your point.”

FS: “So is the Church’s recognition of the Holy Scriptures as such *internal recognition* or *external recognition*?”

JM: “In that case, the recognition is *external*, for the New Testament Scriptures are the writings and teachings of the Apostles, as they received these teachings from Christ. So to define Scripture we verify that it is

written by an Apostle—written under inspiration of course, for not every receipt Paul wrote for a tent purchase was inspired by God!”

FS: “What about Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles? These were not written by one of the twelve Apostles, were they?”

JM: “Well, no, but they were *approved* by an Apostle. Luke was a disciple of Paul, and Paul confirmed the accuracy and authority of Luke’s writings.”

FS: “Luke’s writings were approved by Paul? How do you know that?”

JM: “In some cases the approval is in the letter itself. For the others, well, they *must have* been authenticated and blessed by an Apostle, Father. How else could they be included in the canon?”

FS: “What about the letter to the Hebrews? Was this written by an Apostle—or blessed by an Apostle?”

JM: “See, Father, the only real criterion is that of *inspiration* of a piece of writing *by God*, and His intention to use it for the teaching, reproof, and correction that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. But the *test* of inspiration, however, is contained in these four excellent criteria.”

FS: “Of course. Our aim, as I recall, is not to *determine* whether some writing is inspired or not, since it is already inspired whether we know it or not, but we want to know how we *recognize* it as such.”

JM: “Exactly.”

FS: “So go on and tell me how to recognize Hebrews as inspired.”

JM: “Now that I think about it, there are three other criteria we must use: All Scripture was accepted by most Christians in the early church as being Scripture. And Scripture was used in worship services in the early church. Ultimately, we recognize Scripture simply by the fact that its teachings are orthodox and accurate to the truth of the gospel of Christianity. By these we can recognize pretty infallibly that the 27 books we have, including Hebrews, are all Scripture.”

8.5 EXAMINING THE CANON

FS: “This sounds like an excellent list—but we would be careless gatekeepers if we let in even *one* book that was not supposed to be there, letting it wreak havoc on Christendom; we would be obstinate and ignorant gatekeepers, if we refused entry to one that was supposed to be

there, like foolish servants who fail to honor the noble friend of the king?”

JM: “That would be irresponsible to the extreme, Father.”

JM: I glanced at Henry and a few others. One of them pointed to his watch. I shook my head. I said, “That would be equally tragic, Father. So let us examine it, by all means, although my friends seem itching to go.”

FS: “The first criterion you mentioned applies to the books written by Paul, and the gospels of Mathew and John, and the letters of Peter, James, and John.”

JM: “That is right.”

FS: “And where it does not apply—Hebrews—or does not apply with certainty, like Jude and Revelation and some others, you bring as witness the other three criteria to show that the writing stands up under examination.”

JM: “Yes, precisely.”

FS: “Though Jude may not have been written by an Apostle, still, early Christians such as Clement and Tertullian and many others accepted the letter as inspired.”

JM: “Right.”

FS: “And Revelation may or may not actually be penned by John the Beloved Disciple, and though it was widely disputed for many years, yet its teachings are orthodox.”

JM: “Indisputably.”

FS: “And the same goes for Hebrews?”

JM: “Yes, Hebrews is a mysterious letter, yet the doctrine contained therein is beautifully orthodox, as the church has mostly recognized quite early, and throughout the centuries up to the present day.”

FS: “Of course, the epistle to the Hebrews was not accepted as Scripture by *all* Christians in all places in the earliest times. Perhaps you meant most Christians in most places at most times?”

JM: “Yes, that is what I meant.”

FS: “And was the epistle to the Hebrews was used widely in Christian worship in the early church?”

JM: “I don’t think so.”

FS: “Then let me ask you about the fourth criterion you mentioned: Either Hebrews teaches truths also taught in other books, or not. If Hebrews teaches truths also taught in other books, then why is it necessary in the

canon? If it teaches truths not taught or implied in other books, then how can we judge its orthodoxy based on its consistency” with the other books?”

JM: “Its teachings may not be implied by other books, but they are consistent with them, as biblical scholars will assure you.”

FS: “What if there is some new, seemingly orthodox doctrines which do not *explicitly contradict* the doctrines revealed, but extend Christian doctrine into areas of foolishness, if not error—consider how to refute them.”

JM: “Such as what?”

FS: “Such as the arguments of some wolf in sheep’s clothing, who claims that Hebrews teaches the Donatist heresy—that those who renounce the faith cannot re-enter the Church. The speaker does indeed say, ‘those who... once tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit... and [then] fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance’ [Hebrews 6:4]. Now, you might disagree with the plain sense of this passage, by asserting that ‘those who confess their sins will be forgiven and cleansed’ [1 John 1:9]. But this wolf could argue it, and persuasively. He could go on, showing that Hebrews [8:13] argues for a new covenant, saying, ‘A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.’ Whereas Christ says he has not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; ‘I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them’ [Matthew 5:17]. This wolf could compel us to admit that all Holy Scripture must agree in even small details—and then point out that the author says, ‘Moses... took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people,’ [Hebrews 9:19] whereas the Old Testament reference here clearly refers only to the blood of young bulls, not goats [Exodus 24]. To vary on such details puts sacrificial purity at risk. Are not these sufficient grounds for at least doubting the orthodoxy of Hebrews?”

JM: “These do *seem* to contradict, Father Seraphim. But their true meanings may be and are harmonized.”

FS: “I accept what you say—but say further: Are they harmonized by the Church, or by someone else? Come now, don’t withhold your answer. You can change it later if it seems wrong, but only speak your mind. Do you think they are harmonized by the Church?”

JM: “Right now, I think the church.”

FS: “Perhaps you were being coy before, for now you seem to be saying that the consensus of the church is the truest *test* of inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And, though you tried to argue that the church uses what we called ‘external recognition,’ now you’re arguing for the fourth criterion on your list turned out to be what we earlier called ‘internal recognition,’ but disguised.”

JM: “It does seem to fall to the consensual recognition of Christians, at least with the epistle to the Hebrews, unless we have missed some point worth our attention.”

FS: “If someone can help us with such a point we may have missed, we shall be grateful to them and return to that point again and discuss it, even if they want us to examine Genesis or the Gospel of John—we will discuss it.”

JM: “That seems taking it a bit far, Father. We have the canon of Scripture, and it is closed. We are merely trying to find the method by which the church recognizes which books are included.”

FS: “You believe the canon is closed?”

JM: “Yes, I believe so. You don’t?”

FS: “I believe it’s closed, but I don’t think that *you* believe it.”

JM: I’m sure you’ll challenge me on this too.”

FS: “Just answer and tell me if I’m challenging rightly or wrongly. The canon can only be either open or closed, right?”

JM: “Sure.”

FS: “If it is closed, then it must be closed for some reason. And if it is open, then it is open for some reason. But we agreed that the Church’s *internal* recognition of what is inspired and what is not is correct, have we not?”

JM: “Yes.”

FS: “And is the Church’s recognition human, fallible, and revocable, or not?”

FS: “It might be.”

JM: “If it *might* be, then the canon might yet be open.”

FS: “I protest, Father, the implied need to close the canon in some authoritative and affirmative way. Christians are in universal or nearly so agreement about what is Scripture and what is most definitely not. It seems that the canon is as good as closed, so why are we pursuing a dead question as if it mattered?”

FS: “These questions are certainly live, among many people, not just those who call themselves Christians, but biblical scholars, historians, and theologians. And we must find ourselves tangling in endless argumentation with them, no matter how ridiculous their arguments seem or how debased their way of life. If the canon is open, in principle,

then we are dumb before those who suggest that we remove James from the canon, or add back in the books of Maccabees and Ecclesiasticus, or remove the sections of Paul's writings that condemn homosexual behavior.

JM: "I suppose you're right about that much."

FS: "Now, if the canon is closed, in principle, which I think we would both strongly prefer, then it must be closed for some reason?"

8.6 FOUR HYPOTHESES

JM: "That is only rational, and much preferable."

FS: "Of the reasons that are communicable to ourselves and others, I see three, but tell me what you think. The first hypothesis is that the living community of the body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit living within them, is able to *internally* recognize—infallibly and irrevocably—what is Holy Scripture and what is not. Their having done so closes the canon. The second would be that [2] any logical and well-intentioned person with adequate intellectual faculties and sufficient education has the authority to irrevocably and infallibly recognize what is Holy Scripture. And some of them having done so closes the canon. The third hypothesis would be that any living Christian with the Holy Spirit of God living within them in particular has the ability to internally and irrevocably recognize what is Holy Scripture and what is not. Each time they do this, they re-close the canon, so to speak, when they read the Scriptures and His Spirit testifies with their spirit that this is the Word of God. Do you have any to add to the list?"

JM: "Those seem to be excellent hypotheses, especially the third one."

FS: "Now if the Church as a whole had the authority to irrevocably and infallibly recognize what is Holy Scripture and what is not, then does it seem likely that it could recognize not only writings, but any kind of holy person, place, or thing?"

JM: "I'm not sure what you mean."

FS: "If the Church community is able to accurately recognize what is holy and what is not in the case of books, then probably it is able to recognize what is holy and what is not in the case of persons, places, and things. I mean only to warn you that if we admit this hypothesis, we would be in the perhaps unpleasant position of inquiring what other holy objects we ought to recognize, if we are part of the body."

JM: "That would be unpleasant..."

FS: "But if any logical, well-meaning person can internally recognize what signs indicate Holy Scripture, then it seems to me that there is no good reason for Hebrews and Revelation to be included in the Bible."

JM: "I think you mean that those books are very confusing and seemingly irrational?"

FS: "Exactly. For in relation to their consistency with the rest of Scripture, their content is suspect as being either explicitly inconsistent, as in the case of Hebrews, or as being so unclear it is almost impossible to interpret and harmonize with the rest of Holy Writ, as with John's Apocalypse. And if there is no good reason for them to be in there, and *any* good reason for them to be taken out, then they should be taken out. And there are some good reasons to take them out."

JM: "But we can't accept that!"

FS: "But how can we deny it? Or can you accept those logical, well-meaning fellows who don't recognize Jude, or II Peter, or the Gospel of Mark as Holy Scripture? Can you accept those who recognize the *Didache* and the *Epistles of Ignatius of Antioch*? For if we admit the second hypothesis, then we have much more work to do, for if we are not able to secure the finality of the canon for all time against all such critiques, then we will surely be forced to suffer through the many and tedious arguments that godless scholars like to make about the relative inaccuracy of this or that edition, this or that line of text, this or that concept written about in Scripture."

JM: "A tiresome business, indeed. Let us keep looking, please."

FS: "Now, if any living Christian with the Holy Spirit inside of them has the irrevocable ability to recognize what is holy and what is not, then we are confronted with the embarrassingly wide variety of disagreement on what is Scripture and what is not. For Marcion thought that only a few books ought to be included, compared to your canon. Athanasius was of a similar opinion as you. Pope John Paul has comparatively more, and my bishop includes even a few more than this. Perhaps we are tempted to resort to classifying some of these men as Christians, and others as not true Christians, or at least sub-Christian in this respect. But do I need to remind you of our unresolved disagreements about how to define certainly what it means to be saved and a Christian? Furthermore, I personally, as a logical and well-meaning Christian with the Holy Spirit, recognize that the Wisdom of Solomon and the Books of Maccabees are divinely inspired Holy Scripture. What do you say to people like me?"

JM: "I don't know, Seraphim."

CHAPTER 9: THE SETTING SUN

JM: As I fell silent, Father Seraphim looked around at each of us.

FS: “Perhaps we have a fallible canon of infallible books? That seems slightly ridiculous, unless we fix the present argument, logically inevitable. And since you do not seem to have anything to say in response, perhaps we should move on. We have arrived, I surmise, by some miracle, to the end of the first half of our inquiry. The *logos* produced in common by me and you and those present is that the Words of God are many, and each is authoritative and infallible, if it truly is a Word of God, whether written or spoken. But as for the Sacred Writings, which can be interpreted in various ways, we playfully examined ‘*sola*’ and discovered that one human being, alone, with the Holy Writings is not able to hear, understand, interpret, and apply the Word, nor can one person alone enforce its commands, either in himself or in others. But, in addition to the Holy Scriptures, each person needs the senses to hear the word, the language in which it is written, or else a translation in his own tongue, the faculty of reason and its products, such as logical argumentation, memory, scholarship, and history. As for what ‘*Scriptura*’ exactly is, unless we were mistaken, there is no infallibly certain delineation of what books belong in the Holy Book and what books are false gospel. For either the canon is open or else it is closed, and we left it open. If it’s closed, our first option might be preferable to the other two, if they produce endless difficulties and disagreements and offer no underlying principle by which we may suppress vain argumentation and foster oneness in mind, spirit, purpose, and love.”

JM: As the sunlight shot horizontally through the stained-glass window at the back of the church, we realized it was getting late. But Henry, losing no time, interjected and said:

H: “Don’t worry, John Mark—this is nothing new. I admit the dilemma as you have stated it, Father Seraphim, but I don’t think that it

is all as bad as you make it sound. The doctrine of *sola Scriptura* does not mean that Scripture is the *only* speech of God on earth. As we said, God spoke to people first directly and audibly, and later through prophets and apostles, and then through the writings of these prophets and apostles. It would be foolish to argue that God never speaks to anyone apart from these biblical writings, since he had to in order to create the writings, not to mention that his speaking to people directly is recorded in the writings. Some Christians you may talk to will try to argue that the Written Word of God is the only Word of God, but this is a misunderstanding, and they lack the education and theological sophistication to distinguish between what we might call *solo Scriptura* and *sola Scriptura*. This doctrine is not stated explicitly, but it's necessitated by what *is* explicitly taught in Scripture. Now that Scripture has *come to be*, it is, for all true Christians, the binding *rule* on all matters of faith and practice. Considering the alternative—namely trusting in the authority of man, it is clear that the only option available to the Christian is to commit himself first to the written Word of God in faith and love, but to accept the other Words of God in faith and love.

“That’s why I am OK with translations, commentators, homilies, and all that; these are like the foundations upon which the temple is built. Although the temple cannot stand without them, the temple is where God’s glory dwells, not the foundation. Or, again, the Word of God is like a kingdom or system of government composed of three branches: the legislative, the judicial, and the executive. Or to use another analogy, the Word of God is like a stool or a throne on which the divine sits. The stool has three legs, each important, but all of them work together to support the divinely ordained purpose of hosting God. What is that foundation, that system, and what are those legs? We have already mentioned them. They are Holy Scripture, Holy Tradition, and excellent human reason. You might say we have three primary words of God on earth: The written word on the page; the logical word in the intelligent minds and books of scholarship, whether philosophy or history; and the unwritten word in the mouths of bishops, priests, and laymen. The church requires all of these, including Tradition and reason working together, to understand and enact what is written in the Holy Scriptures. For the Scriptures are like the laws and codes by which we are bound to believe and act. Reason is like the judicial court from which we receive the correct interpretation of these laws and their various applications across time, space, and circumstance. Clergy in the present (and from the past in the form of tradition) is the executive, the living application and enforcement of this law.

“Perhaps I can make myself clearer in this way: Are any of these three *unacceptable*? We all agree on Holy Scripture in principle, and we have quite similar canons, if we cannot yet agree on an *exact* list. As for reason,

Paul and Jesus affirm the use of rationality in the sermon on Mars Hill and the extensive use of complex logical forms—the dilemma, the *reductio ad absurdum*, the Aristotelian sorites, and so on. As for Holy Tradition, John Mark, consider that Jesus never condemned *tradition per se*, but only *false* traditions. We don't reject prophets *qua* prophets, but only false prophets; nor do we reject writings *qua* writings, but only false scriptures; rather, just like we accept only *divine* prophets sent by God and *divine* writings inspired by God, so we accept only *divine* traditions received from God. The divine writings are not only inspired but preserved intact by the Holy Spirit; the divine prophets are not only filled with God's words, but he assures they effectively communicate them in the right language at the right time; the divine oral *paradosis* (and its cognates) are not only received by people from God, but are passed to other people under God's watchful care. Yes, some oral traditions are condemned. Jesus condemned some, and Paul affirmed others, by the same New Testament word: in Thessalonians it says, 'Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the *traditions* which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle' [II Thessalonians 2:15]. These traditions passed down by word or letter are not the same Jesus condemns. Again it says, 'I received from the Lord that which I delivered [*paredoka*] to you' [1 Corinthians 11:23]. This is what the historic church was referring to when it speaks of the Apostolic Tradition—'the Faith once delivered [*paradotheise*] unto the saints' [Jude 3]. Of *this* Tradition, the source is Christ. Since 'he is the fullness of the Godhead bodily,' he personally delivered this Divine Tradition to the Apostles, through his actions and his teachings, 'which if they were all written down, the world itself could not contain the books that should be written' [John 21:25]. The Apostles were the first *episkopoi*, and they delivered this knowledge to the second generation of *episkopoi*. Christ, through the bishops, delivered it to the entire Church; the Church, being the repository of this treasure, thus became 'the pillar and ground of the Truth' [I Timothy 3:15]. Or so I learned in inquirer's class at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church.

"I know you would say, John Mark, that the Apostles had this authority but that their teachings had to be comprehensively written down so that, when they died, the Church of God would not be without a shepherd. Let's grant that authority *can* rest in writings. You think books replace shepherds because human shepherds are corruptible, right? So am I. But we have a choice between two corruptions: The oral and the written. I am afraid of the corruption of men, and through them, the corruption of *written* tradition, aren't you? The two traditions are contiguous in time and space; they are equal in age and difficulty of preservation. Show me your trust that God has preserved the written teachings, and I will show you my trust that God has preserved the oral teachings. And show

me proofs that the oral tradition *must* have been corrupted because ‘man is corrupt’, and I will show you proofs that the written traditions *must* also have been corrupted—decades after the events recorded took place—mistranslated, lost, and perverted by sinful men and the malice of the devils. But if, on the other hand, you are convinced that Christ’s teaching was passed into writings, and secured by the Holy Spirit over time with great effort into our hands today, uncorrupt, then I can quickly convince you to the likes of Mark, and Luke, Polycarp, Ignatius, Dionysius, Athanasius, Augustine, Bede, and many more effectively preserved the oral tradition without corruption.

“Can you have one without the other? I cannot. Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal. And this is not my opinion only, but is the universal understanding of the historic consensus of the church, from Ignatius to Tertullian to Augustine and Aquinas, even our Fathers among the Protestants such as Calvin and Zwingli, up through John Jewel in the Anglican tradition, and the contemporary living bishops and priests from the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican traditions. Christ, living in his body in Holy Traditions, has authority alongside Scripture and reason.”

FS: “Perhaps you should state what you mean by tradition, Henry.”

H: “Nothing complicated, Father. A tradition would be any body of teaching and practices passed down from one person to another. Some traditions are written, but some cannot be written down, or cannot be written down *easily*. They must be acted out; for instance, pronouncing the words of the Institution, confessing our sins, or genuflecting. With this definition, we see that teachings or practices of human origin, and passed down from a human person to a human person through conversation, are human traditions. Teachings or practices of divine origin, and passed down from a holy person to a holy person are Holy and Divine Traditions. These may be written down, or not. For Christ told the disciples to ‘go forth into all the world, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them all that he has commanded them to do’, which they obeyed and taught others to do decades before such tradition was written down.

“That’s the Christian tradition of course, but every religion is a tradition, and, in this sense, there are many Christian sub-traditions flowing out of the one early Church tradition. Even modern Protestant ‘non-denominations’ are traditions, for how else could they remain distinctive and recognizable through several generations?

“In this sense, we can re-frame our earlier dialogue: We may not agree with John Paul that the teaching of the Catholic Church is of divine origin, but we can, at least, agree that he was making the *right kind* of argument. For John Mark’s argument made the same claim: that the *scriptural* definition of salvation is of divine origin. Furthermore, the teaching and practice of the Reformers such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, were Holy Tradition. They brought the Church and her attention back from its wandering, back to divine apostolic teaching from merely human and base practices such as indulgences, not back to Holy Scripture—ignoring Divine Tradition” but back to Holy Scripture and Divine Tradition—scraping off the unholy accretions.

“All that to say that I am not terribly concerned with our present dilemma about the canon. I accept that the Church must have and does have irrevocable authority... on *some* points. Holy Tradition can’t innovate new doctrine, or even new interpretations of the Scriptures, but is bound to remain in the tradition of the historic Church. It does not have the kind of singular irrevocable and unchecked authority of the Roman papacy. Scripture is the only rule of faith and practice, whereas Divine Tradition is the rule of the canon, and it is the binding authority of the episcopate to interpret and apply those Scriptures.”

9.2 THE CANON IN TRADITION, THE CANON AS TRADITION

FS: “So one of the functions of Divine Tradition is the choosing or recognizing of which books are Holy and which are merely human?”

H: “Quite.”

FS: “Honestly, I have never heard such an opinion expressed—it is logically consistent, but where in Scripture, Holy Tradition, or human rationality do you derive such a list of functions of Holy Tradition? Or did your priest teach you this?”

H: “No Father, but that is a good question. I guess it has simply become my understanding—as I have studied the abuses of the Roman tradition—that Divine Tradition is necessary, but must necessarily remain within bounds. What exactly those bounds are I don’t know, except that they must be bounds defined by a community of holy *presbyters* with a view to a reasonable interpretation of Scripture. I don’t doubt that I have to think more about these matters, and pray more.”

FS: “And do you mean the present canon defined by Westminster,

or the present canon defined by Trent, or the present canon in use in the East?”

H: “That defined by Westminster... The other Books the Church reads for instruction, such as are Sirach and Wisdom, Esdras, Tobit, but does not read them for doctrine.”

FS: “Very well, Henry. But would you say that Tradition by which the proper consideration and classification of texts within the written canon, along with the proper interpretation, or range of interpretations, of that written canon.”

H: “Well, yes, Divine Scripture, Divine Tradition, and Divine Reason.”

FS: “Well, Henry, that settles a logically consistent account of the canon—but much remains. For we still must re-state our position regarding Holy Scripture, and argue for the opposite, and test our hypothesis. You and I agree that the Holy Scripture alone is vulnerable, it remains to go through the argument again, or two or three times, or as many times as it takes to discover some error in our reasoning—or failing that, to convince John Mark that the Word in Holy Scripture without all of Holy Tradition is not sufficient for knowledge of God, or the Holy Word, the Logos and Second Person of the Trinity—in Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition—testifies to Him.”

H: “I’ll do my best to convince John Mark, Father.”

FS: “And furthermore, for us, we must go on to ask which tradition to follow—for is there only one Holy Tradition?”

H: “To me at least, Father, it seems to be many. There is such a cacophony and discord among many writers and speakers!”

FS: “Henry, I’m sure you have noticed the great harmony within the books of the Holy Bible—the surpassing sweetness of the grace and truth—between the books of Genesis and John, between the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation, or between the Four Holy Gospels. Similarly, I notice a great harmony not only from ancient history but from modern, not only in the East but in the West, not only Russians like Seraphim Sarov but also the British, and the Roman—nineteen centuries of speaking, through their lips, testifies to a single unanimous teaching, a Divine teaching... When on a clear autumn night I gaze at the clear sky, sown with numberless stars, so diverse in size yet shedding a single light, then I say to myself: Such are the writings of the Fathers. When on a summer day I gaze at the vast sea, covered with a multitude of diverse vessels with their unfurled sails like white swans’ wings, vessels racing under a single wind to a single goal, to a single harbor, I say to myself: Such are the writings of the Fathers. When I hear a harmonious, many-

voiced choir, in which diverse voices in elegant harmony sing a single Divine song, then I say to myself: Such are the writings of the Fathers.”

H: “I envy that, Father Seraphim. For to me at least it seems that our argument has brought us back around to a similar question: Which tradition is Holy Tradition, and which Holy Fathers? Would you say they are all right in all respects, or are only some of them right in all respects, and some wrong in some respects? I think they may be right in some respects, but Holy Scripture can be right in all respects, at all times, and in all places.” Henry leaned forward and said, “But you, too, must tell us, before we go, Father, who are these Fathers you are referring to, and go through in detail the arguments for them.”

FS: “But our time is drawing to a close, my son—people are leaving, and the sun is setting in the west.”

9.3 HENRY’S HOPE

JM: We stood up, and began to pack up our things.

H: “Well, OK, Father. I do hope we can continue this conversation next week. It’s all the more clear, to me personally, at least: The correct interpretation of the Holy Scriptures in accordance with the tradition of the Church, whether individually or corporately, by the exercise of human reason and by the power of the Holy Ghost is the only way by which the Church will be preserved, and the rest of mankind saved. That’s why I only agree completely with Anglican teaching: I think Scripture is essential, reason is essential, and tradition is essential. Though I can clearly see where we fail to live up to our own standards, I think the standards are correct. All of us, even if we’re not Anglican, should earnestly search the church fathers and the Scriptures, and talk with each other as we have been. But we must not forget the power of the Holy Ghost to guide our search, and lead us into all truth. Of course, we can’t just claim to trust the Holy Ghost and hope we are not deceiving ourselves and others, but we can’t forget that it is helping us. What we *especially* can’t do is become lax in our commitment to the Holy Scriptures, or doubt their validity, authority, reliability, or force. It’s true by definition that we always read Scriptures from within a tradition, either an old or a new one, and that we must use the other ‘words of God,’ as we said, to even read and understand and apply them. But of the four major Christian traditions, Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant, I believe the Anglican Tradition is the closest to approximating the catholic—small ‘c’—tradition. As to other Christian traditions, like yours and John Paul’s, well, I agree with

some parts, and not others; I agree with them in many accidentals, but disagree in some essentials. Whether any Tradition is *fully* correct, I can't say, for I honestly don't know for certain. I know what you will say, Father Seraphim, and John Mark, too, I can hear it now: 'Where do you get the authority to recognize the essentials of other traditions?' I hope this question is asked jokingly, for I don't have an answer yet. I've grown up in the Anglican tradition, so I'm very predisposed towards it. But I *can* question it. The person with the greatest doubts rejects inquiry most rigidly. I believe Anglicanism so strongly that I am confident enough to question it. Yes, I will keep seeking, trusting my friends here and guides like you. I will keep trusting in the God who gives fish to his children and not stones. I will keep asking for wisdom from 'He who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.' In the meantime we must not forget to love people. We must be active in service to all people, even sinners, feeding and clothing them, teaching them, and loving them unconditionally, without hypocrisy. Because, after all, if we're not loving others then what *are* we doing? John Mark, and Father Seraphim, and all those present, I honestly think I speak for all of us when I pray to Christ Jesus our Lord for this, and for all mankind to become of one mind, one purpose, one spirit, and one love."