

Reincarnation: New Flesh on Old Bones

by

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“A science of the accidental is not even possible...for all science is of that which is always or for the most part, but the accidental is in neither of these classes.”

— Aristotle (Met. XI.8.30)

A lot has been written against reincarnation, but it is little wonder if the doctrine dies hard, since it is in its nature to be born again.¹ A fresh study on the subject, however, has just appeared, which falls into a somewhat different category, being a scholarly treatise in the domain of pathological psychology; it is entitled *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*,² by Ian Stevenson, M.D., Department of Neurology and Psychiatry, School of Medicine, University of Virginia,—and were it but entitled *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Metempsychosis* (meaning the transference of psychic elements from one being to another), then *we* could not be more in agreement with all the documentary evidence brought forth.

The nuance “suggestive of” is retained advisedly, because as Dr. Stevenson remarks, one has to take into account other possible factors, such as fraud, cryptomnesia, paramnesia, genetic “memory,” extra-sensory perception-plus-personation, retrocognition, and possession.

The question of fraud need hardly detain our attention; Dr. Stevenson has gone to exhaustive lengths to check and recheck his material, which has been chosen from among some six hundred cases actually under study. His documentation is presented with the clinical thoroughness of a professional scientist who has travelled the world over to investigate his cases and make personal contacts wherever possible with both the subjects and all related parties, using interpreters of unquestioned integrity when languages other than English, French, German, Spanish, or Portuguese have had to be used. Indeed, he is rather pushing scientific “objectivity” to a fault, scrupling over a gnat as it were to avoid swallowing a non-existent camel, since in point of fact the woods are full of spooks which are anything but frauds.

1. We have already presented a doctrinal formulation on the subject in *Tomorrow*, Autumn 1965; see also the series of articles by René Guénon starting in the Spring 1966 issue.

2. New York, American Society for Psychical Research, 1966, 362 pages.

Cryptomnesia means mistaking for one's own creations ideas borrowed from another source (believing one is Napoleon, for instance), whereas paramnesia is just the reverse, mistaking for one's memories events experienced for the first time (something like thinking you once were Napoleon when you really are), and *in extremis* leads to a disintegration of sequential understanding, so that words for example, lose their meaning. Genetic "memory" has to do with the hereditary transmission of ancestral biological and psychological factors which become inextricably woven into the memory texture of the subject himself. Extrasensory perception-plus-personation occurs when a "percipient" "identifies" through clairvoyance with another human personality. Retrocognition carries the act one stage further, involving an agent who serves actively or passively as a telepathic link or "carrier" between two otherwise unrelated parties. In a long General Discussion which concludes the book, Dr. Stevenson carefully examines these alternative hypotheses to his twenty case-histories of "reincarnation," one by one, in an attempt to demonstrate in what degree each hypothesis can be eliminated as an unlikely explanation of the case in hand. In this slippery realm of probabilities and improbabilities, we gladly submit to the author's arguments and judgments, these matters in any case being outside of our technical competence.

As concerns possession, the author admits that this hypothesis is far less easily eliminated than the others, but his general rule of thumb is to call it reincarnation if a link between two "personalities" appears to be forming at the embryonic stage of the physical organism, and possession if the association only manifests later, and especially if it is of a temporary rather than a continuous character.

But all this is really beside the point, since the book's avowed aim is to demonstrate scientifically the possibility for "survival of the human personality" in terms of reincarnation. Now the incidence of "survival" based on the reported cases in the author's possession, depending on the ethnic group, varies anywhere from one per 500 persons to one per 5,000. And it is here that Aristotle's dictum cited above applies: for an incidence as low as this, if it proves anything, "proves" that "survival" is a fluke and not a norm; and indeed, if we are to discard everything theology and all the religions of the world teach concerning the immortality of the human soul, and place our faith solely on the evidence that science can produce, then we must perforce acknowledge that "survival" is the prerogative of neurotics.

But let us examine a few cases.

* * *

In India there is Jasbir, son of Sri Girdhari Lal Jat of Rasulpur, District Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, who in the spring of 1954 at the age of three and a half appears to have died of smallpox. Arrangements are made to bury the child the next morning (for although Hindus practice cremation, the bodies of small children are usually buried), when the "corpse" stirs and returns to life. Some days later, speech is regained, along with a remarkable transformation, for

Jasbir now claims to be the son of Shankar of Vehedi village, and refuses food in the Jat home, insisting he belongs to the Brahmin caste. A Brahmin lady neighbor finally offers to cook for him to forestall starvation. Jasbir later relates how in his “former life” he had joined a wedding procession where he was given poisoned sweets by a man who owed him money. This poison provoked a fall from the chariot on which he was riding, and subsequent death from head injuries.

Three years after recounting this, Jasbir met a Brahmin lady from nearby Vehedi whom he recognized as his “aunt”. She retold Jasbir’s story to her husband’s family, and it turned out that a young Brahmin of twenty-two from Vehedi named Sobha Ram Tyagi had effectively died in a chariot accident in May 1954, in the manner described, though his family had known nothing about a debt of money or poisoning. Jasbir was finally permitted to go to Vehedi, where he recognized members of the Tyagi family, and with whom he afterwards felt far deeper ties and much more at home and at ease than with his own family.

Dr. Stevenson made repeated visits to members of both families to verify his material. This case is unusual, in that two lives overlap, whereas habitually there is a five to ten year span of “discarnate survival” between corporeal lives. This is also one of several cases, among the many studied in India, where the caste changes. With the passage of years, memories of “former lives” generally fade, and the author’s investigations show seven years to be the average length of “personation.” Jasbir, however, seemed more disconsolate and morose than ever when Dr. Stevenson last saw him in 1964: in other words, “Sobha Ram” qua Jasbir manifested no shred of gratitude for his new life, even though Jasbir claimed that after death qua “Sobha Ram” he had been advised by a Sadhu to “take cover” in Jasbir’s body.

In Ceylon there is the case of H.A. Wijeratne, born on 17 January 1947, in the village of Uggalkaltota. He has a deformity on his right breast and arm, and his father, H. A. Tileratne Hami, notices such resemblances to his deceased brother, Ratran Hami, that he says to his wife: “This is my brother come back.” She for her part observes her son when around two and a half years old toddling about the house muttering aloud something to the effect that his deformity is the result of his having murdered his wife in his previous life. She asks her husband what this could mean, and he confesses that his younger brother, Ratran Hami, had in fact been executed in 1928 for the murder of his wife. In vain Wijeratne’s father tries to silence the boy; the facts just spill out with all the more abundance and vividness of detail.

The record shows that Ratran Hami, the younger brother by fifteen years of Tileratne Hami and like his brother a farmer in the village of Uggalkaltota, murdered his young wife, Podi Menike, on October 14, 1927, for refusal to quit her parental home at Nawaneliya, by plunging a *kris* through her breast in the same region marked by Wijeratne’s deformity. Though he pleaded an accident at his trial, he was found guilty. Yet he seemed resigned to his fate. Shortly before going to the gallows in July 1928, he told his older brother that he was not afraid to die, and that he “would return.” When Dr. Stevenson interviewed Wijeratne in 1961, he still claimed that “he”

(as Ratran Hami) had murdered Podi Menike, and far from manifesting contrition, said that in similar circumstances he would probably do the same thing over again. He also continued to regard his father as his older brother.

With Wijeratne we witness the transmission of a physical mark, a deformity he believes both inherited and merited through “karmic” justice. This contrasts with the physical transmission of another case described in India, that of Ravi Shankar Gupta, where the victim himself is “reborn” with the congenital scar on his neck from his “previous” murder, the brutal beheading by a barber and a washer-man of six-year-old Ashokumar Prasad,—all this amply testified to by Ravi Shankar and later corroborated and verified by numerous witnesses, including Dr. Stevenson.

Turning from Asia, where the *popular belief* in reincarnation runs strong because of the teaching in both Hinduism and Buddhism of the Round of Existence and the transmigration of souls, the author next finds Brazil a ripe terrain for his studies, given the blending there of African Voodoo and Kardecian spiritism into the potent cult of “*espiritismo*” in a country that is nonetheless nominally Roman Catholic. We have already observed the possibility of lives overlapping, change in caste, and transference of physical marks; in the case of Paulo Lorenz described below, we observe a change in sex,—a phenomenon that occurs in less than ten per cent of Dr. Stevenson’s cases.

Emilia Lorenz was born on February 4, 1902, the second child and eldest daughter of F. V. and Ida Lorenz, the father being a school-teacher in the small village of Dom Feliciano in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. From all accounts Emilia was an extremely disconsolate sort. She felt constrained as a girl, except for a passion for sewing, wherein lay her genius. She said if there was reincarnation she would return as a man, she rejected all suitors, and she made several suicide attempts, once by taking arsenic. She finally ended her miseries with cyanide, quickly dying on October 12, 1921. Sometime later Ida Lorenz was attending spiritist séances, when “Emilia” came through and expressed regrets at her suicide. She said she wished to return to the same family, but as a boy: “Mamma, take me as your son. I will come as your son.” On February 3, 1923, Ida Lorenz gave birth to her thirteenth child, Emilio, whom the family referred to familiarly as Paulo.

If Paulo was “Emilia,” finally gratified in the wish to return to the same family as a boy, the gratitude was stillborn:

For the first four or five years of his life. Paulo resolutely refused to wear boys’ clothes. He wore girls’ clothes or none at all. He played with girls and with dolls. He made several remarks asserting his identity with Emilia. He exhibited an unusual skill for sewing and also had in common with Emilia a number of other traits or interests.

His parents finally got Paulo into pants by having a pair of trousers sewn for him out of a skirt formerly worn by Emilia. All the while he exhibited a remarkable aptitude and skill for

sewing without having had any previous training, unlike all the other members of the family, who even with training were bad or indifferent sewers, including Mrs. Lorenz. This interest, along with other feminine traits, wore off with age, although when Dr. Stevenson met Paulo in 1962 at the age of thirty-nine, he “retained a more feminine orientation than most men of his age,” evidenced by “the fact that he has never married and has never shown any inclination to do so. Indeed, he has little to do with women except his sisters.”

We will not fatigue the reader with further cases, and all the more so, as they have a monotonously similar ring, which in itself suggests an identical phenomenon running through them all. This phenomenon has every mark of metempsychosis in one form or another, and to understand it, one must have at least a rudimentary understanding of what constitutes the human soul. We can follow the author’s example, and turn to India for our documentation.

According to the Vedanta, then, the soul is an emanation from the Principle, an individual living projection (*jīva*) of the Universal Self (*Ātmā*), an appetitive, volatile, cognitional substance, in other words a plenary microcosmic entity, whose domain is neither the corporeal nor the spiritual world, but the intermediate or subtle realm, and whose habitual state is one of flux and change, of dream and imagination on the *samsāric* “sea” of cosmic illusion (*māyā*). But its immortal center is a spark struck from the Divine Intelligence, and it is exhorted mandatorily to return thereto, after one death from a corporeal habitation it has assumed, or after many.

And here we come upon an error in the way transmigration is often envisaged: the soul engaged in the *pitri-yāna* (“Path of the ancestors”) does not “coast horizontally” through an indeterminate series of lives and death, once having been “launched” into the *samsāra* but rather is “referred back” at the conclusion of each life to its Source, there is a vertical dimension (symbolized in the Upanishads as a return to the “Sphere of the Moon”—equitable with *Hiranyagarbha*) which means a direct confrontation (but not yet identity) with its primeval point of Origin.³ Each “life” can therefore be regarded as *original*, as a *fresh* entrance into existence or “descent,” whether into a splendid or a terrible domain, and as a unique cyclic experience with a return culminating in a *theophany* or “Judgment,” at which moment every soul does precisely—and with devastating clarity—recall its “former-life.” All the while the door of Liberation into the *deva-yāna* (“Path of the Gods”) remains accessible to the “Knower’s of Truth,” once the correct responses are given that allow passage out of the *samsāra* and union with supra-formal states of being.

These considerations can help better to understand the “exclusivism” of the soul. For just as two physical organic entities mutually repudiate any biological attempt at fusion into one body, so by transposition onto a higher plane—and despite the absence of certain physical

3. *Bṛihad-Araṇyaka Upanishad*, VI.ii.15, 16; *Chandogya Upanishad*, V. x.1–8; *Kaushltaki Upanishad*, 1.2; *Bhagavad-Gītā*, VIII.23–26.

limitations—are two souls (of which the bodies are but projections) mutually exclusive one of another. Union can only be achieved at the Centre in their common Origin, in what Eckhart calls “fusion without confusion.” An entirely different matter is the possibility for a soul to transmit consciously or otherwise certain impulses of memory and imagination to another soul: these imaginings and memories are creations of the soul and not its innate being; they are by-products, psychic aggregates or residues, and all the more erratic as the personality to which they belong is disordered and disintegrated, thus favoring dissociation at death, particularly where the decease is premature, sudden, or violent.⁴ The phenomenon is one of haunting where these elements “fix” on a place; it is one of possession where (often through the agency of a magician) they “seize” the rational faculties of another soul; it is one of metempsychosis where they “graft” onto another personality in a sort of parasitic symbiosis.⁵ But in no case do these elements have any real *being* of their own; they are without volition and devoid of consciousness, and depend entirely on a physical object or the faculties of another person as support for their shadowy “existence.”⁶

A totally different side of the phenomenon must be mentioned here, where far from being erratic, these influences are highly benefit and under strict ritual control: this is the case of holy places that are impregnated with the *barakah* or spiritual traces of saints and the prayers of the faithful; or again, where it is a case of influences used to assure the continuity of the psychic virility of a people, such as the ancient Egyptians, whose “powers” were literally anchored into the earth along with their treasures in elaborate burial ceremonies; or still again, where these elements under sacerdotal control can reliably serve to indicate spiritual succession, as with Tibetan *tulkus*.⁷

4. A part of the importance of funeral rites, as Guénon observes, is to prevent the untimely disaggregation of these elements.

5. Medical science knows the precarious nature of transplants of organic matter from one body to another, where the natural tendency at rejection usually results in morbid decomposition. The same tendency on the psychic level would explain why the author found an effort frequent among Indian, Burmese, Alaskan, and Lebanese subjects to discourage their children from speaking of “former lives”,—not from incredulousness, but on the contrary because of the instinctive recognition of the morbid character of “psychic symbiosis,” and the fear that it may retard the child mentally and even cause early death.

6. That the dead can in special circumstances appear to the living through visions, dreams, or apparitions is well known (for example, in 1 Samuel 28, which is not at all in the same category as that of psychic residues commonly conjured up in spiritist séances, since here God was pleased to let the prophet really appear to foretell Saul’s ruin); but this is not what is understood by reincarnation, which means the return of the dead to life on earth in other bodies.

7. “Re-embodiment,” or the re-manifestation of a spiritual function is the repeated descent of a spiritual archetype into a succession of human souls predestined to vehicle this function over a period of time. We will not carry definitions further for fear of seeming to schematize imponderables.

But why does the author of *Twenty Cases* barely allude in passing to the recognition tests passed by the fourteenth incarnation of the Dalai Lama (p.214), when there is a wealth of authentic documentation in this field from qualified representatives of Tibetan Buddhism accessible to anyone interested?⁸ And if really concerned with “survival of physical death by human personality,” why does he not heed the Gospel words: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you;”—instead of brushing off Christianity (p.167) with the remark that Roman Catholics are “likely to be unfriendly to the idea of reincarnation,” while yet giving credence to every scrap of evidence advanced by a Tlingit Indian of mixed blood who claims to be the reincarnation of an alcoholic fisherman either drowned or murdered? The obvious answer is that the author is a scientist, not a theologian. But what is not so obvious is his anthropotheological deference to Hinduism and Buddhism wherever these two traditions appear to corroborate his chosen subject.

Thus, he introduces the section on India with a learned discussion of Hinduism⁹ and the section on Ceylon with a learned dissertation about Buddhism—Theravada, Mahayana, and all the rest, and even the section on the Tlingit Indians with an attempt to identify their Asiatic origins with Buddhist traces. But we refrain from imagining the reaction of a Hindu pundit or the abbot of a Japanese Buddhist order to the statement on p.16: “Whatever may be the merits and proper interpretation of these (reincarnation) cases, their mere *existence* has provided a continuing stream of apparent empirical support for the religion of Hinduism, and for Buddhism also.”

Islam serves the author little better than Christianity for “some evidence for human survival of physical death,” since “Moslems...do not believe in reincarnation and even deny its occurrence” (pp. 354 and 312). But he cites in support of reincarnation two *Qur’ānic* passages: “How disbelieve ye in Allah when ye were dead and He gave life to you! Then He will give you death, then life again, and then unto Him ye will return” (2:28); and “And Allah hath caused you to grow as a growth from the earth, and afterwards He maketh you return thereto, and He will bring you forth again, a (new) forthbringing” (71:17-18). We could suggest even other passages, like the one that reads: “Pray not that day for one destruction, but pray for many destructions!” (25:14). However, the hundreds upon millions of Muslims who have heard, read, and recited the *Qur’ān* since the time of the Prophet would seem to have missed the message, perhaps because of still other passages, like the one that reads:

8. See for examples *My Land and My People, The Autobiography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1962; *Born in Tibet*, by Chögyam Trungpa, London, Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1966.

9. Referring us in a bibliography to Coomaraswamy’s *Hinduism and Buddhism*, without perhaps realizing that Coomaraswamy wrote elsewhere: “Reincarnation...is not an orthodox Indian doctrine, but only a popular belief.”

When death cometh unto one of them, he saith: My Lord! Send me back. That I may do right in that which I have left behind! But nay! It is but a word that he speaketh; and behind them is a barrier (*barzakh*) until the Day when they are raised.¹⁰

An eleventh century heretical splinter sect from Islam did nevertheless break through: “Reincarnation forms a fundamental tenet of the Druse religion” (p.243). The Druses also believe that rebirth follows immediately after death, that their number remains constant, and that when a population decline occurs (as in times of war), the remainder of the faithful are held in “discarnate” suspense somewhere in China...*quantum sufficit*.

* * *

It takes forcing logic through some fancy gymnastics to explain away all the phenomena encountered in this book in terms of reincarnation. In wishing to show, for example, that heredity accounts for resemblances and reincarnation for differences in a family (p. 190), how does the author reconcile this with his theory that the “selection of target” is based on continuing affinities? For the cases show that a “personality” may continue down a same family line or equally well be born into a family that is totally unrelated to the previous one. “The second personality of the reincarnating entity...develops as a ‘layer’ around the previous personality...The personalities then develop like the rings of wood on a tree” (p.307). But a tree with a hundred rings is still one tree, so where is the giant tree, the end result an evolutionist should logically expect?

We are told that the Tlingit Indians of Alaska “believe in rebirth as contrasted with reincarnation. According to the concept of rebirth, the old personality gives rise to the new as a candle burning low may light a new candle and so continue the series. In reincarnation, on the other hand, the same personality continues, although changed by the circumstances of the new life. Reincarnation as thus defined is a concept of Hinduism and rebirth a concept of Buddhism” (p. 197).¹¹ A statement like this cries aloud for scriptural confirmation.

Perhaps in the cases under study the most signal feature favoring a reincarnationist interpretation from the author’s point of view is the congenital recurrence of deformities or

10. *Qur’ān*, 23:99-100.

11. This Tlingit conception of rebirth actually describes the conversation of a totem through the condensation and transmission of a magic power within a tribe, analogous on a somewhat inferior plane to the preservation of traditional elements as mentioned earlier concerning the Egyptians.

birthmarks, particularly when combined with specific memories, skills, and idiosyncratic behavior. Psychosomatic medicine knows, however, the difficulty in delimiting the boundary between the psychic and physical domains, where processes overlap, interpenetrate and reciprocate almost inextricably. Dr. Stevenson admits that “maternal psychokinesis” can presumably affect birthmarks in children; it needs only further understanding the modalities—apart from mother to child—by which psychic elements can pass from one being to another to realize that a transmission of physical marks via the subtle domain while exceptional is not extraordinary.

As for the untoward emergence of specific aptitudes, like a skill for sewing, there is no more cause for wonder here than in the case of musical child prodigies, who have either inherited through metempsychosis the musical gifts of another, or else are quite simply born with a colossal predisposition to assimilate an art form and master its techniques. “Selection of target” can be explained by a psychic propensity on the part of the recipient, plus horoscopic affinities; the more pathological cases can be attributed to undue passivity or failure in psychic defenses, where the recipient thanks to a “psychic leak” is abnormally vulnerable.

More disturbing are the reported instances where subject A announces his intention to die and be reborn as subject B, even insisting on certain traits by which subject B will be known, and then where subject B as predicted arrives and effectively recalls details of his previous “life” as subject A. Striking examples of this appear among the Tlingit Indians. In the absence of written statements, of course, everything depends on the reliability of the witnesses acting as correspondent or third party to the transactions involved,—on their objectivity and freedom from suggestion. But when these reservations and also such pathological factors and paranormal alternatives as those listed earlier can be eliminated, then we have to recognize the presence of something very much in the category of a curse that is pronounced upon a family, particularly as these cases seem to run through family lines. Moreover, subject B commonly emerges as the victim, with a morbid discontentment of his lot, saying: “You are not my father,” or “You are not my mother,” “This present life is not my real one.”

But in the name of reincarnation, by what criterion are we to judge which personality *is* the real one, subject A or subject B? In the case of Jasbir described previously, for example, we had every reason to believe that subjects A and B were two distinct personalities, since at one time both Sobha Ram and Jasbir were simultaneously alive. So that if we admit the traditional doctrine, that the body is but a projection of the soul, then whatever happened after death to soul A when it “became” B? It is like a game of musical chairs, where the person left standing suddenly doesn’t “exist” anymore! One may reply that Jasbir did really quit his body, which was then taken over by Sobha Ram in what Dr. Stevenson euphemistically calls “exchange incarnation”; but if this was the case, then the only term for it is the ghoulish one of “body-snatching.”

Or again, if we become “theological” or “unscientific” and admit the doctrine of Judgment common to *all traditions*, are we then to allow that a reincarnationist who—assuming it were possible—dies in the odor of sanctity at the end of time has the stench of sin effaced from all his previous “human incarnations” so that he is welcomed by the Pantocrator on the Last Day? And let not the reincarnationists deform theology to demonstrate that the resurrection of the dead is just a symbol for reincarnation.¹² If the resurrection of the dead means anything, it means that each body the reincarnationist ever inhabited in this world has to be present on that Day, so which body is going to step forth and claim “it is I” when Christ calls out his name? It is easier to skirt around the dilemma by saying that judgment (other than continuous karmic concomitance) does not enter into the reincarnationist’s perspective; but then by what special prerogative do these often rather morbid people escape what the rest of “normal” humanity has to pass through?

In point of fact, the eschatology of the reincarnationists hardly even merits the appellation “rudimentary.” In what they call “discarnate survival,” “something” lingers on the outer fringes of space and time; but the unlovely term connotes the idea of dissociation from the “reality” of the corporeal state, with “survival” relegated to a limbo of ectoplasmic nebulosity. They lean on the Buddha’s doctrine of births and rebirths; but it is monstrous to think that the Tathagata was sent into the world with the great teaching of the cosmic cycles of births and deaths, of the relativity of all existence, and of the Way of Escape from the suffering inextricably involved in the Wheel of Life, if all this was simply to throw light on how a butcher from Talawakele might be reborn five years later as the son of a barber from Hedunawewa!

Qualitatively, metempsychosis is as dull as yesterday’s newspaper. No dimension is added to “*la vie ordinaire*,” no element from a higher domain, no secrets from the Hereafter. In fact, the aroma that comes off most of these cases is redolent with the effluvium of psychic decay.¹³

What is needed is the fresh air of theology. Meanwhile we gladly leave to “science” the task of demonstrating the “human survival of physical death.” And it should be no cause for astonishment if the day when science can prove the existence of reincarnation turns out to be the day when it can create life in the laboratory, and by the same token, abolish death along with it.

12. The mummification of the dead as practiced by the ancient Egyptians and the Incas of Peru is not in view of reincarnation as Dr. Stevenson thinks (p. 191) but rather a ritual preparation for resurrection.

13. One may ask, what harm is there in believing in reincarnation if one wants to? The immediate answer—apart from all consideration of the false theological concepts it engenders—is that inordinate curiosity in this direction inevitably leads towards contact with subtle forces of an infra-rational order which have a psychically dissolving effect, as is evidenced in the material exposed throughout this paper.

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

As soon as you turn away—however slightly from God, and no longer place your trust in Him, things go awry; for then the Lord withdraws, as though saying: “You have put your trust in something else—very well, rely on that instead.” And whatever it may be it proves utterly worthless.

—Theophan the Recluse.