

St. Christina the Astonishing

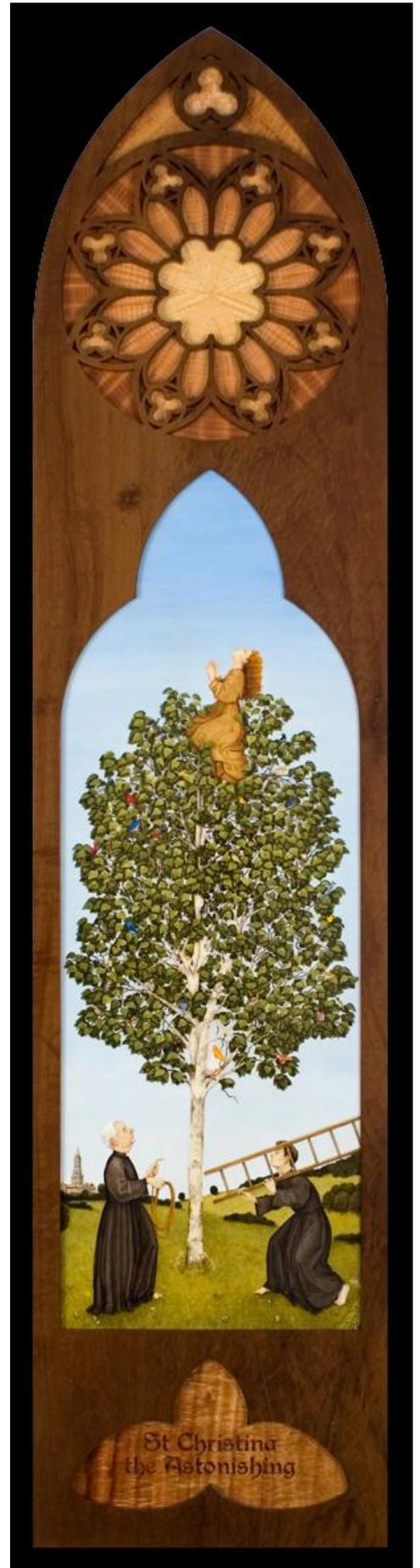
St. Christina prays, with head tossed back
And eyes uplifted toward heaven, as she kneels
In the topmost branches of a Birch tree,
Under a sky that I remember from my childhood,
A rare blue egg tempera wash that would hang
Over the near Eastside on June mornings.

In a tree crowded with colorful birds that sing
Sweet songs amid green foliage, perches one
Sepia Saint, a lone pelican far from the sea,
A white feathered symbol of transcendence
And selfless sacrifice escaping the strong smell
Of the sinful by climbing high and far from its reach.

On the ground below, two barefoot priests
In black robes look up, one holds a cord to bind her,
The other, a ladder to snatch her, twisting and kicking
Against their grasp, like a bird pulled from its perch,
Out of the rare blue air and egg tempera sky,
Out of all the June mornings of my childhood.

-Doug Tanoury
October 29, 2009

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St. John of the Ladder

St. John says that understanding
Is a deliberate lifting up of one's self
And comes by slow and steady effort,
As if you are climbing a tall ladder
Ring by rung, hand over hand and
Step by step, where ascent is a
Vertical exercise of beating down vice
And stepping on them, one by one,
To raise yourself up.

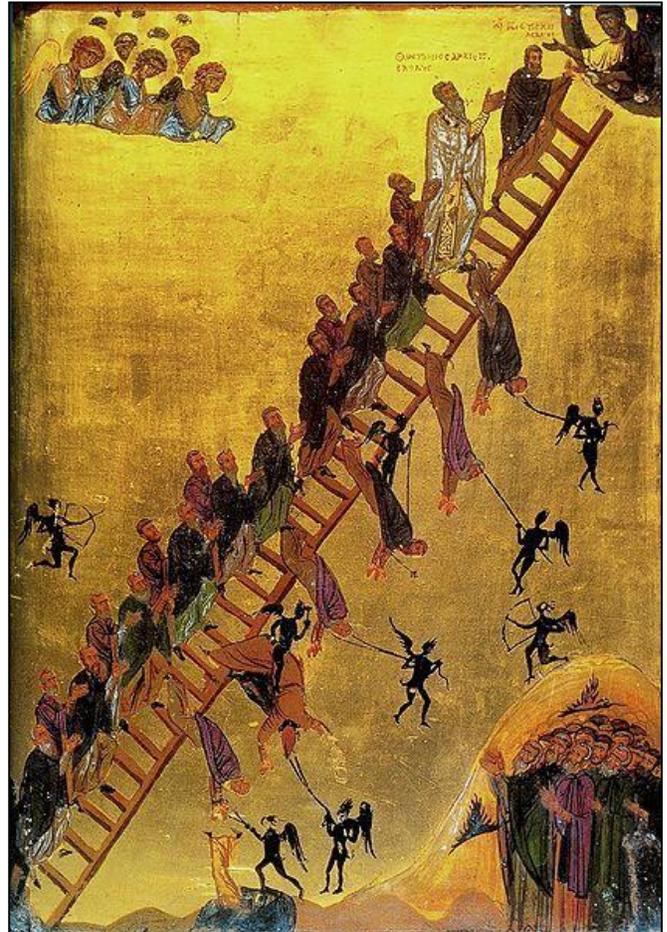
In his cell, a lone penitent kneels
Head bowed deep in prayer,
As virtues move beneath his garment
And fly like white and tan pigeons,
A rapid flurry of wings flapping
Against the fabric of his hair shirt
As they escape, one by one,
To the window ledge and out
To the open air.

For me, insight comes all at once
Like a multi-vehicle crash on the
interstate
Where cars pile up on each other,
One by one, at high speed
To the bang of metal on metal,
The boom of exploding airbags,
As red brake lights silently pulse
On and off bleeding out all my wrong
And mistaken notions.

I prefer the more modern methods of
Spiritual awakening in a midnight vigil
With cars lined up, one by one,
Awaiting neon lit enlightenment
Dispensed at the all night drive through
Of a fast food retail outlet and when the
Speaker crackles, I lean my head out
Of the car window and pray: "Please
Forgive me, for I have sinned..."

Doug Tanoury - October 14, 2009

The Ladder of Divine Ascent or The Ladder of Paradise. A 12th-century icon described by John Climacus.
Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai.

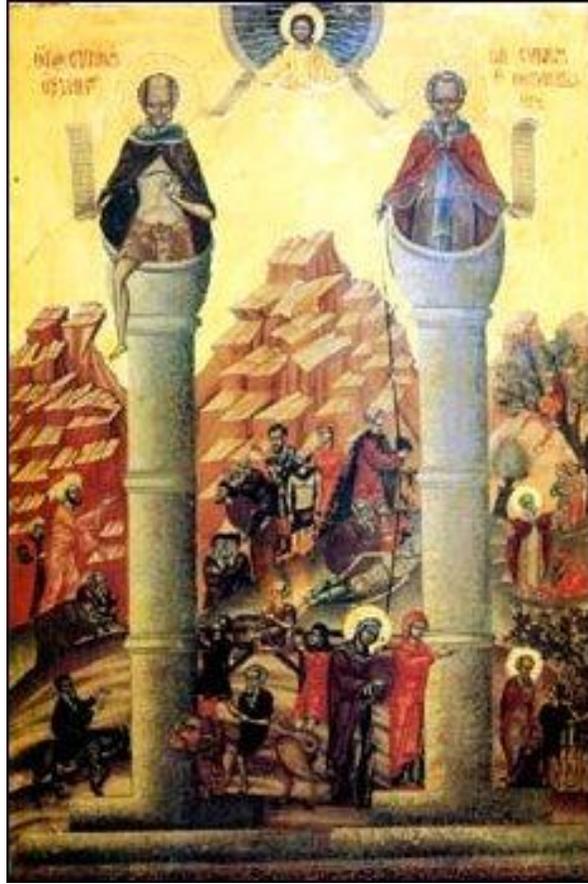


St. Expedito

The red votive candle
On my bookshelf--
Never lit,
Lets all thing
Come to pass
In the sweetness
Of their own time.

Doug Tanoury
9-11-09





Soliloquy of Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger (Or St. Simeon of the Admirable Mountain)

My hermitage is a tall pillar
Standing upon a high mountain,
Elevated in living benediction, alone
And solitary, among the highest places.

Escaping worldly temptation in my solitude,
Floating somewhere between earth and sky,
Tree and cloud, mountain and plain,
I stand as a witness for my God.

When the sun blinds my eyes
And burns my flesh, when the wind
Whips and the rain lashes I am most
Close to the pure happiness of heaven,

And I pray: take me, let lightning strike me
In a storm and throw me down
In flames to death and raise me up
To New Life and The Communion of Saints.

Looking down, the world is so beautiful
At a distance and the silence sings to my soul;
In the evening when the warm breeze blows
From the East, it is the whispering of God.

When the Evil one turns stones to loaves,
Serpents to fish and scorpions to eggs, I close my
Eyes and turn my head away, and Angels
With blue faces minister to me.

And when He tempts me with a human touch,
The sound of a woman's laughter, the warmth
Of breasts and the softness of her belly,
I shout my prayer of mortification of flesh.

The Prophets come to comfort me and
Converse with me as a gentle rain
Washes me clean and the wind dries me,
As the top of my column becomes a tabernacle.

I have Holy Visions of the Lord
Who teaches and instructs me and
Gives me Holy Messages for the people
Who come to this place to pray with me.

He says that everyone who is isolated
From their neighbor sits on a high pillar,
And all who are angry with their brother
Stand solitary and alone on a high column.

Doug Tanoury
October 10, 2009

The Hagiography of a Flamingo Hopping on One Foot

I .

They say that St. Christina the Astonishing rose up after the Agnus Dei at her funeral Mass, levitated above her coffin and flew like a bird to perch on the highest rafters of the church, then descended to the altar, and told an amazing tale that she had visited heaven, hell and purgatory.

II .

She met many family and friends in purgatory and hell, but unfortunately saw no one that she knew in heaven except God Himself, and after this amazing day, she fled the company of people, complaining that she could smell their sins and it was a powerful stench.

III .

She would climb tall trees and sit in their top most branches with the birds. She would stay in a tree, looking up to heaven and praying for so long she would forget to eat. Christina was known on occasion to cast herself into fires and throw herself in open ovens, emerging unharmed and with no burns.

IV .

Cristina the Astonishing would also jump into the frozen river, remaining there for long periods of time as she prayed. Less fantastic, but certainly no less wondrous, eyewitness accounts describe that she prayed while doing cartwheels and while her body was curled up in a tight a ball.

V .

It has been documented by multiple sources, reliable religious and well regarded lay contemporaries, that on one particular occasion she was seen hopping about on one foot and crying out to God in a loud and powerful voice: *"Look upon me, O Lord, for I am like unto a flamingo."*

VI .

Saint Christina is by far the most magical bag lady in the communion of saints, and the most astonishing and unbelievable wonder she performed was this miraculous transformation into a flamingo as she hopped about on a single leg, an act in my mind that is singularly worthy of sainthood.

Doug Tanoury
October 12, 2009

Santa María de la Cabeza

The head of Maria Torribia
Is kept in a silver reliquary
And in times of extreme draught
It is brought out for procession
Through the streets of Madrid.

In a wooden tabernacle
Carved with the faces of
Infant Angels and decorated
With silk ribbons, streamers
Of purple, green and blue.

The head is held high,
Carried by the tallest man
In the parish and followed
By a long line of priests
In black vestments.

Saint Mary lost her child
An event that shook her faith,
Shaped her Sainthood, and made
Her a humble hermit
Praying on a hillside.

When the storm clouds gather
In late August and the rain falls
So heavy it obscures the landscape,
It is simply a Saint remembering
A life unlived.

-Doug Tanoury
October 27, 2009

