



## THE IDEA OF A VILLAGE REVISITED

February 2026

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

As many of you are well aware, over the years a significant number of families have come to dwell in the rural area surrounding our abbey. It is not yet a village in the truest sense, but a true village is surely taking shape. Many and varied are the reasons that brought these people to live near us, but one main reason was to be a part of what is sometimes referred to as the *back to the land movement*. Many of these families are now raising cattle and poultry and planting orchards. On a central area of thirty acres a cemetery has been established, and plans for a church, a parish hall, and even a school have been discussed. More recently, a *Catholic Land Movement Guild* has been established to promote traditional crafts that are part of the art of rural living.

Of course the material flight back to a rural setting is primarily a spiritual quest for the restoration of Christian culture: not only for the purpose of saving one's soul, but more immediately—of reclaiming one's sanity in a world that increasingly resembles a cultural madhouse. At the center of the whole project is the recognized advantage of living near a contemplative monastery, where day and night, prayers are offered to God and supplications sent up for the living and the dead.



Lately our “villagers” have been reading and discussing a new book by an English author, Paul Kingsnorth, *Against the Machine, On the Unmaking of Humanity*. It is an impressive analysis of the current state of what is left of Western culture—which is at heart, explains Kingsnorth, nothing but what was once Christendom. In many ways the insights of this book echo very similar ideas brought forth some decades ago by John Senior. Here is a brief quote from *Against the Machine* that is of particular interest to us at Clear Creek Abbey and to our neighbors. “The right place to be,” explains the author, “is surely in the woods, or in a monastery. Or in a monastery in the woods.”<sup>1</sup>

Kingsnorth well recognizes that this making of a village in order to counteract the unmaking of humanity through the seemingly unstoppable assault of mass technology, is not a mere pastime or a hobby. This is about the most serious questions of human existence, and this amid the terrible decline of society as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Kingsnorth, *Against the Machine: On the Unmaking of Humanity* (Penguin Random House, New York, 2025), p. 161.

The human spirit, like water, will find the level of its times. This is how it must be.

The only question worth asking in times like these is: *How should we live?*<sup>2</sup>

Among the many authors quoted in *Against the Machine*, one of them sums up neatly the whole challenge of our time. It was written by a less recent philosopher, but one who had truly prophetic insights about the future of the West. This Russian, a convert to the Orthodox faith, was exiled by the Bolsheviks in 1922. Here is the quote:

The will to power, to wellbeing, to wealth, triumphs over the will to holiness and to genius... Spirituality is on the wane, [in] a time of bourgeois ascendancy. The knight and the monk, the philosopher and the poet, have been superseded by a new type—the greedy bourgeois conqueror, organizer, and trader... In the new machine-made industrial-capitalist civilization of Europe and America, the spiritual culture...based on a sacred symbolism and sacred tradition, is being irrevocably annihilated.<sup>3</sup>



If there is anything to criticize about the book by Paul Kingsnorth, it is perhaps a certain lack of authentic Catholic Christian hope. The author is a fairly recent (2020) convert to the Romanian Orthodox Church and is no doubt still assimilating the incalculable treasures of the Faith. He points his readers in the right direction, but probably underestimates as yet the unconquerable majesty of the Kingdom of Heaven that is coming and which crushes under its feet—like the old serpent under the Immaculate foot of the Blessed Virgin—that terrible Machine, deadly but altogether doomed to destruction.

Finally, there is something about the idea of a true Christian Village, of a place close to the earth, where children can grow up in relative security and peace—far from the clutches of the Machine—a place that just won't die.

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<sup>2</sup> Op cit., page 166.

<sup>3</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Bourgeois Mind and Other Essays* (The Stanhope Press, 1934).