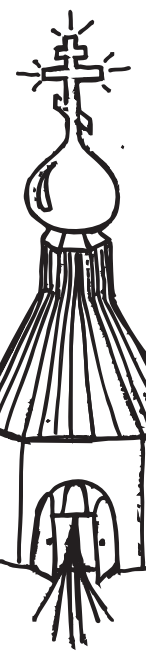
Institutionalized Acedia



"Only when we have their attention, can we hope to win their hearts and minds". - Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google

Acedia, directly translates from Greek as "carelessness". Known by the Desert Fathers as the 'demon of noonday', acedia is not merely slothfulness, but a shallow restlessness and dissatisfaction that provokes its victim towards work and rest simultaneously, leaving one in a constant state of agitation. The 4th century ascetic Evagrius Ponticus writes that acedia is "hatred of industriousness, a battle against stillness.. laziness in prayer, a slackening of ascesis, untimely drowsiness... the oppressiveness of solitude, hatred of one's cell, an adversary of ascetic works, an opponent of perseverance, muzzling of meditation, ignorance of the scriptures, a partaker in sorrow." Acedia is the sleepless demon unleashed by the upward swipe of infinite scroll.



Our technological age has pulled us into a constant state of uneasiness without any detectable root. What is left of our inner lives has become shapeless and susceptible to powerful commercial forces which take the place of traditional cultural. (Even Steve Jobs refused to let his kids have iPads.) The algorithm breeds acedia making us restless through a constant stream of constructed content, every new swipe promising what it can never deliver: peace. For this, we need to participate in eternal wisdom.

Organic Spiritual Technology

Amidst the digital flood, the Orthodox Church provides an ark for our lives, weathering the storms of every age, and purifying our senses through her time-tested therapies. While gawking at screens and tapping icons confuses us with a false sense of communion, venerating the Holy Icons and participating in Divine Services unites our hearts with the heavenly world. The Church's fasts encourage us to replace mindless consumption with noetic nutrition. In her steadfast presence, the Church prophetically shows forth the luminous silence of the eternal life to come, inviting all towards *theosis*: deification in Christ who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. St. Justin Popovich writes "The mission of the Church is to make every one of her faithful, organically and in person, one with the Person of Christ, to turn their sense of self into a sense of Christ". We shouldn't despair, nor yearn for older times. In the words of St. Ambrose of Optina: "Everyone is born at the time that is best suited for his or her salvation". With the tides of worldly technology swelling, we are wise to find sanctuary in the of the living body of the Church. By partaking in the Divine life, No more conformed to electric light of the world, our scattered attention is restored through the pure light of the Holy Trinity. Being transformed in the renewal our minds (Rom 12:2), possessing and possessed by the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16).

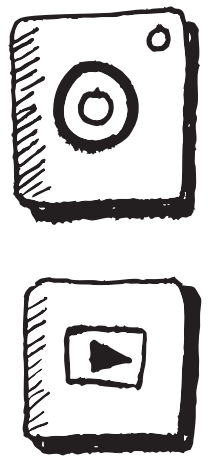
Let us attend!

"The psychological trials of dwellers in the last times will be equal to the physical trials of the martyrs. In order to face these trials, we must be living in a different world." - Fr. Seraphim Rose

Recommended Reading:

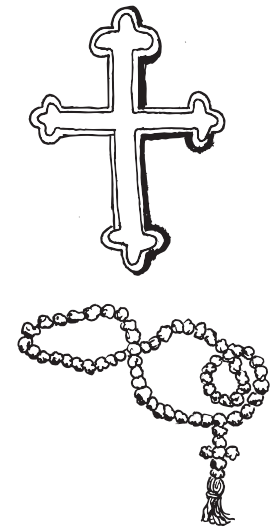
- *The New Media Epidemic* by Jean Claude Larchet
- *Despondency: The Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus* by Gabriel Bunge
- *The Shallows* by Nicholas Carr
- *The World Beyond Your Head* by Matthew Crawford
- *Amusing Ourselves to Death* by Neil Postman

Written and illustrated in 2025 by Rdr. Maximos, St. Herman of Alaska Orthodox Church, Port Townsend, WA



LEFT. TO. OUR. OWN.

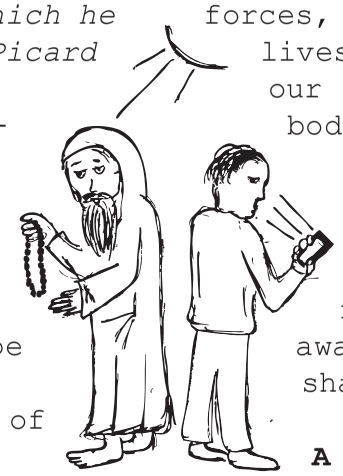
DEVICES



THE STRUGGLE FOR STILLNESS IN THE AGE OF DISTRACTION.

"This is why man is a stranger to himself today. He lacks what really belongs to him: the world of silence in which he can meet the inexplicable." -Max Picard

In the ancient world, encountering a man with his head bowed and thumb in motion invoked an icon of deep contemplation: a dedicated Christian reciting the Jesus Prayer, gently resting his thumb on each knot of a prayer rope and conversing with God.



Today, we see the same image of bowed heads and flitting thumbs, but the purpose is inverted: no longer a silent deepening, but a frantic and shallow escape. Instead of tentatively working through knotted prayer ropes, we clutch sleek phones and abandon ourselves to the whispers of the world. Instead of gathering our minds to the simple words of prayer, we scatter through images, fleeing like the prodigal from our true purpose of communion with the Existing One.

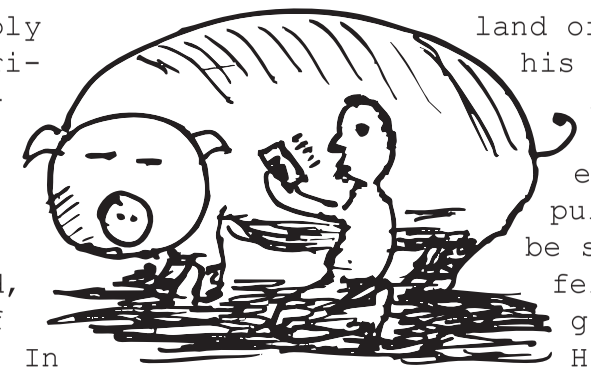
Media theorist Marshall McLuhan famously observed "the medium is the message" implying that it is not the content of our devices that truly alters us, but the form, the nature of the device itself, and the demands it makes on our attention. The screen, notifications, and infinite scrolling have radically altered our brains and our behavior. In this light, digital mediums are not just neutral messengers but powerful forces, shaping the patterns of our lives and shifting the balance of our senses away from natural, embodied perception. Totally removing ourselves from our devices has become practically impossible, and impractical for most, but to stay human, we must become more vigilant and aware of the ways these tools are shaping our souls.

A Spiritual Crisis

"Learn to know the spirit of the age, study it, so whenever possible you will be able to avoid its influence." - St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

In his prescient book The Shallows, Nicholas Carr writes: "The Net may be the single most powerful mind-altering technology that has ever come into use". The artificial environment it creates draws us away from incarnate virtues into a virtual reality, which becomes all consuming, affecting our relationships to ourselves, our neighbor and our Creator. The contemporary use of technology such as "smart" phones and the resulting social media threaten to become the default of our waking life. But this new normal isn't normal. The

digitization of every waking moment has hypnotized us into a hyper-reality of infinite cares, ceaselessly catering to our cravings, even creating new desires, ex nihilo.



The warfare is not simply psychological, but spiritual. Through the promise of a technological paradise, the invasive cyber-culture has systematically shattered our sense of personhood, creating a new world of organized distractions. In 2024, Americans spent an average of 5 hours per day on their phones, checking them, on average, every 4 minutes. While the railroad, telephone, and car changed our relationship to ourselves and our surroundings, nothing has so radically transformed our noetic life as much as the introduction of personal internet devices, to the extent that we are in danger of being shaped more by algorithms than the life of the Church.

The Destruction of Attention and Inner Stillness

The ancient, yet ever-relevant writings of the Desert Fathers teach that us that attention (prosoche) is the beginning of spiritual life and the root of repentance, going as far to say that distraction is the "original sin" of the mind. Adam's fall from Paradise began the moment he diverted his attention from God and attempted to grasp creation on his own. Patristic teachings and biblical literature echo our call back to Paradise as a call to attention: "Attend to thyself that there be no hidden, iniquitous word in your heart" (Deuteronomy 15:9). Without attention, prayer is impossible, and our repentance remains stuck on the surface, never digging deep enough, or becoming still enough to reach the roots of our passions. Being fixated on the surface of things we lose awareness of their deeper meanings and objectify things and people, seeing only that which satisfies our demands for pleasure.



We find a similar teaching in the story of the Prodigal son who left the homeland of his attention and dispersed his spiritual inheritance, casting it into the temporal things of this world, and ending up in a mire of compulsive desires that can never be satisfied. The substance referred to here is the very same grace that we receive through Holy Baptism and cultivate through attentive living in the Church. The ceaseless flow of images and information on our devices, tempts us from internal stillness, towards a mired mirage of the meaning of life.

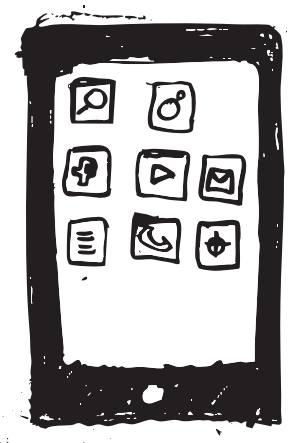
Losing our Vision



Fashioned as priests of creation, we were created as mediators between heaven and earth. The human, made in the image of God, is continually called to grow in likeness towards its archetype: Christ. This means uprooting the weeds in our heart, collecting our scattered attention, becoming clear conduits of God's energies and thereby sanctifying the world around us. Through black pocket mirrors we have constructed digital doppelgangers, idols of ourselves, and trusting in them, have become like them (Psalm 115:8), reducing our created depth to 1's and 0's. Living in the consequences of the Fall, we mediate from screen to screen, not knowing up from down. This makes a screen of the whole world, diminishing its dimensions to shallow appearances. In Adam there was no double-thought, he looked at things and saw them as they were. In our fallen state 'imagination' becomes mixed up with double think: we look at things and imagine something else. We define and fashion ourselves, distorting our self-image and thus the cosmic image, being trained to consume and be consumed by others. St. John Chrysostom writes in the 4th century what is relevant in the 21st: "Just as those who are in darkness are unaware of the nature of things, so too do those who live in sin fail to distinguish between things, they run towards shadows as towards reality."

Alone Together

Unable to live vulnerably with real neighbors, we have created our own virtual worlds to enclose ourselves. Virtual relationships are quickly replacing real relationships, excluding the need for a body to stay connected with others, yet at a major cost. Without the body, we lose the authentic struggle of awkwardness and vulnerability that comes with being in the same space as others. Instead, we open ourselves up to a legion of online relationships, fleeing our inner brokenness by multiplying our connections to strangers and inhabiting an echo chamber of fake personalities. These superficial relationships never touch the deeper recesses of the person where our loneliness is felt the strongest. 12% of Americans report having no close friends (2025).



The destruction of community life is both a result and cause of our dependance on devices. Walking around public spaces, we are surrounded by people pulled into their screens, fleeing the demands of seeing and being seen by others. In our homes, the use of devices divides attention away from our family relations. Childhood is shrinking. 58% of children now have their own tablet by age 4 (2024). It is common to see couples sitting next to each other, absorbed in their own private world of entertainment. We often choose to ignore the unpredictable presence of a real human in favor of predictable virtual ones. 71% of people spend more time with their device than with their significant other (2021). Our devices allow us to be contacted at any moment while we lose actual contact with those immediately next to us. Christ warns us: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Where is our treasure? Let us remind ourselves "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (Psalm 133:1)

The Incalculable Value of Silence

The Fathers of the Church teach that silence is the language of heaven. The heart, being the place of heaven, is opened and made pure by silence; Not an empty silence but a profoundly full silence that continually glorifies God. To remain in silence is simultaneously the simplest and most difficult endeavor, made impossible by the constant itching of notifications and imaginary demands from our devices. Distancing ourselves from silence separates us from God, who speaks in the "still, small voice"(Kings 19:12). The activists of the world shout: "Silence is violence!" and they are right. Real, living silence dismantles the webs of the world woven from vain cares, waking us from the narcotic of constant noise that numbs our self-knowledge.

We can rediscover the virtues of silence and solitude in the Orthodox practices of ceaseless prayer (hesychia) and watchfulness (nepsis). Through attentiveness to ourselves we learn to avoid demonic distractions, eventually coming to know our weaknesses and detect the traps of invasive thoughts. Without stillness and watchfulness self-knowledge is impossible.

