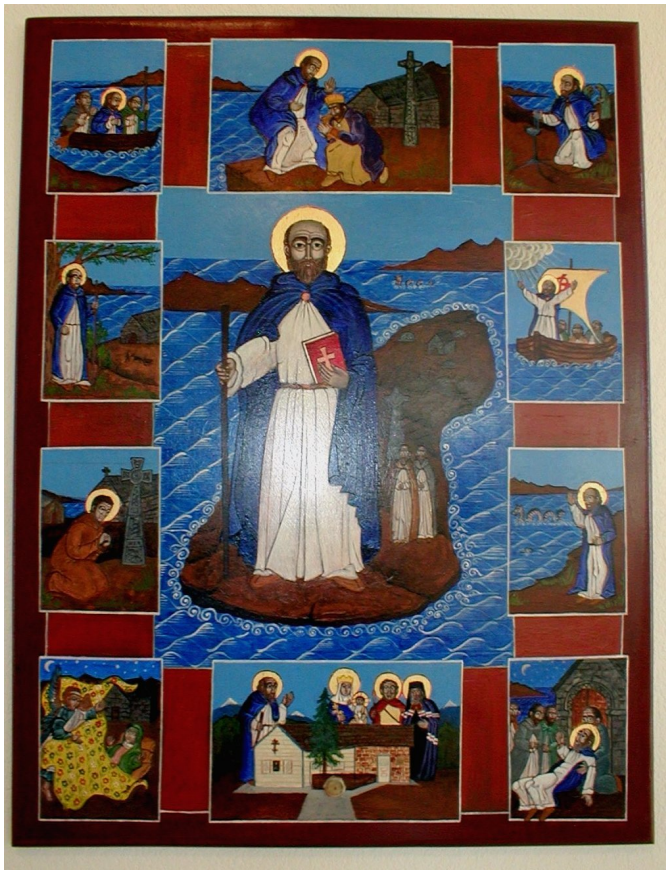


## Clark Carlton: Modernity considers sub-natural existence the sumit of human progress

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[Romanian translation](#)

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**What is the “royal way”?**

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The “royal way” is often described as the way of moderation, avoiding both laxity and zealotry. I would describe the “royal way,” however, as the path of humble obedience to tradition and one’s spiritual father.

It is, of course, a sign of profound arrogance and spiritual delusion to think that we know better than the holy fathers; to think that we are competent to “update” Orthodoxy for the modern world. At the same time, one can also follow the traditions and the liturgical ordo in a legalistic, judgmental, and self-righteous manner. We cannot truly follow holy tradition unless we enter into it in a spirit of true humility. It is a gift-the pearl of great price-that we receive (literally that is handed over or traditioned to us) from those who came before us. There is nothing in Orthodoxy that is of our own doing, so we have nothing to be arrogant or prideful about.

This is the meaning of the parable of the publican and the Pharisee. The Pharisee did everything right, but he did it with the wrong spirit. The publican was a great sinner, and yet his humility saved him. As our Lord teaches, we should do the DEEDS of the Pharisee, but have the humble attitude of the publican.

**How would you evaluate Seraphim Rose and his contribution? Why do you think some of his works are being censored ( <http://remnantrocor.blogspot.ro/search/label/Fr.%20Seraphim%20Censored> )**

This is the first I have heard of Fr Seraphim’s works being censored. I would have to study the matter more carefully before commenting, but I would note that the website you referenced is from a schismatic group, so I would be leery of anything they said without verifying it myself.

**What is the main heresy threatening the Orthodox world in our days? Here some of the**

**so-called “fundamentalists” think it is ecumenism. Do you agree with this view?**

One often hears ecumenism referred to as a “pan-heresy,” but I am skeptical of the term. The only people within the Orthodox world who take ecumenism seriously are academics and a few hierarchs—especially those preoccupied with being noticed by worldly authorities or by Rome. For most Orthodox, ecumenism is more embarrassing than anything else. Rather like having an uncle who drinks and says inappropriate things in public. Eventually the WCC and the NCC (in the U.S.) will go too far and even the pro-ecumenical Orthodox will have to admit the program has failed. (Of course, it failed decades ago, but they are too blind to see it...yet.)

Ecumenism is simply a symptom of a much deeper problem; namely the failure of Orthodoxy to really understand and engage with the modern and post-modern worlds. Ecumenism is espoused by those who desperately want to fit in with the modern world, to be recognized, to be called upon to pray at public events, to have photo-ops with the powers of this world.

The opposite of ecumenism is a fanatical “walling-off” of oneself not only from the “world,” but from the rest of Orthodoxy. Just as American Fundamentalism (I am using the term in its technical, historical sense) was a modernist and rationalist reaction to modernism and rationalism, so rigorist and schismatic groups often share the same, modern mindset as renovationists.

As Christians, we are called to be in the world but not of the world. At the height of the Byzantine synthesis an Orthodox culture was created that expressed this mode of being in (but not of) the world to the highest degree. We still experience the fruits of this culture in Church: architecture, iconography, music, etc. However, the Christian civilization of the Eastern Roman Empire is no more. We have now moved into a decidedly post-Christian era. Unfortunately, we have yet to really come to terms with this fact. The challenge, as I see it, is to find the “Royal Path.” The spirit of modernity is evil. (Fr Seraphim Rose understood this.) And yet, we are called to be salt and light within this world. The challenge is to figure out how to do this without being compromised.

**You said neither capitalism nor socialism represent a good political partnership for**

**Orthodoxy. What is the economic and political system compatible with Orthodoxy?**

See the next two answers.

**Is monarchy better suited to Orthodoxy than a republic? For Russian, for example, the Tzar was, somehow, a figure between people and God.**

Orthodoxy has existed within many different political systems. Because the Kingdom of God is not of this world, I don't think we point to any one system of government or economics and say that it is necessarily "Orthodox." That said, it is certainly true that some systems are more or less compatible with Orthodoxy than others.

Monarchy has much to commend it, but I think the major factor in determining whether monarchy or some other form of government is best for a particular people is the character of that people. A restored monarchy might very well work in Russia, but it would never work in the United States.

In Orthodox countries that have a long tradition of monarchy—interrupted, of course, by the events of the twentieth century—I think monarchy can be a very salutary thing. Of course, this requires that the monarchy itself be Orthodox in piety as well as in name. Historically, this has not always been the case.

## **Is it possible to have a Christian slavery society, from an Orthodox point of view?**

The short answer is, no, but it will require some explanation.

I accept Alan Tate's definition of ownership (or property) as effective control. This means that a great deal of the property that Americans think they own is, in reality, owned only in a nominal sense. For example, Americans think they own their homes, but in reality most homes are owned by banks. The mortgage gives the bank a great deal of control over the home, effectively undercutting the nominal owner's actual control. Similarly, while stock ownership technically confers part ownership in a business, only the largest shareholders can exercise any real control over the business.

If this is true in regard to the ownership of real property and stock, it is also true of one's property in one's own labor. Indeed, only those who have effective control over the property that enables them to earn a living have effective control over their own labor. In other words, if a person has no effective control over the "materials and means of production"—to use the classical Marxian phrase—then that person can have no effective control over his own labor. That person must "sell" or "rent" his labor out to another, thereby limiting his effective control over it. In strained economic conditions, especially when there are more workers than jobs, then workers are forced to compete for jobs and must accept conditions they would not normally choose.

I mention this simply to illustrate the fact that the vast majority of workers—in the US at any rate—to one degree or another lack effective control over their own labor. This is, in itself, a form of slavery. (By definition, slavery is control over another's labor.) Thus, there are multiple forms of slavery. Chattel slavery, where the owner has legal title to another person, is the most extreme form of slavery, but it is certainly not the only form.

I am in full agreement with the Catholic Distributists that the most just society is one in which there is the widest possible ownership of capital property. This means that as many people as possible have effective control over their material property and, thus, over their own labor. Even in the best of situations, however, there will always be a propertyless class. This is another way of saying that there will always be those who do not control their own labor. They are, in one sense or another, "slaves." The question is, what kind of slaves? Moreover, what is the responsibility of the propertied class toward the propertyless class?

A truly Orthodox society would strive to ensure that all persons are able to provide for themselves and their families in a way that respects their creation in the image of God. It is difficult to see how chattel slavery would accomplish this. Even if there were strict laws in place protecting slaves—and such laws existed in the South—by its very nature having legal as well as actual power over another's person is dehumanizing. It would be one thing if the ownership were for a fixed term—such as indentured servanthood—but chattel slavery is intended to be permanent. And, of course, it necessarily involves the offspring as well.

All of which is to say, that while I do not have a definitive, "Orthodox" answer for the problem of a propertiless class, we can safely rule out chattel slavery as a possible alternative.

**You said if Orthodoxy will make a big impact in USA it will be through the Christ haunted South. What is so particular about this land, in connection with Orthodox philosophy? (even here in Romania we heard a little about father Steven Allen, hieromonk Elia and some others, all coming from the South)**

The South has always been the most conservative section of North America. Both the South and New England were steeped in Calvinism, yet the South remained traditionally Protestant while New England and New York became the seedbed of every heresy imaginable. (Many heresies originated in a section of Western New York known as the "Burned Over District," so named because it was the scene of so many religious revivals that the land was literally exhausted.)

I believe that part of the reason for this was the fact that Southern culture was rooted in the soil and traditional ways of life, while the Northeast came to be the center of commerce. If Southerners sometimes came close to worshiping their ancestors, Northerners came to worship money. To make up for this, they dedicated themselves to all manner of idealistic causes.

Because Southern culture was rooted in the soil, there was an inherent sacramentality to

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Southern religion. That is to say, Southerners understood the sanctity of nature. For them it was a means of communion with God. I think this is what helped insulate them from ideological delusions that so easily beset (and still besets) Northerners.

**Richard Weaver has an interesting essay about Robert E. Lee, “The Philosopher”. Do you think we can talk about the great general as being also on the path to the Christian ideal?**

Yes and no. It has been said that Lee had three books on his desk, the Bible, the (Anglican) Book of Common Prayer, and The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. Lee exemplified a Southern culture steeped in conservative Protestantism and traditional social relations, mixed with a strong dose of Stoic philosophy. He was certainly the ideal Christian soldier—provided we keep in mind that we are talking about a Protestant ideal.

Even the best of the Protestant tradition falls well short of the Orthodox standard, because there is really no concept of the interior life as we understand it. The best that can be achieved is a sort of quasi-Stoic/Christian development of character. In saying this, I do not mean to denigrate Lee. The truth is he attained a level of character that few in the modern world even approach.

I have often said that before one can become a saint, one must first become a normally functioning human being. Fallen man lives at the level of sub-nature, but modernity has exalted this sub-natural existence and considers it not only to be natural, but the summit of human progress. We can say that Lee approached the level of true, normal human life. In this day and age, we need examples such as his before we can begin to contemplate the truly super-natural existence of Saints such as St Silouan or Elder Cleopa.

**Do you think Christians, not necessarily the Orthodox ones, are having today more difficult times? I am thinking about hate crime laws and all the political actions taking all over the world against them.**

We are headed for a new catacomb existence in the West, should the Lord tarry. Anti-Christ will accept no competition from Christians. Liberal Protestants have already been coopted into his program of a false Gospel. The aim of Anti-Christ is to destroy as far as possible anything resembling the natural order, so that he may substitute for it the sub-natural order mentioned above, calling this new order the Kingdom of God.

In Western Europe and Canada, and in the US too, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Orthodox Christians to preach the Gospel openly. Preaching traditional morality is “hate-speech.” Promoting traditional social and gender relations is tantamount to promoting slavery. In such an atmosphere, it will not be long before Orthodox and Catholic churches are sued for not ordaining women or “marrying” homosexuals.

### **Why do you think scientific rationalism, philosophically speaking, is a failure?**

It is a failure because it stems from a flawed anthropology. The Fathers understood—and this goes back to Plato—that there is a form of cognition, or reason, that is higher than that of the discursive or language-based reason. In other words, even for Plato there is a form of cognition beyond that of dialectic. This is where the soul enters into communion with the Good or the Beautiful. The Fathers adopted this vocabulary in speaking about the soul’s ascent to God through prayer and ascetic practice. At some point we must leave all language behind and enter into the “silence” of God.

By the time we get to the High Scholastic period in the West, however, this notion of a higher, non-discursive reason (*nous*) disappears almost completely from western philosophy. (It is relegated to the world of “mysticism.”) Scientific rationalism is built entirely on the belief there is only one form of cognition and that is the discursive reason. Scientific Rationalism is doomed to failure, therefore, because it is completely unaware of the highest faculty of human cognition.



**We see a lot of agnostic people going into sham spirituality and the flourishing of mass movements around books like Harry Potter. How do you explain the popularity of the New Age Movement?**

There is an old saying the people who believe in nothing will believe in anything. I think that has been proved over and over again, from the rise of spiritualism and theosophy in England and the US in the last century to the Age of Aquarius and more recent

**What was the main reason you convert to Orthodoxy?**

I have discussed this before in print, but in short I became convinced that both the liberal and conservative wings of Protestantism end in a dead end. Neither is able to bring man into a real encounter with God. I became convinced that Orthodoxy is the true faith, not simply because it has an unbroken (almost) 2000-year old history, but also because it has continued to produce true saints, even in our own day.

**Why do you think empiricism (materialism, evolutionism, etc.) is still surviving, philosophically speaking, although it has been refuted so many times?**

The West has committed itself to a materialistic course. It has no choice but to continue to place blind faith in science in spite of the fact that such faith has led to a dead end in the past. If one rules out the existence of God or any transcendent moral order, then one simply must believe in the authority of the empirically experienced world. There is no other world to believe in.

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I should make a few comments about “post-modernism” at this point. As you are aware, post-modernism is an attack precisely on the objectivity of our empirically experienced world. Post-modern critiques not only call empirical science into question, but logic and rationality as well. And yet, post-modernism really only exists on the fringes of the academy or in the entertainment world (movies with no narrative plotline, for example), everyone else in the real world has “doubled-down” (a betting term) on their belief in scientific progress. Governments, universities, and corporations all believe, or at least act like they believe, in the gospel of uninterrupted human progress. Certainly, this belief is sometimes confessed with an ironic smile, but those were not ironic bombs the US has been dropping across the Arab world in order to bring scientific, democratic faith to the peoples of the Gulf.

**Do you agree with the view that “Christians and Pagans had much more in common with each other than either has with a post-Christian?”**

Well, I think pagans and Christians had more in common than either has with a “modern” person, for it is of the essence of modernity that one thinks of oneself primarily as an individual, whose use of reason will guide him into all truth. I doubt many pagans in the ancient world would have agreed with that. Aristotle would have just laughed.

Since you bring up paganism, however, I would like to say a word about “neo-paganism.” I know that this has had a revival in the Ukraine in the recent past. Also, in France the hard right has a neo-pagan element. Some of this stems from a Nietzschean critique of Christianity, which sees Christianity and its “Jewish slave morality” at the heart of the decline of the West. (In the Ukraine it is also tied to Ukrainian nationalism.)

Certainly Christianity in the West has contributed to the dissolution of Western Culture. But we can hardly blame Orthodoxy for the problems of Scholastic Catholicism and the Protestant Reformations. The West desperately needs a strong, unifying, even “Manly” Christian vision to unite it. Orthodoxy alone can supply this.

The last time Western Europeans tried to resurrect paganism (the 1930’s) things turned out very bad indeed. I believe, however, that it is a major failing on the part of the Orthodox Churches in

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the West that we have not done a better job of offering a real alternative to the life- and soul-denying ethos of late bourgeois liberalism.

**Please, name, for our readers, some of the books that have made a great impact on you in the last years!**

Everyone needs to read Nicholas Cabasilas' *The Life in Christ*. Fr Andrew Louth's book on the *Origins of Christian Mysticism* is a very good book. Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos' book *A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain* is also very good.

A very good philosophy book is Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. I am currently reading a book by my friend David Bradshaw entitled, *Aristotle East and West*.

I can also recommend Richard Weaver's southern essays, which you mentioned above. Those who want to understand why the English-speaking world is the way it is would do well to read *The Cousins Wars* and *Albion's Seed*.