

BEAUTY

WILL SAVE THE WORLD

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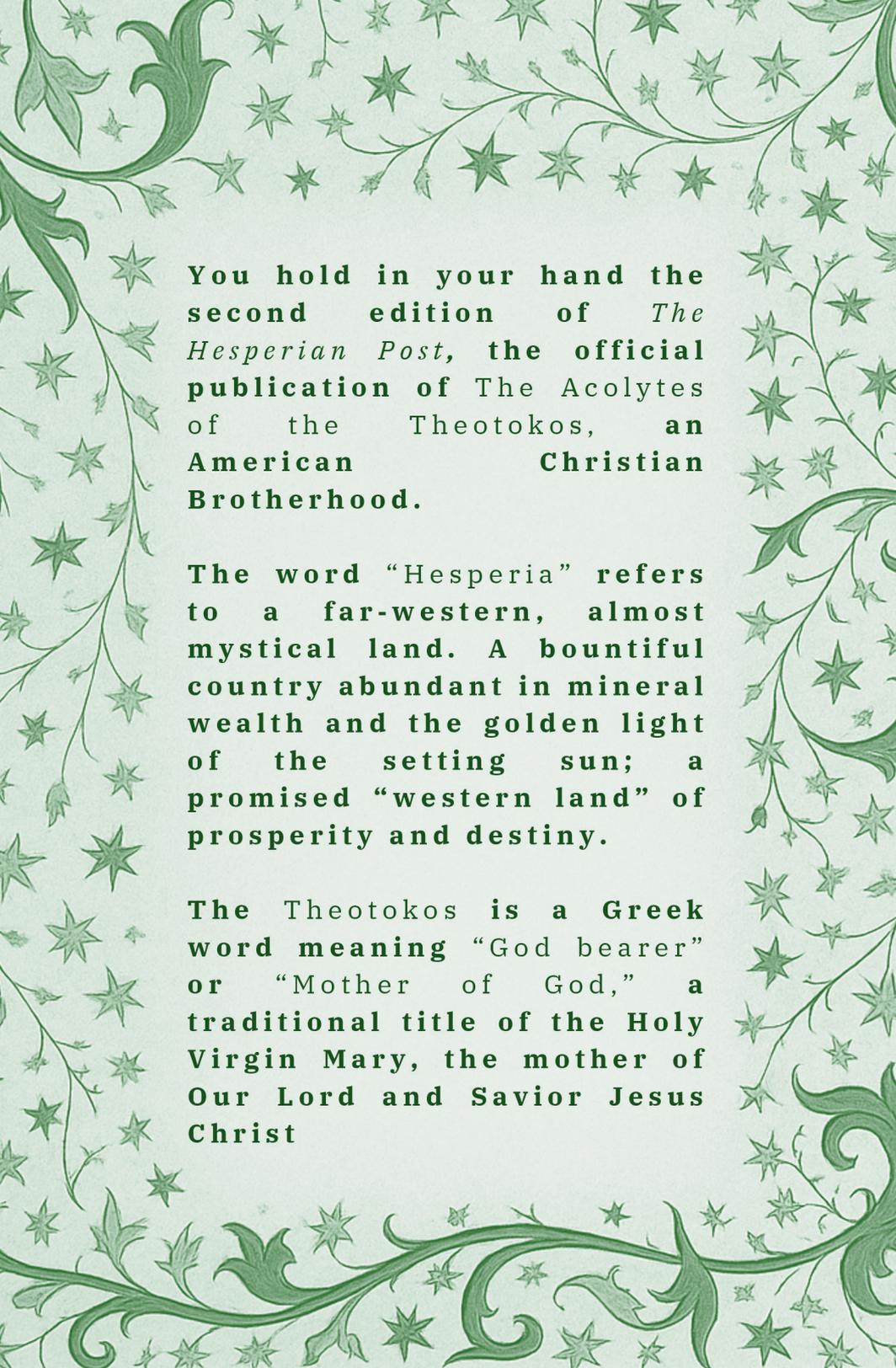
CLOSER TO HEAVEN III 19

THE HESPERIAN POST EDITION 2

**If you belonged to the world, it
would love you as its own. As it
is, you do not belong to the
world, but I have chosen you
out of the world.**

– John 15:19





You hold in your hand the second edition of *The Hesperian Post*, the official publication of The Acolytes of the Theotokos, an American Christian Brotherhood.

The word “Hesperia” refers to a far-western, almost mystical land. A bountiful country abundant in mineral wealth and the golden light of the setting sun; a promised “western land” of prosperity and destiny.

The Theotokos is a Greek word meaning “God bearer” or “Mother of God,” a traditional title of the Holy Virgin Mary, the mother of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Closer to Heaven - Pt 1

I'm travelling alone. Oil is leaking from the head gasket of my 96 Honda Civic with 200,000 miles on it. I travel 10 hours through mostly deserted wilderness.

I frantically pray the Jesus prayer over and over. Every mile marker, I ask the Mother of God to pray for me.

Somehow, through their prayers, it makes it up the steep dirt road to the monastery without a flat tire or white smoke coming out of the AC.

Somehow, through their prayers, I make it up the steep dirt road into the mists of the mountain.

Everything is wet. There's a gentle white noise of falling rain. But no rain drops make it through the trees and make contact with my skin.

Beautiful blue onion domes topped with golden three-beamed crosses tower above the cloud-enveloped mountain.

Beneath them, cobbled together wooden cabins made of old abandoned mining equipment from the gold rush hide amongst the trees. The outsides are bare. The insides are covered in beautiful gold icons. Families of deer frolic around them, carelessly.

Shrines in a mixture of Russian and Chinese architectural styles – onion domes above sliding ornate screens and mossy upright stones – rise above the golden California sun.



"The kitchen is the only room with electricity," says the monk. I meet him in the mist and he gives me and another pilgrim a tour of this place the best he can, through barely discernable English. "In case, you need to charge your phone."

I introduced myself, but I regretted it. I wanted to use my baptismal name. But my email used my birth name, and I didn't want to confuse him.

His black robe is stained. The hairs of his red beard are twisted around like a worn-out toothbrush. The next cabin is the old printshop. In the middle of it is a heavy, black, iron press. On the shelves are metal negatives of the portraits of various saints.

“The metal had to be cut in New York and shipped over in the mail,” says the monk.

I imagine myself receiving one of them in the mail. The sweet salivation of anticipation. (An anticipation which has since gone extinct). Then one day, an anonymous box appears out of the clouds and onto your front porch. You pick it up, and it feels heavy. You unwrap it carefully, ready to receive this long-awaited key that frees the fruits of your efforts.

My parents own a print shop. It consists of complex, plastic printers that make unnatural noises. They connect to a computer via wifi. Even the buttons on them have no weight or substance. They exist on a touch screen.

The monk continues the tour.

He shows me to my cabin, a ways down the mountain.

We walk for a while down the steep path, passing some deer.

I open the door, and reflexively reach for the light switch. But it isn't there. The room has a primitive cot – luxurious compared to the bare wooden boards that the monks sleep on – walls covered in beautiful icons, shelves full of spiritual books – thick and thin, in Russian and in English, and a box full of firewood. The latter is for a black, iron furnace that takes up much of the room. That and the shovel next door must be for the winter.

“Oh you're lucky, you have lots of water,” says the monk, gesturing towards a box of water bottles in the corner. The only

other water down the hill is a large jug of thick blue plastic turned on its side, like a beer keg. This is for washing your hands after using the outhouse, I infer, not for drinking.

“What was your name again?”

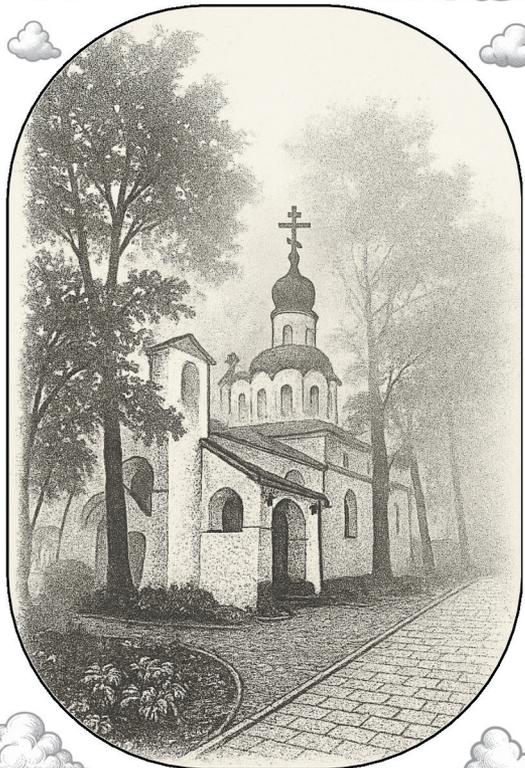
I repeat it, but he can't pronounce it.

“What about your baptismal name?” he asks.

He leaves.

I close the door of the cabin.

I say a very long prayer thanking my guardian angel, the Theotokos, and Our Lord.



Nepsis

A practical guide to cultivating watchfulness in daily life



Nepsis (“watchfulness” or “sobriety”) is the Orthodox practice of keeping watch over the thoughts that enter into our minds and hearts – “guarding the soul.”

The Philokalia describes the human being as a fortress, always under attack by robbers and thieves waiting to plunder. They enter into the fortress by the doors and windows of our soul - the five senses.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

Begin with Prayer



Begin each day in Christ. As soon as you wake and before doing anything else, pray

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy on Me a Sinner.”

In this way, your mind and your heart will be oriented towards Christ from the very beginning, before the assaults of mundane concerns, which invade your stillness and disturb your dispassion – your “*apatheia*.”

From this moment on, you will begin your watch.

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Watch Your Thoughts



The Fathers say sin enters in stages:

temptation → **assent** → **surrender** → **captivity** → **passion**.

“Cut off the roots of our sins and not merely their fruits”
– St. John Cassian

Sin is easiest to deal with at the very beginning, when we first feel tempted.

“*Assent*” is the stage in which sin fools the mind into dialoguing with the temptation. This, in turn, leads to “*surrender*” to the sin. Once we have surrendered once, we become a *captivity* to this habitual sin, until it finally becomes a *passion* we are addicted to.



Lean Not on Thy Own Understanding

It's important to simply recognize the temptation and discard.

By no means try to argue with the temptation. This is how the evil one tries to deceive you -- through a clever argument. Instead, simply dismiss these thoughts before they enter the stage of assent, and eventually to surrender.

Remember humility. Never rely on your own discernment, or think that you are too clever to fall prey to the evil one's arguments.

Don't go it alone. Consult your spiritual father, make frequent confession, seek the counsel of the saints, and above all seek Our Lord in prayer.

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Silence and Stillness

Modern life is full of noise and distraction -- flooding the mind with endless, trivial information. This is the opposite of Nepsis.

Try adding a "social media fast" to your prayer and fasting routine. Put your phone down unless it is absolutely necessary, and check notifications once a day.

Work in silence, rather than having a podcast or YouTube on in the background.

Set aside ten minutes each day to sit in silence.

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Pray Without Ceasing

Whether you are driving, working, or even doing the dishes, continually pray. This will draw your mind back to Christ.

Make prayer the "background noise" of your life, rather than distractions. In this way, it is more difficult to hide your daily activities from God, or to allow bad thoughts into your heart.

"...take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the earth... Watch, therefore, and pray at all times."

- Luke 21:34-36

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End with Prayer

End each day with prayer and reflection. Ask yourself:

When did my watchfulness waver?

When did I allow the passions to make their way inside the fortress of my soul?

How did pride, resentment, lust, or distraction sneak in through tiny doors?

"Attention must go forward and observe the enemies like a scout, and it must first engage in combat with sin, and resist the bad thoughts that come to the soul. Prayer must follow attention, banishing and destroying at once all the evil thoughts which attention previously fought, because by itself attention cannot destroy them."

- St. Symeon the New Theologian

(Published with permission from our spiritual father)

Closer to Heaven - Pt 2



My cabin is at the bottom of the mountain.

Two other pilgrims – a subdeacon and a layman both named Seraphim – are staying at the top. Closer to the chapel.

I try to engage in some friendly conversation, but for the most part everyone is silent.

At meals, everyone eats in silence. I am seated across from another pilgrim, but there is no small talk between us, only gesturing to pass each other this or that. As we eat in silence, a monk reads from a book of the lives of the saints, describing them getting beheaded, skinned alive, or burned, either by Roman emperors or Bolsheviks. Occasionally, it describes those saints who survived the purges and made it out of the prisons to profess their faith freely. Usually they expressed how disappointed they were that they did not get to suffer the same fate for Christ.

In the dining hall, the monks sit at the other end of a very large table far away from us. Many of them are absent, travelling or sick. Those that remain pay us no attention.

One of them is a schemamonk, his back completely bent over. Perpetually bowing. He has to sit in a recliner during liturgical services. The schema is usually given to those monks with one foot in the coffin.

I want the schemamonk's blessing. He is close to heaven. He is carrying on his back a lifetime of prayers. Later, I am lucky enough to get it. He turns his face towards us. It is pale, accented by a few dark circles and rosy extremities.

He blesses me and the pilgrims beside me, drawing the sign of the cross over our heads.

In the chapel, I am blessed again, by the sight of the relics of my patron, and those of my Godfather's patron. I begin to stand beside them during the liturgy. Begging for guidance. Alone, always down at the bottom of the hill, far from the chapel, my infirmities are exposed by the silence. I am carrying on my back a lifetime of sin.



Aside from a few dishes, the monks don't ask me to do any labor around the monastery. Only "pray."

Between 9 am when our morning meal ends, and 1 pm, there is nothing to do but read, contemplate, and pray.

The monks are mostly away in their cells. I am told that pilgrims are not allowed there. On the tour, they took me to Father Seraphim's cell, and they rang a little bell first to alert them to our presence.

There is a rare book in the library, on the life of Father Seraphim. I spend the rest of the day studying it, and praying with him at his grave. He can no longer get sick or be absent. My hermitage is over.

Father Seraphim says that we think of Judas as being something special, but he is not. He says that we are all potential Judases. That we all have some passion, some weak point that Satan can exploit. He uses this weakness as a starting point, and picks at it using logic. A chain of logic that eventually leads us away from Christ.

"We have to look at ourselves and say 'which passion of mine will the devil try to hook me on in order to cause me to betray Christ?' If we think we are something superior to Judas, that he was some kind of 'kook' and we are not—we are quite mistaken..."

He says that for the West, this passion was the subordination of God to philosophy and the rational. First, the Scholastics tried to make God fit into philosophy. Then, they dispensed with God entirely in favor of "pure reason." Finally, Hume and Kant critiqued this "pure reason," knocking it off its throne and leaving nothing.

Father Seraphim says that we must treat all things, good and bad, as being sent by God, and we must think of how to use them to serve Him.

"We should accept all things as God's Providence, knowing that they are intended to wake us up from our passions, to lead us to God, to show us some God-pleasing thing we can do...Almost every day of our lives, there is something that indicates to us God's will. We must be open to this...Let us be sober, seeing not the fulfillment of our passions around us, but rather the indication of God's will."

St. Basil speaks thus of the horror of becoming Judas:

"What, therefore, shall we render to the Lord for all the blessings which He has bestowed upon us? He is good, indeed, that He does not expect a recompense, but is merely to be loved in return for His gifts.

Whenever I call these things to mind...I am struck by a kind of shuddering fear and a cold terror, lest, through distraction of mind or preoccupation with vanities, I fall away from God's love and become a reproach to Christ.

For, he who now deceives us and endeavors by every artifice to induce us to forget our Benefactor through the attraction of worldly allurements...will then, in the presence of the Lord, reproach us with our insolence and will gloat over our disobedience and apostasy.

He who neither created us nor died for us will count us, nonetheless, among his followers in disobedience and neglect of the commandments of God. This reproach to me and the triumph of our enemy appear to me more dreadful than all the punishments of hell, because we provide the enemy of Christ with matter for boasting and with cause for exulting over Him who died for us and rose again."

On Christian Art

“You’re not making Christianity better, you’re just making rock music worse.”

– Hank Hill

Christians have created the greatest works of art in Western society. In fact, they define Western society. Religious art, such as Michelangelo’s David or his paintings in the Sistine Chapel, are known as “the works of the Great Masters.” Mozart’s Requiem is called “Classical Music” (a classic being something that is timeless or the best of its kind). Because the essence of Western society was Christian, so naturally its artists created Christian art, because they could not create any other.

These artists portrayed a timeless and transcendent beauty, a beauty which was bestowed upon Nature by its Creator. Thus, their art was a form of communion with God, the timeless, transcendent, and all-beautiful One. Because it portrays the universal beauty of a universal God, it can be appreciated by all men from all places and at all times. Today, we still hold the Great Masters as the pinnacle of artistic achievement. Those from outside the West, whether they be Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, or even atheist, travel from across the surface of the world to bask in the beauty of our cathedrals.

Yet something has happened to our art. It is something that seems far off and fossilized. Relics from another time. It appears to the contemporary person old-fashioned and from another civilization than our own. Contemporary art is from a new civilization – a secular civilization. At its best, contemporary art no longer portrays the timeless and transcendent beauty of the Creator but rather the self-indulgent expression of the artist. Other times, it portrays mere novelty. At its worst, it even portrays outright ugliness – a rebellious, “anti-art” that makes an open mockery of the very concept of aesthetics.

The Church has little to nothing to do with any contemporary art. Art that is popular, relevant, or significant -- whether in the form of literature, architecture, visual art, or music – art that can be said to be representative of our contemporary civilization, is strictly secular. The few remaining contemporary attempts at religious art are ineffective, and come off as boring, a hollow rebranding of secular art with Christian motifs, or simply a stale attempt to copy a once glorious past that has been lost to time.

HEALING AESTHETIC SICKNESS

Aside from the fact that religion was simply an inseparable part of the average person’s identity (such that an artist’s self-expression necessarily entailed a religious expression), there was another practical cause of the Church’s dominance of our civilization’s artistic output. The Church simply found the most talented artists and patronized them to make its art. It is really that simple.

The Church simply needs to find people who are 1. Good at art 2. Christian, and give them money to create art. However, it must take care to do both simultaneously. One without the other is inefficient.

If the Church patronizes artists who are not skilled simply because they are Christian, this will do damage to its reputation as an institution that creates good art, and the art itself will be of poor quality, doing a disservice both in terms of glorifying God and edifying the audience. Thus, the Church must take great care to be discriminating in its patronage and to hold high standards. It may not seem “nice” to turn down a mediocre artist who is nonetheless zealous in their faith and innocent in their intentions, but it is necessary and just. The Church also holds a responsibility to offer the best fruits of its harvest as an unblemished offering to God, who is only worthy of the greatest. It should be a privilege to be accepted for the Church’s patronage — this alone will be a self-fulfilling prophecy, making such patronage scarce and therefore of inherent value.

If, on the other hand, the Church patronizes artists that are skilled but unbelievers, then it will fail at institutionally supporting and promoting Christian artists, and as more money flows to secular artists, it will be these who have this means who will continue creating. If there are simply not enough excellent Christian artists to meet its high standards, then the next step is to produce some through education. Find those artists that do not yet meet the high standards of the Church, but show potential either through undeveloped talent or an industrious spirit. Then, these candidates should be trained to develop high technical skills according to objective standards. For example, for music, artists should receive a classical education in the fundamentals such as chords, scales, point, counterpoint, reading music, studying classical and contemporary music, etc. Or in the case of visual artists, they should be trained to paint in a classical, realistic fashion as did the old masters. However, so that they are not simply copying older traditional forms that are no longer relevant, they should also be given opportunities for experimentation and dialogue with more contemporary styles.

The ultimate aim should be a fusion of traditional and the contemporary — an expression of universal and transcendent excellence from within a modern context. An avant-garde traditional art.

In this sense, the Church is lucky to live in such times as ours. In the past few decades, secular art has been of a very high quality. But increasingly, secular art has started to decline. This is felt in the increasing proliferation of “safe” art that is created by large corporations to be cheap and have mass appeal. In consumer goods such as cars and clothing, vivid colors have been replaced by blacks, whites, and greys. Movies churn out sequels and remakes. Culture has become “stuck.” Due to the “culture war” between “wokeness” and “anti-wokeness,” entertainment must be careful not to say anything that can offend one side or the other, and thus often ends up saying nothing at all. Or, it participates in the culture war by telling stories with a preachy, ham-fisted agenda. There is an appetite for something new and different. A void for aesthetic beauty has opened up that beckons to be filled.

CREATING A BEAUTIFUL SOCIETY: AN ACT OF CHARITY AND SOURCE OF CONVERSION

Why is it so important to cultivate a Christian artistic movement? Why is such an investment of time and money necessary?

In fact, this is a common criticism leveled by low-church Christians, who tend towards iconoclasm, directed at traditional apostolic Christians.

“Shouldn’t the church spend all that money on the poor?” asks the Evangelical Christian to the Catholic.

They echo the criticism of those who were with Jesus in the house of Simon the leper when the woman anointed Our Lord’s feet with expensive ointment. We, like Our Lord, understand that it honors God when we anoint His mystical body with beautiful things. It is only those who degrade art to the level of a mere consumer product that would question the practical utility served by investing in art.

Nevertheless, there is an answer also to their practical concerns.

The first is that the creation of public art is an act of charity to the poor, just as much as food or clothing. For “man cannot live on bread alone.” In a secular, hyper-capitalist society, only the rich have access to beauty. They can afford beautiful homes, beautiful neighborhoods, and beautiful possessions. The poor, meanwhile, increasingly live in cheap, un-aesthetic housing in graffiti-covered, cramped apartment complexes of cement and asphalt. The public art that they do have access to, mostly a creation of a secular government, is often ugly, post-modern slop, if they are lucky enough for it to exist at all. Whether it be the inside of a beautiful cathedral, streets lined with buildings with beautiful facades, or beautiful public statutory and murals, all of these provide both poor and rich alike with the dignity of surrounding themselves with the beauty of God’s creation as reflected in the creative works of His creations.

The second is that beauty is a tool of evangelization. Not all men are brought to the Church through well-crafted philosophical arguments or inspiring homilies. Some are brought to the Church through a conversion of the heart. This can be a dramatic period of their life that turns them towards God. Or, it can be a longing for some good that they can sense is sorely missing from society — justice, morality, or even simple beauty.



Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev sent his emissaries to tour the world in search of the true faith. Upon arriving in Constantinople and entering the Hagia Sophia, they reported to him the following:

“Then we went to Greece [Constantinople], and the Greeks (including the Emperor himself) led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendour or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty.”

This encounter with beauty resulted in the “baptism of Russia.” To this day, the nation of Russia is home to tens of millions of Orthodox Christians. If it had not been for the beauty of the Hagia Sophia, all of them could easily be Muslim or Pagan instead.



The same phenomenon is just as likely today. Every Christmas, even some of the most secular Americans cannot resist the allure of the beauty of traditional Christmas hymns celebrating the nativity of Christ. How many, each holiday season, wander into a Candlelight service simply to enjoy a romantic holiday night, only to encounter the God that dwells there?

Recently, New York City has seen a recent wave of conversions from atheistic liberal hipsters into traditional Catholics due in part to the beauty of the Traditional Latin Mass.

This is the power of Our Lord, and the gift of beauty He has bestowed upon us. It is therefore the responsibility of the Church to revere, cultivate, and protect this most Holy Gift, this most precious Energy of Our Father, and set it on high for the adoration of mankind, which is due to it.

MAN, IN THIS ART, IS NO LONGER EVEN A CARICATURE OF HIMSELF; HE IS NO LONGER PORTRAYED IN THE THROES OF SPIRITUAL DEATH, RAVAGED BY THE HIDEOUS NIHILISM OF OUR CENTURY THAT ATTACKS, NOT JUST THE BODY AND SOUL, BUT THE VERY IDEA AND NATURE OF MAN.



NO, ALL THIS HAS PASSED; THE CRISIS IS OVER; MAN IS DEAD.

THE NEW ART CELEBRATES THE BIRTH OF A NEW SPECIES, THE CREATURE OF THE LOWER DEPTHS, SUBHUMANITY.

— NIHILISM: THE ROOT OF THE REVOLUTION OF THE MODERN AGE

FR. SERAPHIM ROSE

Father Seraphim Rose (1934–1982) was an American Eastern Orthodox monk, theologian, and writer who co-founded the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery in Platina, California.

A convert from atheism, he studied philosophy and world religions before embracing Orthodox Christianity in the 1960s, becoming a heirmonk under the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia.

Father Seraphim gained a wide following through his writings, which often featured critiques of modern secularism. Known for his ascetic life, deep humility, and defense of Orthodox tradition, he remains a highly influential figure in contemporary Orthodox thought.

In 2025, ROCOR began formally began the process towards his possible canonization

WHAT DOES THE YOUTH WANT? ... YOUTH IS FULL OF IDEALS AND WISHES TO DO SOMETHING TO SERVE THESE IDEALS. THE ANSWER FOR SOMEONE WHO WISHES TO WORK WITH YOUTH...IS TO GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO DO, SOMETHING USEFUL AND AT THE SAME TIME IDEALISTIC.

— FATHER SERAPHIM ROSE: HIS LIFE AND WORKS



WHEN CONVERSION TAKES PLACE, THE PROCESS OF REVELATION OCCURS IN A VERY SIMPLE WAY — A PERSON IS IN NEED, HE SUFFERS, AND THEN SOMEHOW THE OTHER WORLD OPENS UP. THE MORE YOU ARE IN SUFFERING AND DIFFICULTIES AND ARE 'DESPERATE' FOR GOD, THE MORE HE IS GOING TO COME TO YOUR AID, REVEAL WHO HE IS AND SHOW YOU THE WAY OUT...

— GOD'S REVELATION TO THE HUMAN HEART

Individualism vs Personhood



VS



Jordan Peterson is a familiar name to anyone invested in Christian circles. Dr. Peterson has offered somewhat of a middle ground in the debate on the existence of God and the meaning of life between atheists and Christians. By combining psychology, religious phenomenology, and existential philosophy he was able to breathe life into the cultural discussion on these topics which had grown quite stagnant due to a shared scientific-materialism between atheists and (predominantly protestant) Christian apologists. Rather than approach religious texts as something akin to a historical or scientific textbook, Peterson treated them as having immense meaning and psychological value. He used his knowledge of Jungian symbology to map biblical stories onto the human psyche, and then gave practical ways to apply them to our lives. Many of us today may not even be Christians if it wasn't for Dr. Peterson's lectures, debates, books, and interviews that opened our minds and hearts beyond what we previously believed. This being so, there is no intention to condemn Dr. Peterson as a whole in this article, but rather to criticize one of the concepts that is most central to his work and worldview: The Jungian Self.

To understand the Jungian Self we must first understand that it is a supraordinate synthesis of the two major fields of consciousness: the Ego

and the Unconscious mind. The unconscious mind importantly consists of both the Personal Unconscious, and the Collective Unconscious.

"We understand the ego as the complex factor to which all conscious contents are related. It forms, as it were, the centre of the field of consciousness; and, in so far as this comprises the empirical personality, the ego is the subject of all personal acts of consciousness. The relation of a psychic content to the ego forms the criterion of its consciousness, for no content can be conscious unless it is represented to a subject (Jung, 1969, p.3)."

Now we see that the ego is the point of reference for the field of the conscious mind, it is the sphere in which all that is known to us resides. Theoretically there is no limit to the ego, but it finds its limit when it encounters the unknown (Jung, 1969, p3.).

The unknown according to Jung: *"...consists of everything we do not know, which, therefore, is not related to the ego as the centre of the field of consciousness. The unknown falls into two groups of objects: those which are outside and can be experienced by the senses, and those which are inside and can be experienced immediately. The first group comprises the unknown in the outer world; the second. the unknown in the inner world. We call this latter territory the unconscious (Jung, 1969, p.3)."*

So, the unconscious mind consists of psychic content that is personal, yet unknown. Traumas, desires, and emotions which lie underneath consciousness that influence our behavior. More nowadays than ever it is clear to the observer that many people in modern society are controlled by unconscious content. When this unconscious content is left unknown, it can take over the personality of an individual. The ego shrinks, and the unconscious mind is left to rule over the subject's mind. This phenomena is what Jung refers to as the Shadow. The shadow is an archetype of the collective unconscious, meaning it is something that while unconscious, is suprapersonal. All people have a shadow, and will be forced to face it.

One of the primary ways that the shadow manifests itself in the behavior of its subject, is through projection. The subject, having its mind subsumed by the shadow "projects" the turmoil and imbalance in its psyche onto something or someone outside of itself,

"...experience shows that there are certain features which offer the most obstinate resistance to moral control and prove almost impossible to influence. These resistances are usually bound up with projections, which are not recognized as such, and their recognition is a moral achievement beyond the ordinary... in this case both insight and good will are unavailing because the cause of the emotion appears to lie, beyond all possibility of a doubt, in the other person (Jung, 1969, p.3)."

It is clear that projection is rampant everywhere in art, literature, visual media, music, and politics whether left or right, Christian or non-Christian.

The answer and the "...moral achievement beyond the ordinary..." (Jung, 1969, p.3)." in opposition to the shadow is the Self.

As said earlier the self is the synthesis of the conscious and unconscious mind. It is to Jung the proper development of the personality, and the subject's goal is to actualize the self (the term self-actualization coined by Maslow is based on this concept). Through the descent of the conscious mind into the unconscious mind through self-knowledge the shadow is defeated momentarily, and gives way to a psychological rebirth. This pattern of descent and rebirth is mirrored in the death and resurrection of Christ, Jung even dubs Christ as "A symbol of the self." Thus to Jung the realized self is the pinnacle of the personality, and is the basis for his anthropology, but this also denigrates Christ to merely a psychological reality. Herein is where we shall criticize the Jungian self, for as Christians we cannot accept that Christ is only a psychological reality used to explore and understand a higher concept of personhood, but that instead Christ is the basis for reality and personhood itself.

Christian personhood is based upon the union of God and man through perfect love. This union is not from a purely psychological basis, but encapsulates the whole of man ontologically. The created becomes themselves only through union with their Creator. It is important to note that to Christians, God is not the "idea" or the archetype of goodness, but that he is the personal God revealed by his Prophets, Apostles and Saints:

"In the church we do not accept the teaching about idea, the ontology of God as the philosophers describe it, nor the pre-existence of the soul, nor the eternity of the world and of time, nor what is said about man's release, that the soul must leave the body, which is the soul's prison - nor that God is the prime unmoving mover, etc (Hierotheos, 2002, pg.32)."

The philosophers and psychologists use conjecture and imagination to attempt an understanding of God with reason at the center, whereas for the Holy Fathers the nous was at the centre. They first cleansed their hearts from the passions, and their nous was illuminated:

"Abide in Me, and I in you... He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit (John 15:4-5)."

It is only through love that the person is fully realized. The individuality seen in Jung's concept of the self is in opposition to the person revealed through love. For Jung the person is fully realized when the person "individuates", when he draws all of his mind into one state of consciousness and "becomes himself", but for the Christian,

"Love is the supreme road to knowledge of the person, because it is an acceptance of the other person as a whole. It does not project on to the other person individual preferences, demands, or desires, but accepts him as he is, in the fullness of his personal uniqueness. This is why knowledge of the distinctiveness of the person achieves its ultimate fullness in the self-transcendence and offering of self that is love..."

A Christian becomes themselves, becomes a person, only when they give themselves in love to another. This is in direct opposition to Jung's individualism and the individualism of the age we live in which is based upon self love. Even many Christians today are captured by the ideology of self love and find it difficult to reconcile our calling to abandon self love, but also our calling to become Saints and to avoid falling into despair. Saint Sophrony of Essex says on this conundrum to,

"Love God to the point of selfhatred, and

then you will embrace everything in that love!"

When the love of God and our fellow man is the center of our life, this despair of ourselves will go away because we find our purpose and meaning within the other person

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world (John 16:20-21)."

Christian personhood also has an ascetic character. The importance of asceticism in Christian personhood is important to note especially when compared to Jung's idea of the self which views the person abstractly through philosophy and psychology and as a result views love as sensual and biological. Through repentance, fasting, prayer, tears, and worship the whole of the person is united to God's will. The body, heart, mind and nous are turned towards God:

"Nothing so inspires the soul with love for God and love for one's fellow men as humility, compunction, and pure prayer (Philokalia vol. 4, pg.118)."

St. Niketas Stethatos says about asceticism:

"Where there is love for God, spiritual labour, and participation in the unapproachable light, there too the soul's powers will be at peace, the nous will be purified, and the Holy Trinity will dwell within us (Philokalia vol. 4, pg.107)."

Without an ascetic character the person cannot have a proper constitution. If the person is only realized in the mind, then matter ceases to have its true meaning, leading some (even Jung) to lean towards gnosticism. Through asceticism all of man both material and immaterial are fully realized through the grace of God.

"...love is linked with the person, particularly when the person has a theological infrastructure and interpretation, and not a philosophical or psychological one. The philosophical and psychological interpretation does not give us an assurance that love is genuine (Hierotheos, 2002, pg.102)."

Only Christian personhood, not Jung's individualism, can provide meaning for the suffering we are experiencing today. Despair is rampant across the world. Science, modern philosophy, psychology, and politics have replaced God and any meaningful search for truth. The human being, God's crowning jewel of creation is denigrated, mocked, and destroyed. On top of all of this, our individual tragedies torment us. We know deep within ourselves that we are meant to be one with God, but our sins keep us from seeing his light. Here is a lengthy quotation from St. Sophrony of Essex, a modern Saint who experienced this same despair and was transformed by it:

"...the Lord revealed to me the mystery of the persona. Year after year, I prayed prayers of despair. The Lord did not despise me, and descended in mercy even unto me. At first it was His gospel word that acted on me. This word, that proceedeth from the Father, took root in my hardened heart. My new life was born in suffering. To begin with, I was as it were suspended in the air, alone, outside the Church. I was completely ignorant then, but an invisible fire consumed me, and my soul in agony reached up to the Almighty to save

me. Somewhere inside me a ray of hope appeared that overcame my dread of starting out on the painful path. This pain that I am trying to speak of is sacred for me. A strange miracle - the dolour in my heart brought moments of rapture to my spirit. I marveled how God had created my nature able to endure suffering through which hitherto unknown depths of prayer were disclosed to me. There were times when, gripped by pain, in a whisper that yet cried aloud in wonder I would exclaim, 'Glory to Thee, all-wise Creator'. Prayer delivered me from the cramped prison of the world, and my spirit lived in the freedom of the infinity of my God. Without this suffering I could never have understood the love that the Lord spoke of when He said, 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do' (John 14:30-31)."(Saint Sophrony, We Shall See Him as He Is, pg.197-198)

Sacred pain! Only in Christianity, only in our Orthodox Church do we find such immense depth! St. Sophrony shows us that personhood is only realized through asceticism, self-sacrificial love (kenosis), and long-suffering. Jung's purely psychological analyses of the person cannot account for the despair facing us.

"The person is not exhausted in philosophical definitions and theological analyses, but is experienced within suffering. A new being is born through suffering. Just as suffering is linked with biological birth, so also spiritual suffering is linked with man's spiritual birth (Hierotheos, 2002, pg.99)."

As an "individual" it is impossible to bear this despair and pain by ourselves. When we cease to suffer for ourselves, and being to suffer for God and our neighbor then despair is defeated and we can allow God to shape us into who we are meant to be.

Christian Artists



OWEN CYCLOPS

Owen Cyclops is an illustrator and comic artist whose work explores themes of religion, mysticism, symbolism, and esoterica, often through a Christian lens. His art blends sacred imagery with contemporary commentary, aiming to counteract the pervasive influence of modern visual culture.

He also has a popular twitter account, where his tweets often go viral.

<https://owencomics.com/>

Authenticity – 9/10

Owen draws heavily from his own life. His comics feature personal anecdotes, spiritual and theological questions, American Christian esoterica, conspiracy theories, stories from his pre-Christian life as a hippie artist who experimented with psychedelics, observations about the absurdity of modern life, etc.

Transcendence – 5/10

The art is highly focused on his own personal life. It has a fairly down-to-earth style. So, transcendence is not the first thing that comes to mind. But it is not anti-beauty either.

Tradition & Context – 9/10

Owen draws on Christian themes and symbolism heavily. One of his most well-known comics points out that the "goth" aesthetic often used by anti-Christians is really an expression of the Christian motif of "memento mori." On his website, he offers a fully illustrated liturgical calendar.

Ingenuity & Contemporaneity – 9/10

Owen Cyclops excels at using new media, especially meme aesthetics and digital formats. He has a large following on Twitter. Although trained in classical art, his style is highly contemporary and unique. His work shows how Christian thought can be injected into modern forms without simply copying secular trends. His art is clever, timely, and inventive.

Not a Copy of Secular Art – 9/10

His art style is contemporary and in a modern format. Aside from this, he really is not trying to create a "webcomics but Christian" product.



DEATH TO THE WORLD

Death to the World is an Eastern Orthodox Christian zine founded in 1994 by monks from St. Herman of Alaska Monastery in Northern California, notably Justin Marler, a former member of the doom metal band Sleep. Aimed at reaching disillusioned youth in the punk and metal subcultures, the zine promotes the ancient principles of Orthodox Christianity as the "last true rebellion" against modern nihilism and despair, encouraging readers to be "dead to this world and alive to the other world".

<https://deathtotheworld.com/>

Authenticity – 9/10

This is a good example of "baptizing" rather than "copy-cattin'." Although it does participate in a secular music movement and format (zines), this is a movement that the creators were authentically a part of prior to their conversion. They emphasize and extract the Christian elements - and thus transcendent truths - already inherent in this movement for their aesthetics.

Transcendence – 9/10

The message of the zine expresses a perennial Orthodox motif. "Keep thy mind in Hell and despair not." - St. Silouan the Athonite. "If you give all your life to the Earth, the Earth will give you a tomb; but if you give your life to heaven, heaven will give you a throne." - St. Ephraim the Syrian.

This motif is common to both the metal/goth music scene and Christianity. The difference is that the Christian life offers an answer to *memento mori*, not simply nihilism and hedonism. This creates a more complete message.

Tradition & Context - 9/10

It is firmly rooted in Orthodox tradition and aesthetics, and the zine draws upon the writings of Church Fathers and monastic teachings, presented in a contemporary format. The zine format harkens back to the epistles circulated by the early, underground, DIY Church of the apostles.

Tradition & Context - 9/10

It is firmly rooted in Orthodox tradition and aesthetics, and the zine draws upon the writings of Church Fathers and monastic teachings, presented in a contemporary format. The zine format harkens back to the epistles circulated by the early, underground, DIY Church of the apostles.

Ingenuity & Contemporaneity - 10/10

By utilizing the zine format popular in punk culture, it ingeniously bridges the gap between ancient faith and modern subcultures, demonstrating that Orthodox Christianity can be both timeless and timely.

Not a Copy of Secular Art - 7/10

Death to the World does copy the themes of the metal and alternative scenes, but the alternative scene copied them from Christianity first. So Christianity ultimately owns them. The zine format is something that originated from outside the Church in a secular subculture hostile at times hostile to Christianity, so in this sense they did copy the secular culture, thus they lose a few points.



ARVO PART

Arvo Part is an Estonian composer of contemporary classical music. He is also an Orthodox Christian. Part's music is inspired by traditional religious music such as Gregorian chant, but has an extremely modern and avant-garde style. He was the most performed living composer from 2011-2020, and 2022.

While a bit older than the others - his works go back to the 70s - Arvo Part does an excellent job of creating truly high art by blending the traditional with the modern, and is an excellent model to follow for those aiming higher than "art zines."

According to Wikipedia:

In April 2020, although Pärt rarely gives interviews, he spoke to the Spanish newspaper ABC about the COVID-19 pandemic, stating that it was a "mega fast" and reminded him to follow the example of John Updike, who "once said that he tried to work with the same calm as the masters of the Middle Ages, who carved the church

pews in places where it was impossible to see them."

Authenticity - 10/10

Part's music is totally sincere and original. He is a highly trained classical master who built on the techniques of old masters who came before him, and then invented his own. This is the ideal Christian artist.

Transcendence - 10/10

His works evoke a sense of the sacred, often described as transcendent and meditative. Some contemporary and experimental composers of the 60s and 70s emphasized dissonance, and had an "anti-art" style, or a style that simply embraced novelty and subversion for the sake of novelty and subversion, Arvo Part instead, embraced experimentation while adhering to transcendent notions of beauty.

Tradition & Context - 10/10

Part draws heavily from early Christian music traditions, particularly Gregorian chant and Orthodox liturgy. His compositions are deeply rooted in these traditions, yet he presents them in a contemporary context, bridging the ancient and the modern. He writes choral music, featuring familiar liturgical pieces such as "Kyrie," "Gloria," and "Angus Dei" - just as the traditional masters such as Mozart once did. However, his compositions also represent the peak of avant-garde contemporary composers such as Phillip Glass.

Ingenuity & Contemporaneity - 10/10

By creating the tintinnabuli style, Part introduced a novel musical language that resonates with contemporary audiences while maintaining a timeless quality.

Not a Copy of Secular Art - 10/10

Part's music isn't a copy of anything. It is totally original and represents mastery over the forms and techniques of composition.

These are some contemporary Christian artists that we find interesting.

Some are high art, others are a mix of more pedestrian art/popular art comparable to secular popular art.



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Closer to Heaven - Pt 3



On the way back down the mountain there is a fallen tree on the road, blocking my path. One of the monks comes out with a chainsaw to dispose of it.

This was the monk who had spent most of the week caring for me and the other pilgrims. He showed us around the monastery grounds, fed us, attended to our needs, asked if there was anything that he could do for us. He even assisted pilgrims who had just been casually passing through, and had audaciously requested a place to plug in their computers or take advantage of other modern conveniences while in the middle of an ascetic community.

He tells me to grab some food from the kitchen while he deals with the log. I run to the kitchen and stuff a few pieces of fruit down my gullet as fast as I can. I want to leave with a full stomach, so that I won't be starving if my car breaks down on the way back and I am trapped in the middle of the desert. But I also think there will probably be lumber to move after he is done with the chainsaw, or perhaps something else that he would need assistance with. So I want to get back to him in time to help.

I go back down to the road, and I meet him coming back up.

“Are you finished already?”

He says yes. Then he hugs me goodbye.

He says, “If I have done anything to offend or upset you during your stay here, please forgive me. And pray for me.”

At that moment, I understand what is meant by “wounded by love.”

After a week of feeding me, taking care of me, rescuing me from every obstacle, after attending to my body and my soul, and all the while asking nothing in return, now **he** asks **me** to forgive and pray for him?

Me – who did nothing to earn such kindness, gave nothing in return, and was surely a greater sinner than any monk, or even a layman of a more normal, mild-mannered temperament than myself.

It is an audacious, almost subversive act of love. It is powerful, and capable of piercing the hardest of hearts. It is an act of love that pierces through pride, ugliness, and falsehood.

This is the truth of God.

The truth of Christ.

The truth of the God that loves.

A truth buried in noise – distractions, money, and delusional ideologies promising a false, man-made paradise.

Beyond rationality or ideology.
Beyond thought or feeling.
Pure light, pure life.

But now I have to throw this all away and return to my daily life? A life spent worrying about money and business and plans and amusements and so much other noise?

I want to escape from the noise and be free to live in truth.

But how?

No sooner do I feel it, then I can already feel it slipping away. Falling back into the old routine. Back into the noise.

How can I keep the candle lit?



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