

***Sobornost* and Society:**
**Finding Freedom for Purity
Amid a Materialistic Culture**

by

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The Orthodox journalist Rod Dreher wrote of his visit to a parish in Moscow:

I gave a talk later in the afternoon to a group from the parish. Well, not a talk, really, but just answering their questions about my work, and the challenges facing Christians in our time. I found myself sitting there telling a room full of Russian Orthodox Christians about Drag Queen Story Hour, and the other things that have become a normal part of US culture. Hearing these things coming out of my mouth, and watching their faces as Matthew translated my words, really brought home how completely freaking insane we Americans have become.

Someone asked if the churches were standing up to this madness. I had to tell him no, not really. Some churches bless it, a few oppose it, but most just want to be quiet and wait for it to go away.

A man in the back of the room said that it seemed to him that we are losing the image of God in man. Yes, I said—and if we lose the image of God, then we will also lose man himself.

Why are we doing this to ourselves? It defies comprehension.¹

(For those not familiar with Drag Queen Story Hour, it is the spread to public libraries around the country, with support from the American Library Association, of programs in which men dressed as women read stories and engage in activities promoting various forms of “non-binary” sexuality to little boys and girls.)

The current erasure of natural order, as understood in traditional Christianity, involves, as Dreher suggested, the erasure of human nature by technologically driven efforts that involve a small group controlling a larger group. In the case of sexual identity politics, this is expressed in the ability to manipulate sex today through virtual technological “reality” ranging from online public opinion “cascades,” to surgery and related chemical treatments for so-called “sex changes,” to digital auto-eroticism through cyberporn extending to sexbots and artificial reality, online hookup sites, and the historic trend of advancing forms of contraception and abortion; and the removal of virtually any legal restrictions on divorce, then marriage, and surrogate parenting; and now increasingly to the power of the state over parents and property owners. Bioengineering, cloning, and perhaps the Singularity (the Silicon Valley’s effort to achieve immortality in cyberspace) are all on the way, too. Seeking to determine sex by technology in the interest of elites expresses the rule of *techne* that the philosopher Martin Heidegger, in seminal writings on environmental philosophy, saw as *objectifying* the earth and human beings.²

¹ Rod Dreher, “Father Alexey’s Carpentry Shop,” *The American Conservative* (11/3/2019), <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/father-alexey-s-carpentry-shop-yakovlev/>

² For this facet of Heidegger’s writing, by a now-Orthodox philosopher, see Bruce Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature* (New York: Humanity Books, 1993).

This is the era of emerging technocratic Gnosticism predicted by the political scientist Eric Voegelin in his criticism of the rising administrative state and totalitarianism of the mid-twentieth century.³ We can recognize in it the mad demonic dimension of “the lie and the father of it” warned of in the Gospel, and derivatively in the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Alexander Solzhenitsyn in the Orthodox tradition. For lying is idolatry. That is why Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* warned against it in his words to Fyodor Karamazov: “Give up lying about yourself and others, because in doing so [lying] you prevent yourself from loving.”⁴ You lose the realization of the common responsibility of each for the other in *sobornost*, “spiritual unity,” by making yourself incapable of realizing your identity in relation to Jesus Christ and thus to others and yourself, made according to God’s image, Christ. In living what Solzhenitsyn called the “permanent lie” of totalitarian culture, you create a fetishizing objectification of yourself and life.⁵ This becomes like Tolkien’s Ring, which in its nexus of power makes the user invisible, and thus seemingly unable to love and be loved.

The ground for the “permanent lie” of virtual reality is highly unstable, which adds to the cultural anxiety reflected in the intensity of sexual politics today. There is a fundamental contradiction in Western sexual nihilism between the desire not to be objectifying of identity, and the desire to weaponize identity categories of various types in a new version of class struggle—an adaptation of “cultural Marxism” related to critical identity theory.

Postmodern sexual identities ultimately are individualized and customized to the extent that they become atomized and isolated, and thus

³ See Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁴ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux: 2002), 44.

⁵ See the discussion in “The Soul and Barbed Wire” section of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, III-IV*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 597-672.

become subjective expressions of a self-will that is nihilistic. Yet they are at the same time *essentialized*. This involves what Hannah Arendt termed the isolation basic to totalitarianism in technologically-ruled states, isolation that combines with terror to enable totalizing rule, which terror today in the West becomes cultural in nature.

Ironically, in all this, what is presented as the ultimate in individualizing involves the paradoxical assertion of group identities. But the group identities become based on shifting definitions of essentializing fluid sexual passions of all types: heterosexual, homosexual, polyamorous, trans-sexual, queer, asexual, auto-sexual, etc. This shifting foundation lacks grounding in relational identity with the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and tends toward an isolating self-centeredness despite the group affect.

This sexual nihilism is more serious a problem in our culture than we Americans usually realize. Focusing on its “reality,” there can seem little to salvage now in American society and culture, or in so-called Western civilization. We sacrifice our children to our idols.

Some modern Russian thinkers suggest ways out in relation to Orthodox Christianity, and we would do well to consider their suggestions, coming from outside the box of our American presuppositions. This is particularly true with regard to the idea of *sobornost*, its relation to Orthodoxy, and the basis it provides for active resistance to this evil of sexual nihilism, in order to save our children, our society, and our churches, by rejecting any false Tolstoyan pacifism. For the latter is an invitation to totalitarianism by helping to ensure that good men will do nothing to stop it.

Solzhenitsyn, in *The Gulag Archipelago*, repeatedly raised the question of what would happen if people on a large scale had resisted the Bolshevik secret police as they made their night-time arrests, for few did. Culturally today, the spirit of heretical and schismatic Tolstoyanism remains with us, to disarm us spiritually in our responsibilities as Orthodox Christians to children and the vulnerable in our Church communities, with regard to the sexual nihilism that would prey upon their souls.

In this, Jeffrey Epstein sadly has become emblematic of our time. We are currently on the road to cultural serfdom to technocratic elite nihilists, in ways not clearly seen nor addressed by either the political right or left in America. Both in effect are complicit, as is what has been termed “woke capitalism.”

We can, in reflecting on our current cultural abyss, instructively look back on the great cataclysm of the Bolshevik Revolution, sometimes called the Russian Golgotha by Orthodox Christians, our Holocaust, though often unrecognized as such. Together with the Turkish genocides against Greek and Armenian Christians, it forms the great trauma of Orthodoxy in modern times, even greater in size than persecution under the pagan Roman emperors.

The Russian Orthodox philosopher S. L. Frank, in works written in exile from the 1920s through the 1940s, brought out the importance of what he called *sobornost* and also “strange love” to our situation in the West, which he could discern developing then. Frank wrote in his post-Revolution work *The Fall of the Idols*, and in its sequel *The Meaning of Life*, of how the idols of atheistic revolution, of politics, of culture, and of moral idealism, whether on the right or on the left, came crashing down in the Russian Revolution and Civil War for both victims and refugees.

In such extreme circumstances, lacking material stability and comforts, human beings turn either to despair or to divine love. He wrote, drawing partly on ancient Christian sources, of how

just as the leaves of a tree are separated and as if isolated from one another, but in reality live and turn green only by virtue of the juices that flow through them from one common trunk and root, and are nurtured by the moisture of a common soil, so human beings, too, outwardly isolated and closed off from one another, are inwardly—

through their common connection with the all-embracing Source of life—fused together in one integral life.⁶

Frank also wrote how the *Philokalia*, a classic compilation of Orthodox ascetical practice and theology that co-exists in different Slavonic-Russian and Greek compilations,

has a beautiful metaphor attributed to Abba Dorotheus: If we imagine that people are moving along the radii of a circle, the closer they come to the center of the circle—the absolute center of being and life, God—the closer they come to one another.⁷

Frank's social philosophy involved a keen sense of *sobornost*, or spiritual unity, as an underlying dimension of life to be lived integrately with the mechanical individualism of *obshchestvennost*, or public society. *Sobornost*, to Frank, is organic and stems from the Body of Christ in the Church, apart from any "social contract." *Sobornost* is the mysterious aspect of life he apophatically developed in 1939 in his most substantive philosophical book, *The Unknowable*, as reflected in its title.⁸

His is an Orthodox beyond-ontological project, critiquing Western tendencies toward objectifying or essentializing the self and others which advance by essentializing the passions. This tendency has become so extreme that we are in the throes of an emerging identity struggle replacing the class struggle of classical Marxism. Our current situation lies between the racism of Nazism and the classism of Communism, and perhaps is even more dangerous because of how it is enabled by technocracy which makes us forgetful of faith by immersing us in virtual reality. Unlike Alyosha at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, we are in danger of not remembering, of

⁶ S. L. Frank, *The Meaning of Life*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans: 2010), 129. His work *The Fall of the Idols* is not translated into English, although *The Meaning of Life* includes a summary and excerpt from it.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁸ S. L. Frank, *The Unknowable: An Ontological Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983).

forgetting to pray for God's memory eternal, or with the Wise Thief for our Lord to remember us in Paradise.

Frank articulated apophatic Orthodoxy's "beyond-ontology" in a lifelong project that his English translator Boris Jakim called a lifting up of the twentieth-century sufferings of the Russian people into theodicy. In this, Frank referred to the "strange love" of an exile for a homeland beyond reach, yet always also involving concrete experience here and now. He wrote that in exile "we participate in the supra-individual soul of our homeland; we not only feel obscurely but now meaningfully understand our homeland as a living entity, as our mother; and we know the connection of our life with her life, the interdependence of our salvation and hers." Yet, he adds, "we understand that the salvation from this perdition consists not in any political fanaticism, but only in spiritual rebirth, in the growth of an inwardly meaningful, love-filled relation to life."⁹

The homeland we yearn for most deeply is Paradise. Frank's *sobornost* reminds us of this. It has roots in other nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian philosophers, but a form of the word first appeared as a Slavonic calque on the term "catholic" in the Nicene Creed. The root of the word etymologically comes from a term for a cathedral. It evokes Frank's apophatic and multi-layered definition of freedom, as participation in meaningful unity, more than assertion of individual rights. Frank wrote in *The Unknowable* that

potentiality, the potency to become what it is not, lies in the deepest core of being. This is what we call "freedom." Since all concretely existent things are rooted in the total unity of being and are permeated by the "juices" of the total unity, the element of primordial freedom is present, to varying degrees, in all concretely existent things....

This primordial freedom, in which we are driven by forces of our own inner being and which enslaves us, is opposed by another, higher freedom which emanates from our selfhood.... This freedom is realized through self-overcoming... This is not yet the ultimate and highest freedom, genuinely 'true' freedom which can never emanate from

⁹ S. L. Frank, *The Meaning of Life*, 135-136.

man's inner being alone... for it is freedom only in the form of struggle... But it is nonetheless true freedom insofar as it is self-overcoming.¹⁰

“True freedom,” he argued, draws on the above-mentioned primordial freedom of potentiality and self-restraint; but it must involve also what he calls “the ground of reality as antinomian monodualism”—man’s independent yet connected relation to God, fulfilled in *theosis*. Frank terms this “antinomian monodualism,” which he defined as “The coincidence of being for another and in another with what is, in essence, being in itself and for itself... revealed in the phenomenon of love.”¹¹ It is *antinomian* because it involves two different senses, of unity and of difference, yet it is *monodual* in that these two are not synthesized in any Hegelian deterministic sense, but are by apophatic mystery the same reality. He refers to this as love, which in Orthodoxy must be rooted in God through *theosis*.

Thus, Frank argued, the Orthodox definition of freedom is voluntary service to universal truth, in the Person of Jesus Christ. This Truth is a Who and not a what, answering the question “who is truth?” rather than “what is truth?”, for truth is never an object.

Frank’s “antinomian monodualism” as a description for *sobornost* involves bringing together antinomies, not in mechanical synthesis or social contract, but in a mystery of wholeness-yet-distinctness in the Person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. At different dimensions and levels, this is typology for Christology, and also for Triadology, and thus beyond our intellectual understanding.

Yet also, on the human level, it is a type of what St. Maximus the Confessor described as overcoming divisions in *theosis*, including the coming together of bride and bridegroom, of Christ and His Church, and the overcoming of the division of male and female in Christ. Thus, too, *sobornost* can be a type of the oneness yet distinctness of the uncreated

¹⁰ S. L. Frank, *The Unknowable*, 116-117.

¹¹ S. L. Frank, *The Spiritual Foundations of Society: An Introduction to Social Philosophy*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987), 148.

divine energies of the Most Holy Trinity and the unknowable essence of God. In our oneness with those uncreated energies lies our freedom from mortal passion, from objectification and idolatry, and their agents the demons.

Such true freedom involves a definition of justice for Frank. Justice for him involves ensuring the opportunity for each individual to participate in such meaningfulness, in voluntarily serving universal truth. Justice thus becomes identified with Providence, or the Wisdom of God as Christ, expressed in *sobornost*, and with *righteousness* in Greek biblical terminology –and not so much with the assertion of individual rights or human ideas of fairness, as in secular modernity.

These definitions reflect Frank's emphasis on *sobornost* as a spiritual unity baked into the embodied experience of Christians on earth. It resists the two-story universe of Western rationalism, with its dimensions of physicality and conceptualization. In the latter's virtual level of reality, secular conceptualization assumes a totalizing role through technology, as in the cyber world many of us now inhabit, which now includes sexual nihilism.

Sobornost is not based on the social contract theory of liberalism, with its ultimately subjective individualism. It also is not based on the class struggle of communism and its related ideologies, nor on the racial structure of Nazism, nor the struggle for state unity of fascism, nor on the sexual nihilism of melding of cultural Marxism with corporate globalist consumerism. Rather, it is based on the otherworldliness that Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov* posits as the basis for true human freedom, in grace-empowered growth in virtue toward *theosis*.

The fictional Elder Zosima, for whose literary portrait Dostoevsky apparently drew on the historical figures of Elder Ambrose of Optina and St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, voices this Orthodox idea by saying:

Much on earth is concealed from us, but in place of it we have been granted a secret, mysterious sense of our living bond with the other world, with the higher heavenly world, and the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here but in other worlds. That is why

philosophers say it is impossible on earth to conceive the essence of things. God took seeds from other worlds and sowed them on this earth, and raised up his garden; and everything that could sprout sprouted, but it lives and grows only through its sense of being in touch with other mysterious worlds; if this sense is weakened or destroyed in you, that which has grown up in you dies.¹²

From that otherworldly perspective and connection, we are able to avoid lies or objectification of ourselves and others, the essentializing of our passions, and to love others deeply with God's help. "Live not by lies," Solzhenitsyn famously wrote.¹³

This is the basis for Frank's sense of freedom in the philosophy he developed in exile from Russia after he was put on one of the "philosopher ships" by Lenin. But Frank's post-revolutionary philosophy was anticipated by St. John of Kronstadt in the years leading up to the revolution, in the saint's support of the idea of *symphonia* of Church and State in Orthodox Christian tradition. St. John argued that Christianity needed that relation of *symphonia* with the State to thrive, which in effect was the good society or community expressed by the Church to our neighbors, following the parable of the Good Samaritan.¹⁴

In today's post-Soviet world, Russia is the one major Orthodox Christian nation, and arguably the one major nation in the world, expressing a public Christian culture. At this writing, it is considering writing into its constitution the provision that marriage is between a man and a woman, something that in the early 2000s was pushed for but not carried out by some (but not all) American conservative leaders.

¹² Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux: 2002), 320.

¹³ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Live Not by Lies," *Orthodoxy Today* (2004), <https://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles/SolzhenitsynLies.php>

¹⁴ On St. John's fervent support of the Russian monarchy, see Nadieszda Kizenko, *A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

It would do well for us to take stock of how Russia is doing in relation to the sexual nihilism that threatens Orthodoxy, especially in the West. Here Orthodoxy is a diasporic minority engaged in evangelizing for our Faith in “strange lands,” which nonetheless have Christian roots, however heterodox. In this, Russia can be both a model of sorts and an ally, a refuge, and a potential protector spiritually, in terms of *symphonia*, with regard most especially to the Russian Church and her role in public life, including even as a world power guaranteeing, however imperfectly, the historical presence of Orthodoxy at this moment, even as the Byzantine Empire likewise did in the past.

This does not mean emulating any abuses of power or hateful aspects alleged in Russian society. But in the context of constructive, positive cultural affinities, the divisions between Russia and the U.S. as the second most Christian remaining power, however heterodox and flagging in this regard, can be discerned by Orthodox Christians as a demonic sowing of discord, threatening world peace and Christian solidarity, as seen especially in the Ukrainian schism that would split the Orthodox world. Such divisions require our daily prayer, in our spiritual warfare against the spirit of the age, including sexual nihilism with its combination of ancient gnostic and other heresies.

In addition to Frank’s writing about *sobornost*, another post-revolution Russian Orthodox philosopher articulated the basis for such resistance. Ivan Ilyin, in his 1925 book *On Resistance to Evil by Force*, rejected Tolstoy’s philosophy of nonviolence as being ironically an oppressive Western-inspired entryway to totalitarianism. It would paralyze Christian adherents of the “hidden God” tradition of incarnational theology from resisting the objectification of earth and humanity, he argued. He wrote, “resistance to evil by force and the sword is not a sin wherever it is objectively necessary, or, what is the same, where it turns out to be the only possible, or least unrighteous, outcome.”¹⁵ Yet he also criticized Martin Luther’s blanket

¹⁵ Ivan Ilyin, *On Resistance to Evil by Force*, trans. K. Benois (Zvolen, Slovakia: Taxiarch Press, 2018), 181.

endorsement of wielding the sword on behalf of the State, arguing that that extreme is as much an expression of utopian chiasm as Tolstoy's pacifism.

Resistance to evil as a lie (objectification, idolatry, and a missing of the mark, or mis-growth of humanness, which can involve demonic attack), can be seen in Ilyin's work in light of the *sobornost* that to Frank connects all. In this view, as Dostoevsky also wrote, sin is not isolated in either blame or effect. There is a mutuality of responsibility.

Ilyin carefully spells out that any violence to uphold justice for the vulnerable, to protect the ability of each individual to find voluntary service to universal truth or a meaningful life, must be carefully discerned and repented and held to the standard of universal truth. An analogy easily understandable in today's West would be the fight against Nazism, although Ilyin responded primarily to the emergence of the earlier and even larger totalitarian effect of Communism in the world.

Ilyin argued that the Christian standard for individual forgiveness and loving of enemies must be upheld, but that in defending the larger interrelationships of *sobornost* amid the *obshchestvennost* of public society, sometimes forgiveness and loving of enemies must be set aside at the collective level, in acts he terms unrighteous but not sinful if repented. Thus it could be a sin to kill a robber in the act of breaking and entering, if killing the criminal left him without opportunity for repentance of life sins, but not perhaps if to protect victims or to resist organized crime terrorizing a community, if there is no other alternative and it is then properly repented. We can take this as a type of the kind of spiritual warfare extended into our culture, in which we are engaged today by virtue simply of being Orthodox Christians in this age, although thankfully this does not involve physical violence.

Symphonia, for Ilyin, involves "the warrior's voluntary acceptance of the monk's spiritual wisdom, and... the monk's undemanding gift of necessary earthly fruits," referencing St. Sergius of Radonezh's blessing of Prince and later Saint Dimitry Donskoy on the eve of the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380, which in revolt against the Mongol state laid the foundation of the

Russian state.¹⁶ The latter would help nurture the flowering of Christian worship and arts, and the removal of oppressive tributes and soldierly obligations to the Mongols. St. Sergius also allowed two former warriors who were novices in his monastery to help Donskoy in the battle. “With this solution, the warrior did not fall under the weight of his burden, and the monk did not turn away from the burden of peace,” Ilyin writes.

Resistance to evil was conceived and occurred as an active, organized service to the cause of God on earth, and the state’s affairs were interpreted as being not outside of Christian love, but within it. And perhaps one of the most majestic and touching customs of this system was the custom according to which the Orthodox Monarch, sensing the approach of death, accepted the monastic vows as a final return from his unrighteous service to the *pleroma* of justifying piety.¹⁷

This is a recognition of interconnections of life on earth in a fallen creation, as in the case of carnivory. The Church Fathers regarded the latter as a result of the Fall. This is why Orthodox monastics abstain from meat, and Orthodox fasting is generally vegan plus shellfish, a lower-order being. Yet, all forms of eating and existence involve a recognition of the interconnected gifts received from God in the form of other beings. Hence the prayers before and after meals, and the super-ultimate symbolism of the Eucharist.

Our fight against sexual nihilism today in America is not violent, thank God, except inasmuch as it calls us into the public square, where we may indeed martyrically be stripped of livelihood and career, perhaps a seeming typology of a death sentence in capitalist America’s own terms. It is spiritual warfare that extends into our culture and society.

It is not impossible, given fallen human nature, that the cultural aggressiveness of the sexual nihilist movement targeting Christianity, could, like Bolshevism, tip into physical violence in the future. May God prevent that, for the sake especially of the “little ones” likely to be caught in the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

middle of physical violence. But the spiritual warfare expressed in cultural resistance today likewise catches the vulnerable in the middle, psychologically. It requires prayerful discernment and wisdom, including self-examination and repentance, for any acts of needed non-violent social resistance. It also requires recognition that acts of persecution and hatred targeting individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ are un-Christian.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow recently stated in a homily, “If a person who is far from the church is to be told in a nutshell why the church is necessary... The church is needed so that the spirit of our people is strong.” Heroism removed from the Church is not sufficient to strengthen a country. As in the Russian patriotic war against the Nazis, he said, “An idea is something that belongs to our spirit, and therefore the implementation of a heroic idea, such as the defense of the Fatherland, takes place first and foremost at the level of the human spirit, the human soul.”¹⁸

Today our country, America, requires defense against sexual nihilism and disintegration of culture, families, individual lives, and society into potential future violence and oppression. What will we do as Orthodox Christians, a seeming minority? We need to remember our connection through *sobornost* to the saints, to Orthodox lands including Russia, and to the Christian aspects of America’s heritage. We are no longer alone, as the Communion prayers say, when we are with our Lord in the Eucharist, basing our resistance in *sobornost*.

It is worth remembering that the *neptic* science of ascetic practice, as monastics have called it, is more scientific than any reductionist claims of social Darwinist and Marxist materialisms, and any chains of economic or genetic or cultural determinism claiming to underlie sexual nihilism. We can engage spiritual warfare in resistance to evil, with faith and confidence in our Lord, knowing the gates of hell cannot prevent against His Church, His Body.

18 Michael Tare, ““Only the Church Can Unlock the Potential of the Nation’ Says Russia's Church Leader,” *Russian Faith* 10/23/19, <https://russian-faith.com/only-church-can-unlock-great-potential-nation-says-russias-church-leader-n2505>

We can avoid pridefully pushing for martyrdom, not tempting God nor man, while nonetheless being willing to accept it in various forms, if God wills.

The Irish spoke of the three colors of martyrdom, interpreted sometimes as the martyrdom of monasticism, martyrdom of death, and the martyrdom of ascetic struggle toward *theosis* that laity and monastics alike undertake. In such noetic and martyric life of the Church lies the assured triumph of Orthodoxy against today's re-combining of multiple ancient heresies in sexual nihilism—both personally and communally.

In all this, it is important to be alert, but not to fall into the sin of despair. A small but potent reminder of the strength of our cause can be found in the example of the prayer rope or ladder used by Old Believers in Russia and some Russian Orthodox globally, known as the *Lestovka*. In its steps, flaps, and other features, this small device gathers symbolism of earth, heavens, angels, the Apostles, the Old Testament Prophets, the Mother of God as having given birth to Jesus Christ, His earthly life, the repentance of those praying the name of the Incarnate God, the mysteries of the Church, and the Gospels—all in a small loop on which are performed embodied breathing and prostrations while repeating the Jesus Prayer. It is a reminder of the strength of the connectivity of *sobornost*, with which we ally ourselves in this current battle against sexual nihilism in our individual lives, as well as socially.

Truly, we live not for ourselves alone. We are called to be of good cheer, for our Lord has overcome the world (cf. John 16:33).