

# 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.

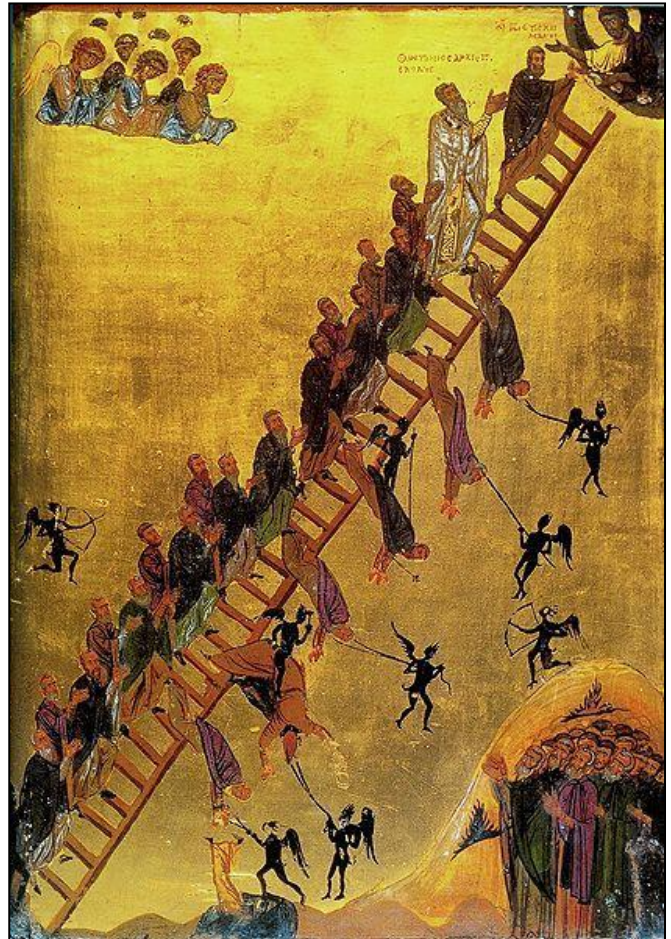
In his cell, a lone penitent kneels  
Head bowed deep in prayer,  
As virtues move beneath his garment  
And fly like white and tan pigeons,  
A rapid flurry of wings flapping  
Against the fabric of his hair shirt  
As they escape, one by one,  
To the window ledge and out  
To the open air.

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

