

Jonathan Pageau: Symbolism, Tradition, and Contemporary Cultural Engagement

I. Introduction: Jonathan Pageau - Artist, Thinker, Commentator

Jonathan Pageau emerges as a distinctive and multifaceted figure in contemporary discourse, operating at the intersection of art, religion, and cultural commentary. Primarily identified as a French-Canadian liturgical artist specializing in Eastern Orthodox icon carving, his activities extend significantly beyond the studio.¹ Pageau is also a prominent public speaker, writer, YouTuber, the editor of the *Orthodox Arts Journal*, and the founder of Symbolic World Press.¹ These varied roles are not disparate pursuits but rather integrated components of a unified project centered on the exploration and promotion of symbolism as a fundamental lens for understanding reality.

The core of Pageau's work revolves around articulating and advocating for what he terms the "symbolic worldview".⁶ This perspective posits that the cosmos is inherently structured by deep, interlocking patterns (*logoî*) that embody and convey meaning.² He argues that these patterns are most clearly discernible in traditional religious narratives, mythology, and sacred art, and that recognizing them is crucial for navigating the complexities and perceived "meaning crisis" of contemporary Western culture.⁶ Pageau's approach is not merely interpretive; he presents this symbolic structure as an objective feature of reality itself.¹⁰

His influence has grown considerably, particularly through his online presence on platforms like YouTube and through high-profile collaborations, most notably with Canadian psychologist and cultural commentator Jordan Peterson.² These engagements have positioned Pageau as a significant voice in ongoing conversations that attempt to bridge traditional religious frameworks, particularly Eastern Orthodoxy, with critiques of modern secular culture.⁴ The confluence of his roles as artist, speaker, writer, and publisher appears strategic; by actively creating symbolic art (icons), interpreting symbols publicly (videos, talks), and disseminating symbolic narratives through his press, Pageau embodies the worldview he advocates.¹ This integration of practice and commentary lends a perceived authenticity and coherence to his message, moving beyond purely academic or theoretical discussion into lived demonstration. This report will provide a comprehensive analysis of Jonathan Pageau, examining his biographical trajectory, core philosophical tenets, artistic contributions, public platforms, significant works, intellectual influences, critical reception, and recent activities, based on available information.

II. Biographical Trajectory: From Contemporary Art to Orthodox Iconography

Jonathan Pageau's life path reflects a deliberate turn from contemporary artistic modes towards traditional religious art and thought, a journey that informs his public work and critique of modernity.

A. Origins and Early Life

Born in Montreal, Quebec, Canada on June 30, 1975, Pageau is of French-Canadian heritage.¹ He spent his formative years in Quebec's Eastern Townships, near the United States border.¹¹ His upbringing was initially shaped by Quebec's historically dominant Catholic culture, though his family later became Protestant.² His father served as a Baptist pastor before transitioning towards psychology.¹¹ This shift led the family to move, including a period during Pageau's teenage years spent in Wheaton, Illinois, while his father pursued studies there.¹¹ French remains his first language and the language of his home life, creating a contrast with his professional life, which is conducted primarily in English.¹¹

B. Education and Artistic Training

Pageau pursued formal artistic training at Concordia University in Montreal, enrolling in the Painting and Drawing program.² He graduated with distinction in the late 1990s, having been trained in Postmodern approaches to art.²

C. Disillusionment and Search

Following graduation, Pageau established a studio but quickly grew disenchanted with the contemporary art world.² He described feeling alienated by the "aloofness" of the art he was producing and struggled with the "schizophrenia" of attempting to reconcile his Christian faith with the prevailing postmodern artistic milieu.² This dissatisfaction culminated in him breaking decisively with contemporary art and discarding the work he had created during that period.² This artistic disillusionment formed part of a broader personal and spiritual crisis he experienced in his twenties.¹³

D. Pivotal Experiences

A significant period in his twenties involved moving to Africa with his wife, Marti Vradiak (who is from Slovakia), under the auspices of a Mennonite charity.² They spent a total of seven years on the continent, with four years in the Congo and three years in Kenya.² This experience appears to have been formative, though specific

details of its impact on his later thought are less elaborated in the provided materials.

E. Conversion and Theological Studies

Pageau's spiritual journey led him away from his Protestant background towards Eastern Orthodoxy.¹³ He describes searching for a "deeper and more integrated Faith," feeling something was missing in the Baptist churches he attended.¹³ His discovery of medieval art and, crucially, Orthodox icons became a pivotal moment.⁵ He perceived icons not merely as aesthetic objects but as art that was "powerful and integrated while being theological," specifically "Christological," rooted in the Incarnation and the restoration of the divine image in humanity.¹³ This discovery rekindled his passion for art within a traditional framework. Upon returning from Africa, he pursued formal studies in Orthodox Theology and Iconology at the University of Sherbrooke.²

F. Embracing Icon Carving

Beginning around 2003, Pageau specialized in the practice of carved iconography, the art form for which he would become known.² He attributes the specific choice of carving over painting partly to "providence" and a series of opportune circumstances.¹³ His work involves creating various liturgical objects, often using wood and stone (particularly steatite).² He also began teaching wood carving and iconography, sharing his craft through seminars and workshops.²

G. Family Context

Pageau resides in his birth city of Montreal with his wife and their three children.² His brother, Matthieu Pageau, is also engaged in exploring symbolism, albeit from a different disciplinary background.² Matthieu is identified as a mathematician and computer scientist who has written about symbolic patterns, notably in the Book of Genesis, and occasionally collaborates or appears in discussions with Jonathan.²

Pageau's personal trajectory—from postmodern art training, through disillusionment and spiritual searching, to the embrace of Orthodox tradition and the integrated practice of icon carving—closely mirrors the cultural critique he offers publicly. His biography functions almost as a narrative archetype for the solution he proposes to the contemporary "meaning crisis": a return to traditional frameworks and integrated ways of living.² This personal arc lends considerable weight and perceived authenticity to his message, suggesting it is rooted in lived experience rather than mere intellectual abstraction. Furthermore, while he ultimately embraced Orthodoxy, his Baptist upbringing, with its emphasis on personal conviction and direct communication of faith, may subtly inform his accessible communication style and his

ability to connect with audiences beyond strictly Orthodox circles, potentially bridging evangelical and traditionalist sensibilities.⁷

III. The Core Philosophy: Understanding the Symbolic World

Jonathan Pageau's public intellectual work is centered on the articulation and exploration of what he calls "The Symbolic World." This concept serves as both a cosmological framework and a hermeneutic lens for interpreting reality, scripture, culture, and art.

A. Central Concept: The Symbolic World

The fundamental premise of Pageau's philosophy is that reality itself is intrinsically symbolic.² He posits that the cosmos is not a random collection of matter or events, but rather a structured reality composed of interconnected patterns, which he often refers to using the Orthodox theological term *logoi* (singular: *logos*).¹⁰ These patterns are not merely subjective interpretations but are inherent structures that embody and convey meaning.² Understanding the world symbolically, therefore, means recognizing and engaging with these underlying patterns as the fundamental constituents of existence.⁶

B. Key Tenets

Several key tenets define Pageau's symbolic worldview:

- **Patterns and Hierarchy:** Reality operates through discernible patterns, often exhibiting fractal qualities (where similar patterns repeat at different scales) and nested hierarchies.²⁰ Common hierarchical dichotomies he explores include heaven/earth (representing meaning/identity and manifestation/multiplicity), center/margin (representing core identity and periphery/potential), and unity/multiplicity.¹⁰ He argues that recognizing these hierarchical structures is essential for navigating the world coherently.²
- **Inherent Meaning:** Meaning is not something humans project onto a neutral world; rather, it is embedded within the symbolic structure of reality itself.² Pageau suggests that humans are naturally attuned to perceive the world this way, possessing an innate religious sensibility, but that this capacity has been obscured or suppressed by modern rationalism and materialism.²
- **Role of Symbols:** In this framework, symbols are not simply arbitrary signs or metaphors. They are understood to participate in the reality they represent, acting as conduits or manifestations of deeper patterns.²⁶ Consequently, symbols are vital tools for human consciousness to grasp and interact meaningfully with

the world.²

- **Art's Purpose:** The function of art, particularly traditional and liturgical art, is to reveal these underlying symbolic patterns and structures.² Pageau describes art's role as one of "uniting opposites," bringing disparate elements into a meaningful whole that reflects the cosmic order.² This contrasts sharply with his view of much contemporary art, which he sees as often characterized by irony, deconstruction, and subjective expression disconnected from broader meaning.¹³
- **Scripture and Myth:** The Bible, along with traditional myths and fairy tales from various cultures, are considered primary repositories of these fundamental symbolic patterns.² These narratives are valued not just for their literal content but for their capacity to encode and transmit timeless truths about reality, human nature, and the divine through symbolic language.

C. Critique of Modernity

The symbolic worldview serves as a platform for a critique of key aspects of modernity. Pageau contrasts the richness and coherence he perceives in a symbolic understanding with the perceived "disenchantment," fragmentation, and "meaning crisis" resulting from modern materialism, rationalism, and secularism.⁶ His work implicitly and sometimes explicitly pushes back against postmodern deconstruction, advocating instead for a recovery of traditional structures of meaning.³⁰

D. Relation to Orthodoxy

Pageau explicitly roots his symbolic framework in Eastern Orthodox Christian theology and patristic thought.¹⁰ He frequently references the concept of the Divine Logos (Christ) and the *logoi* (the inner principles or meanings of created things) as articulated by figures like St. Maximus the Confessor.⁹ He also draws on the tradition of symbolic or allegorical interpretation of scripture found in Fathers like St. Gregory of Nyssa (particularly his *Life of Moses*) and St. Ephrem the Syrian.⁹ He presents this symbolic understanding not as a personal innovation but as a recovery of an authentic and central aspect of traditional Christian cosmology.¹⁰

The "symbolic world" concept functions as an ambitious meta-narrative, attempting to re-integrate disparate fields of modern knowledge and experience—including science (e.g., referencing fractals²³), psychology (evident in his dialogues with Peterson⁶), art, and religion—under a unifying, traditional cosmological umbrella. By proposing an ordered, meaningful structure inherent in reality itself, it offers a seemingly coherent alternative to philosophical positions perceived as dominant in the contemporary West: namely, strict scientific materialism on one hand, and postmodern relativism on

the other.¹² This integrative effort directly addresses the "meaning crisis" by suggesting a path back to a perceived enchanted and purposeful cosmos.⁶

However, the strong emphasis on "patterns," "hierarchy," and concepts like "center" and "margin" inherently carries socio-political resonance.² While often presented as metaphysical or cosmological descriptions, these concepts readily map onto discussions of social order, tradition, and authority. Pageau's critique of contemporary culture frequently targets what he sees as the inversion of traditional hierarchies, such as the elevation of marginal identities to central cultural importance.¹⁴ This alignment is further underscored by his associations with conservative thinkers and platforms.⁴ Thus, the philosophical framework, while rooted in theology and cosmology, naturally lends itself to, or at least resonates strongly with, a conservative socio-political orientation emphasizing order, tradition, and established structures.

IV. Artistic Vocation: Icon Carving and Liturgical Art

Jonathan Pageau's identity as a thinker and commentator is deeply intertwined with his practice as a liturgical artist, specifically an icon carver in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. This artistic vocation is not merely a biographical detail but a foundational element of his worldview and public message.

A. Practice and Studio

Pageau is recognized as a professional icon carver, having specialized in this demanding art form since 2003.¹ His work involves carving traditional images, typically Eastern Orthodox icons and other liturgical objects, using materials such as wood and stone, with a particular focus on steatite (soapstone) carving.² He established Pageau Studios for this purpose.¹⁷ In recent years, he has shifted away from accepting individual commissions for his carvings.¹⁷ Instead, acquiring original art from his studio, where he works with a full-time assistant named David Gagnon, primarily occurs through participation in his Patreon community, which offers patrons access to original pieces, drawings, and signed prints, as well as exclusive auctions held periodically.¹⁷

B. Philosophy of Liturgical Art

Pageau articulates a distinct philosophy regarding the purpose and nature of icons and traditional Christian art. He views this art as fundamentally theological and Christological, directly stemming from the Incarnation—God providing an image of Himself in Christ.¹³ Unlike contemporary art, which he often characterizes as marked by irony, individualism, ambiguity, and detachment², he sees traditional liturgical art

as integrated, participatory, and oriented towards community.² Its aim is not self-expression but to facilitate an encounter with the sacred, revealing the underlying patterns of reality and participating in the cosmic order.¹³ He describes the role of art, particularly in this traditional sense, as one of "uniting opposites," bringing harmony and meaning out of complexity.² Conservative commentator Bradley Anderson framed Pageau's iconographic work as a response to the perceived "dead ends" of modernism, offering instead art that invites community engagement with "reverence and humility".²

C. Teaching and Advocacy

Beyond his own carving, Pageau is actively involved in teaching the craft. He has taught icon carving through organizations like Hexaemeron⁵ and offers exclusive online icon carving classes, adapted from previous in-person seminars.¹⁷ He is also an advocate for the revival and appreciation of liturgical arts in the modern world, seeing them as vital expressions of faith and meaning.¹¹

D. Specific Works/Exhibitions

His carvings have been commissioned by churches, bishops, priests, and lay individuals across the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia.⁵ He has participated in several exhibitions showcasing icons and liturgical art.² While specific major commissions are not detailed extensively in the provided material, an example mentioned is a wooden cross featuring carved stone icons created in collaboration with architect Andrew Gould in 2016.² His work has been shown in museums and published in various books and periodicals.³

Pageau's artistic practice serves as more than just an illustration of his philosophical ideas; it appears to be foundational to them. His turn towards Orthodoxy and traditional art was simultaneous and interconnected.⁵ The discipline inherent in icon carving, the adherence to tradition, the theological underpinnings, and the communal context of liturgical art provide a concrete, embodied grounding for his more abstract theoretical explorations of symbolism, hierarchy, and meaning. The very act of carving an icon, following established canons and participating in a sacred tradition, can be seen as a direct engagement with, and participation in, the "symbolic world" he describes.¹³ This tangible practice lends credibility and depth to his verbal and written discourse, anchoring it in a non-discursive tradition of making and participating.

V. Platforms and Public Presence: Disseminating the Symbolic Worldview

Jonathan Pageau has cultivated a significant public presence, utilizing a range of modern digital platforms alongside traditional means to disseminate his ideas about symbolism, religion, and culture.

A. Core Digital Platforms

- **YouTube:** The primary vehicle for Pageau's public commentary is his YouTube channel, "The Symbolic World," launched around 2017.² This channel features videos exploring symbolic patterns in scripture (Genesis, Exodus, etc.), mythology, religious traditions, contemporary culture (movies, events, social trends), and art.⁷ It serves as a platform for both solo lectures and dialogues with other thinkers. His subscriber count reflects a substantial following, reported at various points as 257k, 259k, and 261k.⁴ A secondary channel, "Jonathan Pageau - Clips," repurposes shorter segments from his main content.³⁴
- **Podcast:** Complementing the YouTube channel is "The Symbolic World" podcast, which makes his discussions available in audio format, further extending his reach.¹
- **Websites:** Pageau maintains two primary websites. *The Symbolic World* (thesymbolicworld.com) hosts his blog, offers exclusive content for subscribers/patrons, includes a community forum for discussion, lists courses, and features an online store.¹ *Pageau Carvings* (pageaucarvings.com) focuses on his artistic work, providing information about his studio, linking to his Patreon, and detailing online carving classes.²

B. Publications and Editorial Roles

- **Orthodox Arts Journal:** Pageau serves as an editor and regular contributor to the *Orthodox Arts Journal*, an online publication dedicated to contemporary Orthodox Christian arts.¹
- **Symbolic World Press:** He founded his own publishing house, Symbolic World Press, to produce books aligned with his focus on symbolism, particularly targeting genres like graphic novels and fairy tales.¹

C. Community and Support

Pageau utilizes Patreon as a key platform for community engagement and financial support. Patrons gain access to exclusive content (videos, Q&A sessions), receive original art or prints depending on their support level, and can participate in exclusive auctions.⁹ The Symbolic World website also hosts community features, fostering discussion among his audience.⁹

D. Public Speaking

Beyond digital platforms, Pageau is an active public speaker, sought after for conferences, workshops, and lectures at various institutions.⁴ Venues have included universities like Cambridge University and Princeton Seminary, Orthodox institutions like St. Tikhon's Seminary, Anglican colleges like Wycliffe College, Catholic organizations like the Catholic Art Institute, classical education conferences like the Great Hearts Symposium, and events hosted by platforms like The Daily Wire.⁴

E. Social Media Presence

He maintains a presence on major social media platforms, with reported follower counts including 82k on Instagram and 79k on X (formerly Twitter).⁴

Table 1: Jonathan Pageau Platform Overview and Reach

Platform	Role/Function	Audience Metric (Approx. & Source)
YouTube (Main Channel)	Primary video content, lectures, dialogues on symbolism, culture, religion	261K subscribers ⁷
YouTube (Clips Channel)	Short excerpts from main channel content	43.8K subscribers ³⁴
Podcast (Symbolic World)	Audio versions of discussions, interviews	794 ratings (4.8 stars) ²²
Website (Symbolic World)	Blog, exclusive content, community forum, courses, store	N/A
Website (Pageau Carvings)	Artist portfolio, studio info, online classes, Patreon link	N/A
Symbolic World Press	Publishing house for books (graphic novels, fairy tales)	N/A
Orthodox Arts Journal	Editor, contributor	N/A

Patreon	Funding, exclusive content, art distribution, community	N/A (Monetary/Patron count not public)
X (formerly Twitter)	Short-form commentary, announcements, engagement	79k followers ⁴
Instagram	Visual content (art?), announcements, engagement	82k followers ⁴
Facebook	Announcements, engagement	17k followers ⁴

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Pageau's multi-platform strategy demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of contemporary media ecosystems. He leverages the broad reach of YouTube for initial engagement, offers deeper dives via his podcast and website, fosters community and secures funding through Patreon and exclusive website content, and produces tangible cultural products via his press.¹ This synergistic approach allows him to build and sustain a dedicated following and a viable career centered around traditionalist ideas, adeptly utilizing modern communication tools rather than eschewing them.

VI. Significant Works and Contributions

Jonathan Pageau's influence stems not only from his commentary but also from his tangible contributions as an artist and author. His works embody the principles he discusses, ranging from liturgical art to narrative publications.

A. Liturgical Art

Pageau's primary artistic contribution lies in his work as an icon carver.¹ He is recognized as a world-renowned liturgical artist whose carvings contribute to the life of Orthodox Christian communities and private collectors globally.⁴ His efforts are seen as part of a movement to revive traditional Christian art forms in the contemporary world.⁴ His work has been featured in exhibitions and museums, signifying its recognition within both religious and artistic spheres.² While specific iconic pieces are not exhaustively listed, his body of work over nearly two decades represents a significant contribution to contemporary liturgical art.

B. Published Books (Symbolic World Press & Self-Published)

Through his own Symbolic World Press and self-publishing efforts, Pageau has

authored and co-authored several books, primarily focusing on retelling and interpreting traditional narratives through a symbolic lens:

- **God's Dog Series:** A graphic novel project co-created with his brother Matthieu, offering an imaginative retelling of the life of St. Christopher, often depicted as dog-headed in some traditions.¹³ The series aims to explore themes of monstrosity, sainthood, order, and chaos in a visually engaging format.¹³ Published volumes include *God's Dog: Monster* (2022) and *GodsDog: Warrior* (2024), along with a companion volume *Secrets of GodsDog* (2022).² The project originated as a film pitch before being adapted into a graphic novel format.¹³
- **Fairy Tale Series:** Pageau has embarked on a project to retell classic fairy tales, aiming to highlight their deep symbolic structures while remaining faithful to their traditional essence.⁴ The stated goal is to produce works that are enjoyable for children but also contain hidden layers of meaning for adults, counteracting modern deconstructive or overly didactic approaches to these stories.³⁰ The first in a planned eight-book series is *The Tale of Snow White and the Widow Queen* (2023), featuring illustrations by Heather Pollington.² A companion analysis, *Symbolism of Snow White* (2023), was also released.⁴ Another title in the series is *Jack and the Fallen Giants* (2024).⁴
- **Symbolic World Press Mission:** The publishing venture itself represents a significant contribution, aiming to "reclaim the storytelling landscape" by producing books that are aware of the contemporary cultural moment yet deeply committed to honoring the traditional roots and symbolic richness of ancient stories.⁹

C. Notable YouTube Content/Series

While specific videos gain traction (e.g., analysis of the Olympics opening ceremony⁸ or Lil Nas X's "Montero" video³³), Pageau has also produced structured series exploring foundational themes. These include introductory explanations of symbolism ("Start Here: What is Symbolism?" playlist¹⁸), explorations of biblical books like Genesis and Exodus⁴, discussions on "Universal History" through a symbolic lens²⁶, and analyses applying symbolic concepts like fractals.³¹

D. Orthodox Arts Journal Contributions

His writings for the *Orthodox Arts Journal* constitute another body of work, where he applies his symbolic analysis to specific icons (e.g., Nativity, Last Judgement, Holy Week icons), discusses the state of contemporary liturgical arts, interviews other artists and composers, and reflects on the relationship between sacred art and

culture.²⁷

Table 2: Published Books by Jonathan Pageau

Title	Co-author/Illustrator	Publisher	Year	Genre/Type
<i>God's' Dog: Monster</i>	Matthieu Pageau (co-creator)	Self-Published/SWP	2022	Graphic Novel
<i>Secrets of GodsDog</i>		Self-Published/SWP	2022	Companion/Analysis
<i>The Tale of Snow White and the Widow Queen</i>	Heather Pollington (Illustrator)	Symbolic World Press	2023	Fairy Tale Retelling (Illustrated Children's)
<i>Symbolism of Snow White</i>		Symbolic World Press	2023	Analysis
<i>GodsDog: Warrior</i>	Matthieu Pageau (co-creator)	Symbolic World Press	2024	Graphic Novel
<i>Jack and the Fallen Giants</i>		Symbolic World Press	2024	Fairy Tale Retelling

(Publisher details might vary slightly between sources/editions, SWP = Symbolic World Press)

Pageau's expansion into publishing, particularly with the *God's Dog* graphic novels and the fairy tale series, marks a significant strategic development. It represents a move beyond commentary *on* existing culture towards the active creation and shaping *of* culture.¹³ By producing new (or newly retold) narratives imbued with the symbolic structures he values, aimed at a broad audience including children, he is attempting to directly counter and provide alternatives to the contemporary cultural trends he critiques, such as the perceived deconstruction or politicization of traditional stories.³⁰ This shift from analysis to intervention signifies an ambition to actively participate in the "re-enchantment" of culture through the production of resonant

symbolic works.

VII. Intellectual Constellation: Influences, Dialogues, and Critiques

Jonathan Pageau's thought is shaped by a distinct set of influences and situated within a network of contemporary dialogues and debates. Understanding this intellectual constellation is key to grasping the context and trajectory of his work.

A. Primary Influences

- **Eastern Orthodoxy:** This is the bedrock of Pageau's worldview. His thinking is deeply informed by Orthodox Christian theology, liturgical practice, iconography, and the writings of the Church Fathers.¹⁰ Figures like St. Maximus the Confessor (on the Logos and *logoi*), St. Gregory of Nyssa (on symbolic interpretation, e.g., *Life of Moses*), St. Isaac the Syrian (on paradise), and St. Ephrem the Syrian (on Genesis symbolism) are explicitly or implicitly foundational to his understanding of cosmic symbolism.⁹
- **Scripture:** The Bible serves as a primary source text for his symbolic analysis. He engages deeply with biblical narratives, particularly Genesis, Exodus, the Gospels, and the Book of Revelation, viewing them as key expressions of the fundamental patterns of reality.²
- **Mythology and Folklore:** Pageau draws extensively on world mythology and folklore as repositories of universal symbolic patterns. His reading list and discussions reference Ancient Near Eastern myths (like the Epic of Gilgamesh), Greek mythology (Hesiod, Homer), Roman narratives (Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), the Alexander Romance, Arthurian legends (the Matter of Britain), and pre-Christian European tales (Beowulf, Nordic Sagas, Celtic mythology).⁹
- **Traditional Art and Symbolism:** His background as an iconographer provides a direct connection to the principles of traditional Christian symbolism and medieval art, which he sees as embodying a more integrated and meaningful approach to representation than modern art forms.⁹

B. Key Collaborations and Dialogues

Pageau actively engages with a range of contemporary thinkers and platforms:

- **Jordan Peterson:** This is arguably his most prominent association. Pageau has appeared frequently on Peterson's podcast, participated in his global speaking tours, and contributes to the Peterson Academy.² Their dialogues often explore

shared interests in symbolism, psychology, mythology, the "meaning crisis," and the relevance of religious narratives.⁶ Notably, some observers perceived Peterson's apparent turn towards religious faith as being influenced by his conversations with Pageau.²

- **Bishop Robert Barron:** Collaboration with the prominent American Catholic bishop is mentioned, indicating dialogue across Orthodox-Catholic lines.²
- **The Daily Wire:** Pageau contributes to documentaries produced by the conservative media company (e.g., *Exodus*, *The Gospels*, *End of the World*, *Foundations of the West*) and has appeared on associated programs like *The Ben Shapiro Show*.⁴
- **Other Intellectual Figures:** He engages in discussions with a network of thinkers often associated with exploring meaning, tradition, and cognition, including cognitive scientist John Vervaeke, theologian Paul Vanderklay, his brother Matthieu Pageau, liturgical architect Andrew Gould, historian Tom Holland, and podcasters/commentators like Russell Brand and Matt Fradd (*Pints with Aquinas*).⁴ He has also expressed appreciation for the work of figures like N.T. Wright on resurrection.⁴⁹

C. Engagement with Other Ideas/Figures

- **Critique:** Pageau's work inherently critiques Modernism, Postmodernism, secularism, materialism, and rationalism, viewing them as contributing to cultural fragmentation and disenchantment.² He also critiques specific contemporary cultural trends he sees as problematic, such as certain aspects of identity politics, "woke" ideology, and the perceived subversion of traditional narratives in media like Disney remakes.¹⁴
- **Reference/Comparison:** Figures like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien are often invoked as comparisons or subjects of analysis, representing authors who successfully integrated Christian themes and traditional storytelling.¹¹ There are suggestions of engagement with Jungian archetypes, although Pageau might distance himself from Jung directly, and some critics perceive a Jungian lens in his work.⁴⁸ The work of René Girard on mimetic theory, sacrifice, and scapegoating is also relevant; Pageau has appeared in discussions related to Girard, and Girardian concepts sometimes appear in analyses involving Pageau or his sphere, suggesting awareness and potential engagement, though perhaps not foundational integration.¹⁹

Pageau occupies a distinctive intellectual niche. He grounds his work firmly in pre-modern sources, primarily Eastern Orthodox Christianity, yet actively deploys these traditional concepts in dialogue with contemporary thinkers (often conservative

or classically liberal) and applies them to current cultural phenomena via modern platforms.⁴ This bridging function makes traditional ideas accessible within current debates but simultaneously exposes his work to potential misinterpretation or instrumentalization by different audiences and invites criticism from both traditionalist purists concerned about adaptation and secular/progressive critics wary of his associations and conclusions.¹⁴

Regarding specific influences like René Girard, while Girardian themes of sacrifice and scapegoating are occasionally referenced in contexts related to Pageau⁵⁴, his core symbolic framework appears more heavily reliant on the hierarchical, cosmological patterns derived from Orthodox Patristics (especially St. Maximus) and the symbolic interpretation of Genesis.² Mimetic theory does not seem to be the primary engine driving his interpretations. Some analyses suggest a potential tension or lack of deep integration between Pageau's Neoplatonic/Patristic cosmology and Girard's focus on mimetic violence and the scapegoat mechanism.²⁰ Girardian thought may thus represent a parallel or occasionally intersecting influence rather than a foundational component of Pageau's specific symbolic system.

VIII. Reception and Critical Analysis: Praise and Controversy

Jonathan Pageau's work has garnered both significant appreciation and pointed criticism, reflecting his engagement with sensitive topics at the intersection of religion, culture, and tradition.

A. Points of Praise

- **Insightful Symbolic Analysis:** Pageau is widely recognized for his ability to provide deep, often illuminating interpretations of symbols found in religious texts, myths, fairy tales, art, and contemporary cultural phenomena.⁴ Many find his symbolic lens a valuable tool for uncovering underlying meanings and connections often missed in conventional analyses.
- **Addressing Meaning Crisis:** His work resonates strongly with audiences experiencing a sense of meaninglessness or fragmentation in modern secular society.³ He is praised for offering a coherent framework and a path towards "re-enchantment" by reconnecting with traditional sources of meaning.
- **Revival of Tradition:** Pageau is appreciated for his role in reviving interest in and understanding of traditional forms, including Eastern Orthodox theology, liturgical art (especially icon carving), and classic narratives like fairy tales.² His efforts are seen as preserving and revitalizing valuable cultural and spiritual heritage.
- **Articulate Communication:** He is often valued for his ability to communicate complex theological and philosophical ideas in an engaging manner, particularly

through his videos and public speaking¹², although this is sometimes counterbalanced by criticism of verbosity.⁴⁸

B. Points of Criticism and Controversy

Pageau's work is not without significant controversy, particularly concerning his theological interpretations and methodology:

- **Theological Interpretation (Orthodoxy Debates):** A notable stream of criticism comes from within Eastern Orthodox circles.²⁶ Critics accuse him of interpretations that deviate from traditional Orthodox teaching. Specific points raised include:
 - *Symbolism vs. Literal Truth:* The assertion that Pageau prioritizes symbolic truth to the detriment of the literal truth of Holy Scripture, which critics argue is essential to Orthodox belief.²⁶ His phrasing "what is really meant is..." followed by symbolic explication is seen as potentially undermining the text's direct meaning.²⁶
 - *Deviation from Holy Fathers:* Offering interpretations described as "bespoke" symbolism that are either not found in, or go beyond, the established teachings of the Church Fathers, implying his understanding surpasses traditional authority.²⁶
 - *Views on Angels/Demons:* Specific claims, such as describing angels and demons as "collective consciences," are cited as contradicting the traditional Orthodox understanding of them as distinct beings.²⁶
 - *External Frameworks:* Accusations that he employs external, modern frameworks—such as psychological perspectives potentially influenced by Carl Jung (a comparison Pageau might reject) or even postmodern approaches—to interpret or justify Orthodox teachings.²⁶
 - *Metaphysical Stance:* Being critiqued for remaining within a "pre-critical substantiality" or pre-modern metaphysics, seen as philosophically outdated by some critics informed by later philosophical developments (e.g., Hegelianism).⁴⁸
- **Methodology:** His symbolic interpretations are sometimes criticized for methodological weaknesses, including vagueness in defining key abstract concepts, making large logical leaps between arguments, and offering interpretations that lack clear criteria for validation or falsification.²⁴ Critics question the objective basis and rules governing his symbolic readings.²⁴
- **Potential Biases:** Accusations of bias have been raised, including claims of editorial bias in his analyses²⁶ and, in at least one instance, misogyny.⁴⁸
- **Associations:** His close collaboration with Jordan Peterson and engagement with

conservative platforms like The Daily Wire draw criticism from those who disagree with the politics or other views associated with these figures and outlets.¹⁴

- **Communication Style:** While praised by some for articulateness, others find his style overly verbose, employing "word salad" that can obscure meaning.⁴⁸

C. Counterarguments/Defenses (from snippets)

Defenders of Pageau, often engaging directly with these criticisms, offer several counterarguments:

- *Symbolism and Reality:* They argue that symbolic truth and literal truth are not mutually exclusive within Orthodox tradition; something can be both historically real and symbolically significant (e.g., the Eucharist).²⁶ Pageau's use of "symbol" is argued to point towards a deeper, participatory reality, not mere metaphor.²⁶
- *Patristic Roots:* Defenses assert that Pageau's symbolic approach is, in fact, deeply rooted in Orthodox Patristic thought, citing figures like St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Isaac the Syrian as precedents for his methodology.²⁶
- *Traditional Interpretation Methods:* It is pointed out that symbolic and allegorical interpretation (e.g., the four senses of scripture) has a long history within Christian, including Orthodox, tradition, predating modernism.²⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses* is often cited as a key example.²⁶
- *Audience Adaptation:* Some suggest his communication style might be adapted for a broader, non-Orthodox, or even non-religious audience seeking meaning, necessitating a different approach than intra-Orthodox theological discourse.²⁶
- *Clerical Engagement:* The fact that Pageau engages in dialogue with respected Orthodox clergy who appear receptive to his ideas is sometimes raised, suggesting his views are not entirely outside the bounds of acceptable discourse within the Church.²⁶

The controversies surrounding Pageau's work illuminate a fundamental tension faced by many contemporary traditionalist thinkers and communities. This tension lies in navigating the challenge of maintaining theological fidelity and historical continuity while engaging meaningfully with the language, platforms, and intellectual currents of the modern and postmodern world.²⁶ Pageau operates directly on this fault line, attempting to translate and apply ancient wisdom to contemporary problems using modern media. His popularity suggests this resonates with many, while the criticisms highlight the inherent difficulties and potential pitfalls of such an endeavor, particularly the risk of being perceived as either compromising tradition or failing to adequately address modern critiques.²⁶

IX. Current Trajectory: Recent Activities and Statements (2024-2025)

Jonathan Pageau maintains an active public profile, with recent activities indicating a consolidation of his core themes and an increasing application of his symbolic framework to contemporary cultural and political issues.

A. Content Production

Pageau continues to produce regular content for his primary platform, The Symbolic World YouTube channel and podcast.⁹ Recent topics (early 2025) demonstrate engagement with current anxieties and technological developments, including discussions on transhumanism (with Joe Allen), the nature of identity after postmodernism (with Mary Harrington), AI, political implications of Christianity, and analyses of cultural products like the TV show *Severance* and Disney's anticipated *Snow White* remake.⁹ He maintains engagement with his supporters through regular Patron-only Q&A sessions and exclusive video content covering topics like the symbolism of fractals, interpretations of biblical passages (e.g., 1 Timothy on women being "saved through childbearing"), and reflections on current events.³¹

B. Publications and Projects

Symbolic World Press remains active. 2024 saw the release of *GodsDog: Warrior* (the second volume in the graphic novel series) and *Jack and the Fallen Giants* (part of the fairy tale series).⁴ Promotional efforts for existing titles, such as offering limited edition box sets of *Snow White and the Widow Queen*, continue.⁵⁰ Behind-the-scenes updates suggest ongoing work on future book projects.³⁶

C. Courses and Teaching

Pageau is expanding his educational offerings. In Spring 2025, he launched a multi-week online "Symbolism Masterclass" designed to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding his symbolic worldview.²² Other courses offered through his platform include explorations of specific symbolic domains, such as a course on J.R.R. Tolkien's *Legendarium* taught by associate Richard Rohlin.⁵² His involvement with the Peterson Academy also continues.⁴³

D. Public Appearances and Collaborations

He remains an active public speaker and participant in conferences and forums. Notably, he participated in the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) Forum,

contributing a paper on identity in the digital age and appearing in discussions, including with Jordan Peterson.³¹ His involvement with classical education conferences also continues.³⁷ He continues to contribute to content for Daily Wire+, such as *The Gospels* series.³⁵

E. Recent Statements/Themes

His recent commentary reflects ongoing engagement with several key themes:

- **Cultural Polarization:** He addresses the increasing polarization of Western societies, expressing skepticism about finding a middle ground and acknowledging the need to push back against perceived cultural extremes, particularly concerning issues like transgender ideology and child transition.⁵⁷
- **Critique of Modern Storytelling:** He continues to critique contemporary storytelling, especially for children, lamenting what he sees as heavy-handed, politicized moralizing and ugliness, contrasting it with the reverence and beauty he advocates for in retelling traditional tales.³⁹
- **Technology and Identity:** A significant focus is on the impact of technology on human identity, including the challenges posed by the digital world, AI, transhumanism, and what he frames as modernity's dangerous quest for forbidden knowledge (linking UFOs, AI, psychedelics).⁹
- **Importance of Tradition:** He consistently emphasizes the necessity of tradition, coherent narratives, community participation, and shared meaning (often rooted in religious frameworks) as essential for navigating contemporary crises and maintaining individual and societal coherence.¹⁴
- **Religion and Politics:** While engaging in cultural and political commentary, he also reflects on the complexities and potential dangers of weaponizing Christianity for political purposes, as discussed in his reflections on the ARC conference.³¹

Pageau's recent trajectory (2024-2025) indicates a deepening of his established project. He continues to refine and disseminate his symbolic worldview but increasingly applies it directly to pressing contemporary cultural and political debates, such as those surrounding AI, transhumanism, identity, and societal polarization.⁹ Concurrently, his focus on creating educational materials (masterclasses, courses) and tangible cultural products (books via Symbolic World Press) suggests a long-term strategy.⁴ This strategy appears aimed not just at commenting on culture but at actively building an alternative intellectual and cultural ecosystem grounded in the principles of the symbolic worldview he advocates, seeking to influence thought and narrative formation more directly.

X. Conclusion: Synthesizing Pageau's Impact

Jonathan Pageau occupies a unique and increasingly influential position in contemporary cultural and religious discourse. He operates as an artist-theologian-commentator, distinctively blending the practice of traditional Eastern Orthodox icon carving with a sophisticated use of modern digital platforms like YouTube and podcasting to articulate a worldview grounded in ancient traditions, scripture, and mythology.¹

His core contribution lies in the development and popularization of the "symbolic worldview".⁶ This framework, which posits reality as fundamentally structured by meaningful, interconnected patterns, serves as both a hermeneutic for interpreting culture and a proposed antidote to the perceived fragmentation, materialism, and meaninglessness of modern secularism.¹² In articulating this view, Pageau has effectively translated concepts drawn from Orthodox theology and patristic thought, particularly the notion of the *logoi*, for a much wider, often non-Orthodox or even non-religious, audience seeking coherence and depth.¹²

His reach and influence are significantly amplified by his multi-platform media strategy and key collaborations, especially his ongoing dialogue with Jordan Peterson.² These factors have established him as a central node within contemporary alternative intellectual and cultural networks, particularly those leaning towards traditionalist or conservative perspectives. He functions as a bridge figure, connecting ancient religious traditions with current cultural anxieties and debates.

However, Pageau's work remains a site of considerable tension and debate. The attempt to adapt and apply traditional Orthodox concepts within contemporary discourse inevitably raises questions about theological fidelity and interpretation, leading to criticism from some within his own religious tradition.²⁶ His methodology invites scrutiny regarding its rigor and objectivity²⁴, while his cultural and political commentary, along with his associations, places him within contentious ideological landscapes.¹⁴

Ultimately, Jonathan Pageau's significance lies in his embodiment of the search for traditional meaning within the context of a digital, often secularized, age. He represents a concerted effort not merely to interpret the world symbolically but to actively reshape cultural narratives through the creation of art, the dissemination of commentary, and the publication of symbolic stories.⁴ His work serves as a compelling case study and a focal point for critical discussions concerning the role and relevance of religion, symbolism, tradition, and hierarchy in confronting the perceived crises of

modernity. Whether viewed as a prophetic voice recovering lost wisdom or a controversial figure navigating complex intellectual and theological terrain, his ongoing project continues to provoke thought and shape conversations about the nature of reality and the future of Western culture.

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