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### July 30, 2014: The Best Written Sports Illustrated Issue Ever

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Title: The Best Written Sports Illustrated Issue Ever

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7/30/2014—One thing I have already learned from Sergei Bulgakov, the Russian Orthodox thinker of the early 20th Century, is that you should judge fundamental commitments not as isolated ideas, but as a way of life. That was how Bulgakov thought about his return to Orthodoxy from atheism—what kind of life was a life lived in Orthodoxy. We must judge a way of life by what it ultimately offers to our lives. This was also the way that the thinker who influenced Bulgakov, and indeed many others in Russia, Vladimir Soloviev, thought about philosophy, according to Egbert Munzer, whose 1956 book, *Soloviev: Prophet of Russian-Western Unity*, contains this sentence: “Philosophy was to him a means to salvation, an idea which has become very alien to European thought.” So, how about secularism in America? What kind of a way of life is it? We get a snapshot of one kind of secular life—the one lived in sports—through the July 21, 2014 issue of *Sports Illustrated*, the one chronicling the return of LeBron James to the Cleveland basketball team. This issue contains two views of the secular life. One is from a story about Roger Angell, who received the J.G. Spink Award from the Baseball Writers Association of America on July 26 at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. In the story, Tom Verducci quotes a 1975 piece by Angell, *Agincourt and After*, on the question of caring about sports. Angell writes that it is obviously silly to care about a sports team, except “for the business of caring” itself. Really caring “is a capacity or an emotion that has almost gone out of our lives.” Now, I suppose an authentic religious life, the sort led by Bulgakov and Soloviev, would automatically contain a lot of caring. But secular life does not. Or at least not as much as religious living used to contain. And this has consequences. We see this week a story making the rounds in the media that researchers believe they have discovered that a life of meaning is healthier than a life of drift—the sort of drift that comes from thinking that life is one big accident. Here is the story. And it does not even seem to matter what the purpose of life is, in terms of the health benefits. The other snapshot of sports-oriented secular life is a series of shorter stories by various writers about their home teams. These stories include pictures of the writers’ own family life, their attempts to get their children to share their sports commitments. It is quite charming. It is a picture of committed fatherhood and family life—they are all men. Quite rare in its way outside a certain kind of church life. And this idea that sports is today a substitute for organized religion for the fans is often lightly suggested in *Sports Illustrated*—with its customs, and memories, and ceremonies—and caring. But, sports is not the Christ story. It is really not at all like religion. It will not teach us how to live.