

AND IN THOSE DAYS MEN WILL SEEK DEATH AND WILL NOT FIND IT.



DEATH TO THE WORLD  
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THEY WILL LONG TO DIE, AND DEATH WILL FLY FROM THEM.

# DEATH TO THE WORLD

*The Last True Rebellion*



Issue

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## DEATH TO THE WORLD

is a zine to inspire Truth-seeking and soul searching amidst the modern age of nihilism and despair, promoting the ancient principles of the last true rebellion: to be dead to this world and alive to the other world. Correspondence is encouraged and articles for submission are welcomed. Each article printed herein is true to life and has been written out of pain of heart for love of truth.

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What do we mean by:  
"DEATH TO THE WORLD"?

"The world" is the general name for all the passions. When we wish to call the passions by a common name, we call them the world. But when we wish to distinguish them by their special names, we call them the passions. The passions are the following: love of riches, desire for possessions, bodily pleasure from which comes sexual passion, love of honor which gives rise to envy, lust for power, arrogance and pride of position, the craving to adorn oneself with luxurious clothes and vain ornaments, the itch for human glory which is a source of rancor and resentment, and physical fear. Where these passions cease to be active, there the world is dead. ... Someone has said of the Saints that while alive they were dead; for though living in the flesh, they did not live for the flesh. See for which of these passions you are alive. Then you will know how far you are alive to the world, and how far you are dead to it."

—St. Isaac the Syrian

# META-PUNK MANIFESTO

THE POOREST OF THE POOR.  
THE HARDEST OF THE HARDCORE.

## 1. WHERE WE CAME FROM:

X

We've been given EVERYTHING:

Enough and more than enough of what we need for physical survival and comfort in this world -- PLUS an unlimited supply of dazzling, hypnotic, high-tech entertainments, produced by a multi-billion-dollar corporate media industry, in which companies vie with each other to suck in their most lucrative target audience: teenagers with a "discretionary income" (money they can spend on entertainment rather than survival).

X

We've been given NOTHING AT ALL:

No Truth, no meaning for our existence here on this earth, no God.

No understanding of what lies beyond this world, so that everything we do in this world seems only temporary, with no ultimate purpose.

No parents, or only one parent, or two parents with no answers.

No love. Because love without God is only carnal (including parental love).

Nothing to keep us together when we do think we've found love. And, in the end, we found that we were all alone.

No life. Only energy -- raw, nervous energy, which is not life.

A list of do's and don'ts, with no ultimate reason for WHY we should do one and not the other.

But, more often, NO LIMITS. "Without God and immortality, everything is permitted" -- Dostoyevsky.

## 2.

### WHERE WE WERE:

X Crawling out from under the rubble of the hippie movement, which was to change the world into a utopia, but tripped over its tie-dye t-shirt and fell flat on its face. The hippie movement was the counterculture's last gasp to create paradise on earth. When it failed, we saw that there was no hope, and thus no use to try.

X Living in despair. Relishing even the pain, because the pain was the only thing we knew was real, in a world of fakery.

X Glorifying in our poverty and ugliness. In a society that worships youth, beauty and wealth, we hid our youth and disfigured our beauty, and lived dirt-poor, in rebellion against these superficial values of this world.

X Digging in filth. Looking in the gutter for something real, because the skyscrapers and factories and supermarkets and department stores and chain restaurants were temples of death. Perhaps from the garbage -- the people who did not fit into society -- we would hear a word of truth. The filth scarred us, it seared our skin like sulphur, but it never went through to our souls.

X Trying, in our rejection of the world, to preserve our innocence and childhood. And this is why the filth never went through to our souls.

X Experimenting with insanity. Because what our society considers sane is actually insane. Therefore, perhaps insanity could lead us to a glimpse of things as they are.

X Banding together. Deprived of a real family, living in a society that worships the individual (who worships himself through the icon of the mirror), we formed our own families of misfits, banded together against the world.

X Trying to be honest. This above all. Trying to be who we are, not what we've been told we're supposed to be. Doing anything not to sell out. But we never could find out who we really were, because we had not learned from anyone that we could be anything more than animals with highly developed brains. Because no one around us had risen above that level.

## 3.

### WHERE WE ARE:

We are everything that we once were, but now it's all changed:

X We still have no hope for a paradise on earth, for we know that this world will end. Paradise is not on this earth, but in the hearts of people who love God.

X We still feel pain. We still embrace it and do not turn from it. But now that pain is transformed into something pure and beautiful by the agony of the Cross, which conquers Death. And the love we feel -- when we feel another's pain -- NEVER DIES.

X We still place no value on the superficial values of this world: youth, beauty and wealth -- because all these rot away. But now we don't have to go out of our way to make ourselves ugly. We look the way God made us to look, and do nothing more about it.

X We still dig into ourselves to find the filth, but now it is in order to eradicate it, to annihilate it, and thus prepare ourselves for the other world.

X We still strive, in our rejection of this world, to preserve our innocence and childhood. And now, through interior work on our deepest being, we have the means to do so.

X We still band together against the world. We have a new family, composed of those who are misfits in our society, and who reject that society's worship of the individual.

X We are still considered crazy by this world, which cannot understand our sanity.

X We still strive to be honest, to be ourselves: not what our society, which is going to hell, tells us to be. We refuse to become slaves to history or fashion or public opinion or earthly institutions. We strive to be what we were intended to be. But now we know that we are not mere animals, but have been created for eternity. We see the proof of our immortality when we give and receive love: a love that is no mere human love, but something above nature and otherworldly, and which we know can never pass away with death. In this love is an intense PAIN OF HEART, known in silence, which the world can never understand.

## 4.

### WHERE WE ARE GOING:

To Heaven, but not without sweat and blood, self-sacrifice, self-renunciation, and pain of heart, always remembering that "The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by violence, and the violent take it by force."





## PIG FARM

From the memoirs of Sabina Wurmbrand, who suffered under the communist regime in Romania while her husband was enduring a 14-year prison sentence for his belief in God.

... The skies were ankle-deep in liquid filth -- the one substance that never froze. A vile, nauseating stench hung over the place and penetrated every angle of our huts. It hung about the body and hair. The very skilly we slopped up with our wooden spoons savoured of it. We were better off than the prodigal son: we filled our bellies with the husks the swine did eat.

The meaning fell away from things. Death stared me in the face. The whole world was made of tears and despair as never before and a cry rose from my heart, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

... And perhaps, in a psychological condition such as this, I should not have survived for long. But happily it did not last for many weeks. I am convinced that the Lord heard my prayers and took me out according to His plan. I had only to learn a very deep lesson, to drink the cup to its bitterest dregs; and now I am thankful that I passed through this hard school, which teaches you the highest love, love towards God, even when He gives you nothing but suffering.

Submitted by Natasha Vasquez

# COMMON SUFFERING

## Readers' Contributions

### COMMON SUFFERING

God of our fathers  
God of all men  
God of mercy  
come heal our land

Turn our mourning  
into a dance  
the cry of mercy  
is our last chance

God of the sun  
God of the moon  
God of the rain  
come heal our pain

God of deliverance  
God of our song  
rescuing captives  
waiting so long

See our afflictions  
and our torment  
don't give your beloved  
to wicked men

Common sufferings  
Linking mankind  
those past and present  
all the same mind.

—Tammy and Mari  
Kansas City, Missouri

### DRY CRY

My hand feels numb, why can't I turn out the light?  
My heart feels cold, why can't I sleep, I drank enough?  
Oh God -- only now dare I call your name -- dry cry.  
My God, I don't believe this lie,  
I can't live like this -- you know I've tried.  
Dear God, I'm just a kid who's scared and alone.  
Dear God -- Let there be Love.  
Please -- Let Love be real.

— Platonida  
Chico, California



## AT THE END OF THE CYCLE

This one short phase of revolving worlds and its changes only prove how short and temporal our life here is. We become attracted and attached to waves that in the crashing surf & tide bring us closer to shore, when we feel like we're drowning and helplessly being carried out to sea like driftwood. These will soon be the days of old. There is really nothing here for us but opportunities to press ourselves into the good pages that God will judge us from. End on End. Cycles. "And every beat without purpose or thought makes me feel so alone . . . & I get so tired of waiting when these skies won't fall."\*

Our true Father is waiting with His arms open wide to receive His little, lost children, whom He will hold next to His heart, and all else will be forgotten . . .

\* Rites of Spring

-- Sr. Matrona  
Forestville, California

### MANY TIMES

Many times my adoptive dad out of anger completely broke off the screen door. We had to fix it for we could not buy a new one, for we were very poor.

Many times wild animals was mostly what we ate during meals in the winter. While getting wood for our wood-burning stove that we cooked on, we had to be careful so in our fingers we won't get splinters.

Many times work, work, work, that's what all life was, that's what life is, and what life is for.

If there is work to be done look at it in the positive way, that time will pass much faster and life won't be such a bore.

Many times I actually never was like most of the other kids who could march in the town parade.

I started to work really hard in the 4th grade.

Many times my life was a struggle to overcome my pain of heart.

See, people in my school made fun of me because I was the ugliest, and not smart.

Many times I still to this day remember what they've said to me.

By your actions and words you can destroy a person or help that person be all that they can be.

Many times while I was riding in the school van to go home I would get hit by the males with their fists or with the metal buckle on their seat belt.

It hurt, and it was out of hatred, this I could tell by the delight on their faces, and I know that they didn't care what I felt.

Many times I wanted to die.

My dog, Lady, who had just died 9/1/93 was 13 years old for she knew when I was in pain, and she heard my every sigh.



Many times while writing this poem I need to let the pain go, and now I've written enough for tears are starting to come.

This was a true life poem that's from the 4th grade until 9/1/93, but it's just a small part of sufferings, though. You see, we need them to grow. If you don't want to suffer and endure pain, then growing isn't going to occur. I myself know of some people who wanted to suffer so they could grow. There's no way around suffering for it'll get you no matter what. What matters is what we do with the suffering, for we can either build or destroy lives. I'm not telling you to start troubles to suffer, but what I am saying is that we all have our share of pain. Life on earth is short so let's all deal with the pains that have come our way. It starts with each one of us to make greater or lessen the sufferings of all mankind even your own pain.

-- Angelina  
Wildwood, California

### SUFFERING RUSSIA

I grew up in the society where just for mentioning the name of God you could be taken to prison, and where tyrants were elevated into idols of universal worship and people had no freedom to express their belief.

More than a thousand monasteries were in Russia before the revolution, and all of them were destroyed by communists, who killed over 60 million people. Hundreds of thousands were suffering in the concentration camps. Trying to kill the faith, communists closed the majority of the churches and religion was declared to be the "opium of the people." The seeds of nihilism brought forth the fruits of ungodliness and lawlessness. People experienced living hell every day, and they had no way out. Nevertheless, many people chose the way of martyrdom, because they loved Christ. And their motherland once again was bleeding innocently.

That was in Russia -- a land with deep Orthodox roots.

Another side of the same diamond -- which is nihilism, the spirit of despair and ungodliness -- appeared in America. The Prince of this world -- Lucifer -- chose another way to kill the spirit of Truth. He gave people external freedom in order to get their souls. And he has almost succeeded. Modern Christianity has lost the idea of suffering, the idea of the Cross, and offers people a high-tech and "happy-life-without-thinking" substitute: Christianity without the Cross. And people buy it. The foe of humankind wants to convince us that we can be happy and live as we want, and that the only thing we can wish is that the others would be like us. But this happiness is nothing but "having fun," and the goal is to take us away from the true path to God. But you cannot be happy if you don't know what suffering is. You cannot love your fellow human beings if you don't carry your cross.

Let us take our crosses and, with absolute abandonment of the ways of this world, let us follow Christ on the way to Heaven. Many difficulties will we face on this way. But let us not look for the easy ways. Because easy ways lead to the death of the soul, and we are called not to kill souls but to save them.

-- Vladimir  
Moscow, Russia





# THE CURTAIN IS RENT IN TWAIN

Abbot Damascene of Valaam

(1795-1881)

"Do you know what is the meaning of the rending in two of the veil of the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the Saviour's death on the Cross?"

"I think that this signifies how the human soul is torn as it strives towards God and towards pleasing God: it is rent in two, becoming spiritual but not ceasing to belong to the fleshly man that dwells in it; it is torn, cutting off and tearing away from itself the will of the outward man, which is sweet, but inclined to sin; its poor heart is torn, tearing itself in half, into pieces; some of them, as unfit but nonetheless kin to it, it tears and throws into the world, but the others it carries like pure incense to its Christ. Oh, how difficult it is sometimes for the poor heart; how it is tormented and suffers, literally being torn in half!"

-- Abbot Damascene of Valaam Monastery,  
in a dream which Abbess Thaisia had of him after his death.



ABBESS THAISIA (†1915)



## ARCHIVES OF THE WOMEN MARTYRS:

### EVDOKIA



Evdokia the holy martyr of Christ was a native of Anatolia. She was taken captive by the Persians and brought back to their land. Since she was well-versed in the holy Scriptures, she instructed all her fellow prisoners. Whereupon, she became acquainted and friendly with the Persian women, and led many to the knowledge of God. For this reason, she was malign to the judge, who had her scourged with a bullwhip. Afterwards, Evdokia was cast into prison and remained there for two months. After another examination, she again confessed Christ as the True God. For this avowal, she was so severely beaten with rods, made from the thorny branches of rose bushes, that her flesh fell in pieces to the ground. Her tormentors were dyed red by her splattering blood. When they finished, she was thrown once more into jail.



With the passage of six months, they reproved her at a third inquisition, and tore at her flesh with reeds equal in length to her body. Then, undressing her, they coiled the canes about her flesh. Thus wrapped, they closely pressed the canes against her by tying them with ropes. As a result, they were fixed into her flesh. Evdokia was then violently dragged about in this reed envelope, being pulled and drawn up.

As a consequence, the martyr experienced extreme and sharp pains from the punishments under which she was subjected. Later, they raised the saint aloft and, binding her entire body tightly with ropes, they shattered her bones. When they beheld her half-dead and speechless, they cut off her sacred head; and, thus, our courageous Evdokia departed this life wearing a heavenly crown. Afterwards, at the translation of her holy relics, there sprang forth cures for those that hastened to her in faith.

Submitted by Angelina Dedrick.



# Umilenie

(A TRUE STORY)\*

Sherry was a person who didn't fit into any mold. At 19, she had recently come to believe in God and had renounced much for His sake, but she was still not fully accepted by many Christians her age. They said that her dark past still showed in the way she acted, talked, and dressed. "She looks like a slut," one of them said to me. "We'll have to do something about that."

It hurt Sherry to learn that people talked about her like that. But the whole time I knew her, I never saw her speak ill of them or try to get back at them. She had a compassion for others, no matter who they were, which came from a place deep within her. One felt that she could forgive anyone anything, for, unlike the ones who judged her, she had suffered. She knew what it was like to have nothing to lose.

Sherry had an inward joy which at that time was impossible for me understand. It was not a frivolous, temporal kind of joy, but a profound happiness that came out of, and was somehow still bound up with, her profound knowledge of sorrow.

I met Sherry at a youth camp where we both worked one summer as counselors. Then I didn't believe in God as she did, but she didn't look down on me for this. At times she would tell me how she saw God in her life and the lives of the children she cared for; but - unlike some of the counselors who were religious and considered me "spiritually immature" - she never preached to me nor tried to conform me to her beliefs. And for my part, I didn't pay attention to what those same counselors said about her, because I saw that their judgments were stupid and petty, being based merely on appearances.



Sherry and I had a mutual friend, whom I will call Janine. At one point, Janine found that she was pregnant. Her 19-year-old boyfriend, whom she really loved, totally freaked out and said he was not ready to marry her, and told her to get an abortion right away. She was afraid to tell her father of the pregnancy, for she believed he would be consumed with rage and would never forgive her. Because of these two men, she felt she had to have the abortion. But she absolutely did not want to; she wanted her baby to live.

Janine told only three people at the camp about what was happening: Sherry, me, and a young man whom I will call Benjamin. When Benjamin found out, he gave her a religious tract against abortion and a stern, categorical warning and rebuke. When I found out, I just told Janine - since I really didn't believe in anything then - that she should do whatever she felt was best, and that I would support her in whatever decision she made.

Sherry, however, met the news with neither Benjamin's legalism nor my relativism. With a compassion that was neither overbearing nor wimpy, she did her best to make Janine not feel ashamed of doing exactly what her heart told her to do.

When the different physiological changes of pregnancy began to occur in Janine, she and Sherry would talk about them. When Janine felt the baby move inside her, Sherry was filled with such happiness that one would have thought the baby were her own. I'll never forget going to see both Sherry and Janine in the evening, after the camp's children had gone to bed, and seeing Sherry hugging her, encouraging her, sharing with her the wonder of the new life.

Sherry's hope was infectious: soon I, who had before been so ambivalent, began to catch it. The three of us would talk about the child, and Sherry would often say what a great mother Janine would make. We all loved children, being surrounded by them every day. Sherry and I promised to help Janine, to be there for her and her baby as the child grew.

In the presence of Sherry's selfless love, it seemed like everything could be all right after all. The potential anger of Janine's father and the fears of her boyfriend - they would subside. Janine's child would live and thrive, and all the temporary pain would be worth it. These thoughts made Janine happy and at peace when she was around us, but still there was the lurking fear of what waited for her at home.

When Janine did not feel well enough to carry out all the physical demands of a counselor, she left the camp. I don't know what happened between her and her boyfriend and father when she was gone, but when she came back to the camp briefly to say goodbye and pick up her things, we learned that she had had the abortion. Sherry, I remember, was still loving to her. But Janine was different; she was in a state of mourning or shock, and didn't want people to talk to her or get too close.



Very soon after that, the camp was in its final week. On one of the last days, Sherry came up to me when I was standing in line with the boys in my cabin. Her face was all red, and I could see that she had been weeping. It looked like she had just been through a major trauma, and yet she had a gentle smile on her face. I asked her what had happened, and she said that she had been praying and that God had told her something.

This was a total mystery to me, for God had never told me anything; as I said, I didn't even know who or what God was. I asked her what He had told her, but she apologized and said she could not say. "Why not?" I pressed, but she only smiled and shook her head. Her eyes were still wet from the tears, and her face was literally shining. I wanted so much to know the secret of that joyful pain or that painful joy, or whatever it was. But there was still a gulf between Sherry and me that I could not cross, and therefore I could never understand that secret even if she were to spend hours trying to explain it. Even so, I wanted so much to know what God had told her.

Camp ended. I went off to college and Sherry went back to our home town. Scarcely two weeks later, I learned that Sherry had been killed in a car accident, on a notoriously dangerous curve near the city airport. The funeral had already taken place by the time I found out.

That night, I went out into a field below the college and wept. I tried to see some sense or meaning in her death, but since I had not yet crossed that gulf to what she had known, I saw none. Of course, I reflected on whether God had revealed her impending death on that day when I had seen her crying. If that were so, then her death would have meaning. But how was I to know for sure? I tried to talk to Sherry as if she were still alive.

I called up Janine. I don't know what words I hoped to hear from her, but whatever they were, I didn't hear them. She was still distant. I wanted to talk with her about Sherry, about what had happened, about what she had taught us, what she had meant to us. I related how God might have informed Sherry of her death not long before it occurred, but Janine did not seem very moved by this. All I remember Janine saying was: "That is such a dangerous curve. I will never go around that curve again."

I was so depressed when I got off the phone. I was too depressed even to blame Janine: she had her own problems, and it was not for me to judge her for seeming to miss the point. But I thought: so what about going around that curve? Sherry was only 19 years old, and she's dead. If her life and death have no ultimate meaning, then all of us might as well fly off that curve at 90 miles an hour and be cast into the great, eternal void.

A genuinely good person like Sherry comes into our lives, and she is criticized for looking like a slut by those who do not see her soul. We could have learned so much from

her. But she dies - and everything remains the same. We are still the same; her life didn't change us at all. Janine is still in darkness, as am I - as if Sherry's light had never even been here.

But it was not really so. Soon after Sherry's death, circumstances began to conspire in my life which led me to a level of suffering such as I had never known before - and out of that suffering I at last began to know Who God is. It was then I began to know the secret of that joyful pain, that ultimate peace, that sweetness of dying on the Cross and weeping with tears of gratitude, being able to forgive and love everyone, even those who revile and curse us.

It seems that no one else had seen Sherry in that joyful pain shortly before her death. And now I longed to tell her: Sherry, now I know how you could have been so happy and could have thanked God even in the midst of that great sorrow, even if He had told you that you would die soon. I know now what you couldn't tell me then.

Some years passed. I was living as a monk on a remote forested island in Alaska. I was all alone in a cabin by the rocky shore, miles from anyone. I thought again of Sherry, and again the tears came. But now that sorrow didn't just sit there as an inert weight, like it had before. Now it could go somewhere, now it had meaning, just as her life and death had meaning. I took a walk in the damp northern air, then sat down and wrote these lines:

Before your life, so short, had run its course,  
I saw you once with crying eyes still red.  
Your face shone with both joy and sweet remorse  
From closets of your heart where words were said.  
Just what it was, to me you couldn't say,  
For such things I could not then comprehend.  
I don't know whether God revealed that day:  
The days you lived would soon come to their end.  
Though then I didn't know that gentle glow  
Of pain of heart that our Redeemer gives  
And gave to you that day, yet now I know,  
And thus your life more deeply in me lives.

But now that God my soul does rest upon,  
I cannot tell you either - for you're gone.

- Monk [redacted]

\**Umilenie* = pain of heart, warmth of heart, contrition of heart, tenderness of feeling.





From ancient manuscripts of Egypt and Israel  
in the 6th century.

### 1.

#### THE LIFE AND DEATH OF ABBA POEMEN, THE SOLITARY

One day I went down to Rouba to visit Abba Poemen the grazer. When I found him, I told him the thoughts which troubled me. When night fell, he left me in a cave. It was winter and that night it got very cold indeed; I was freezing. When the elder came at dawn, he said to me: "What is the matter, child?"

I said: "Forgive me, father; I had a very bad night because of the cold."

He said to me: "Indeed, child? I did not feel the cold."

This amazed me, for he was naked. I asked him of his charity to tell me how he did not feel the cold. He said: "A lion came down and lay beside me; he kept me warm. But I tell you, brother: I shall be devoured by wild beasts."

I asked him why, and he told me: "Because when I was in our homeland" - we were both from Galatia - "I was a shepherd. I was hostile to a stranger who came by, and my dogs devoured him. I could have saved him, but I did not. I left him to his fate, and the dogs killed him. I know that I too must die in that way."

Three years later that elder was devoured by wild beasts, as he himself had foretold.

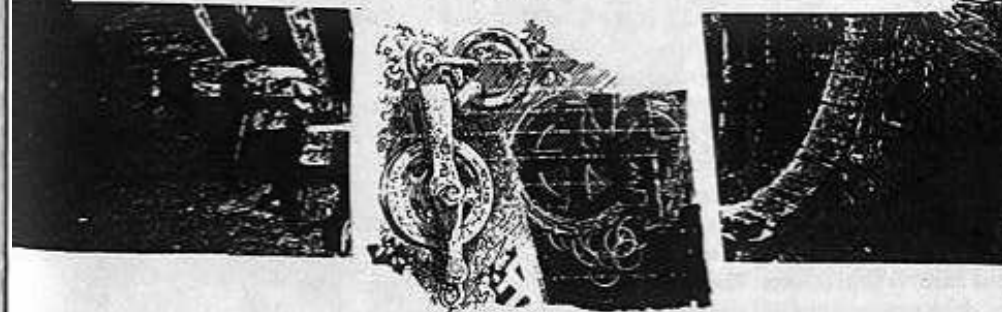
#### 2. THE LIFE OF A ROBBER WHO BECAME A MONK AND WAS LATER BEHEADED

When I was living at the monastery of Abba [Father] Firminos, a robber came to Abba Zosimos and begged him: "Of your charity, for God's sake, make me a monk, for I am the author of many murders. Make me a monk so that for the rest of my life I may desist from my evil doings."

The elder gave him instruction, made him a monk, and provided him with the holy habit. A few days later, the elder said to the new monk: "Believe me, my child, you cannot stay here. If the governor hears about you, he will arrest you. Or maybe your enemies shall pass this way and kill you. But pay heed to me; I will take you to a community some distance from here." He took him to the community of Abba Dorotheos, near to Gaza and to Maiouma. He spent nine years there, learning the entire psalter and all the conventions of monastic observance. Then he went back to the monastery of Abba Firminos and said to the elder: "Abba, have pity on me, sir; give me back my worldly clothes and take the monastic habit from me."

Distressed by these words, the elder said to him: "Whatever for, child?" The other answered: "See now, father; as you know, I have been nine years in the community. I have fasted to the full extent of my ability; I have practiced self-discipline; I have lived under obedience with complete serenity and in the fear of God. I believe that, of His goodness, God has pardoned my many evil deeds. Yet every day I see an infant which says to me: 'Why did you slay me?' I see him in church, I see him in the refectory, always saying the same thing to me. The vision never leaves me untroubled for an hour at a time. This is why I want to go away, father. I must die for that infant, for I killed it without reason." He took his clothes, put them on, and went out of the monastery. He went to Diospolis. The following day he was arrested and beheaded.

Amen.





# THE HARDEST OF THE HARD CORE

## THE STORY OF JOHN THE ROMANIAN

There have been people throughout history and across the world who have sustained themselves by God alone, having lived for years with neither food, shelter, nor clothing. We are far from the experience of such ascetics; however, stories of them reach us from time to time. The following account is a true story about an ascetic who lived alone in the forests of Romania until the 1950's.

"In the summer of 1945, I took my staff and went over the mountain to Sihăstria Monastery. I wanted to confess to Father Cleopas. When I crossed the ridge of the mountain and had arrived in Sihăstria valley, at the edge of the clearing called 'Trapeza' there appeared before me the calm and holy face of an unknown hesychast. He was rather short of stature, with his head uncovered, dressed in a kind of long ryassa of wool, barefoot, and belted with a rope of hemp. He had neither a staff nor a bag, and in his hands he carried a prayer-rope made by him of the red hips of wild roses. He seemed to be waiting for me. When he saw me he blessed me with both hands and said to me by name: 'Father Theodulus, you're going to Sihăstria, to Father Cleopas? How many

times have I also gone to Sihăstria Monastery and stood in church during the service, but no one saw me! I know that your holiness wishes to leave Agapia and go to Sihăstria, but you shouldn't go. Stay at Agapia Monastery and do your obedience there, since God did not send you to Agapia in vain. There is the salvation of your holiness!"

"When I saw that he spoke to me by name and also knew my thoughts, a kind of fear and astonishment at first overwhelmed me, so that I was unable even to speak, especially because I didn't know then who he was. But his words entered into my heart and filled me with great spiritual joy, such as I had never felt before. Then, taking courage, I asked him: 'What is your name, Reverend Father, and how long have you lived in asceticism in these parts?' 'I am called John,' he answered me, 'and I am from the Tighina region. I was a vicar bishop in my youth. But, loving silence and prayer more, I left this high office, and hearing of the hermitages of Oltenia, in 1915 I came as a novice brother to Crasna Skete in Gorj County. The abbot had me take care of the cattle of the skete. After some years he said to me: 'Brother John, prepare yourself, because

tonight we will make you a monk!' He wasn't acquainted with my past life. Then I left everything and departed that night for the desert in the depths of the forest. Then hearing about the hesychasts in Moldavia, in 1920 I withdrew for good to the Sihla Mountains.'

"After a short silence the holy hesychast John added: 'Father Theodulus, please bring me a packet of writing paper and a kilogram of ink.' 'But what will you do with them, your holiness?' 'I have to write something!' 'Should I also bring you a pen?' The good ascetic, however, pointing with his hand to the branches of the fir trees, said to me: 'I only need nibs, for look how many pens God has given me!' 'Where, exactly, and when should I bring you paper?' I asked him. 'Don't worry about that,' he answered, 'the Lord takes care of everything!' 'Your holiness, do you wish me to bring you also some dried bread or some other food?' 'I don't need anything, since, by the mercy of God, I have everything I need!' Then kissing his hand, I said to him: 'Bless me, your holiness!' 'May the Lord bless you, and forgive me!'

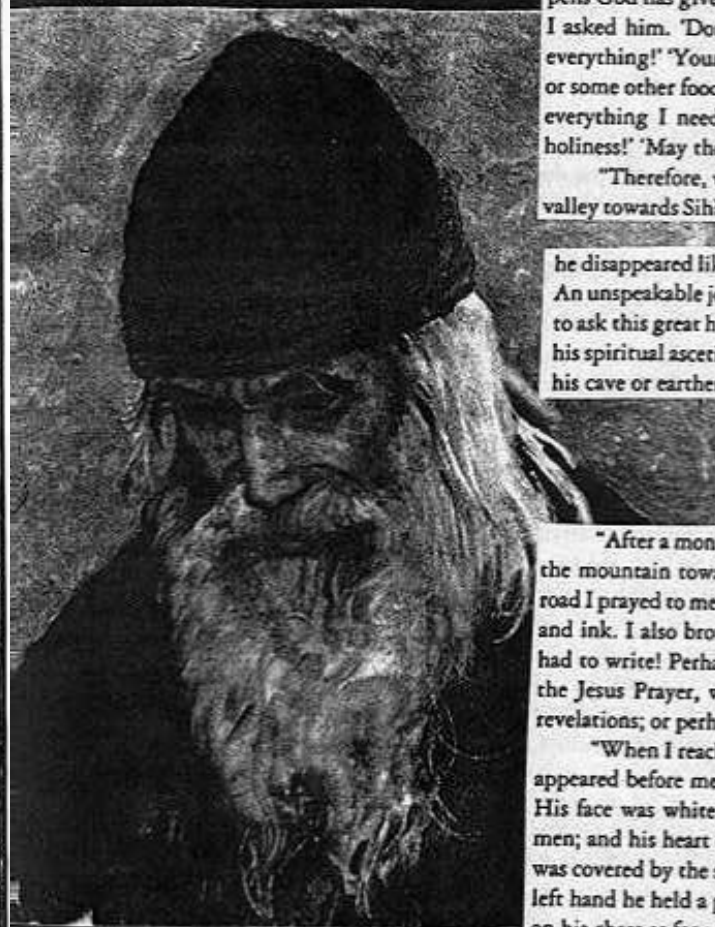
"Therefore, when he had blessed me with both hands, I descended to the valley towards Sihăstria, and he stood a moment leaning against a fir tree. Then

he disappeared like a deer into the depths of the forest and I saw him no longer. An unspeakable joy rested in my soul. How many things would I not have liked to ask this great hesychast, but he didn't want to disclose to me anything about his spiritual asceticism in the Sihla Mountains, nor even the place where he had his cave or earthen hut."

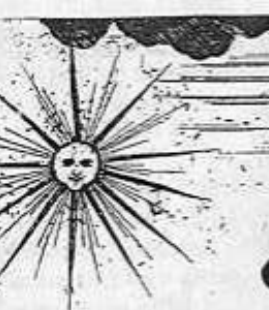
"After a month I took the knapsack on my back and a staff, and went over the mountain towards Sihăstria. I had business with Father Cleopas. On the road I prayed to meet the holy hesychast John so that I could give him the paper and ink. I also brought him some dried bread for food. Who knows what he had to write! Perhaps some secret spiritual teachings; perhaps counsels about the Jesus Prayer, which he had acquired in his youth; perhaps some divine revelations; or perhaps about his own life.

"When I reached Trapeza clearing, the holy hesychast John immediately appeared before me without my observing from what direction he had come. His face was white, luminous, and radiated a heavenly joy alien to ordinary men; and his heart overflowed with great peace and spiritual quiet. His body was covered by the same coarse clothing of wool, knit by his own hands. In his left hand he held a prayer-rope of rose hips, and he always held his right hand on his chest as for prayer.

"After I had kissed his hand and made a prostration to him, the holy John blessed me with both hands, kissed me on the forehead, and said to me: 'Father Theodulus, are you going to Sihăstria? It is better for you to return to Agapia, since Father Cleopas, the abbot of Sihăstria, is absent today. He was called to Neamț Monastery.' 'Your holiness,' I said to him with emotion, 'I brought you paper and ink. Here are also some nibs!' 'Thank you, Father Theodulus. I knew you would find them!' Then he placed them in the knapsack which he had on his back. 'I also brought you some food: bread, fruit, and a little wine.' 'May God reward your love, Father Theodulus, but I don't need anything. The Lord takes care of me!'







"I insisted in vain that he take something. He wouldn't even look in the basket to see what I had brought him. But so as not to sadden me, the good soldier of Christ gave me this spiritual word:

"Father Theodulus, fasting is of great profit for a monk. You should know that there are seven kinds of food for men, that is to say, seven degrees of fasting:

"A. *Carnivores*, who always eat meat. These are in the lowest degree of fasting, even if they sometimes restrain themselves from food. They are never able to advance in prayer.

"B. *Lacto-vegetarians*, who never eat meat, but only milk, cheese, eggs, and all kinds of boiled vegetables. These are in the second degree of fasting, which is kept by monks in coenobitic monasteries and, very rarely, by laymen.

"C. *Vegetarians*, who eat only vegetables and boiled or raw legumes. This arrangement forms the third degree of fasting, and the most zealous monks of the common life keep it.

"From here on begin the strictest degrees of fasting, which are usually kept by hesychast monks and the most ascetic desert-dwellers.

"D. *Fruit-eaters*, who eat bread and uncooked fruits once a day, without otherwise ever tasting food. He who attains this degree of fasting is able to master his body and thoughts without difficulty and can advance rapidly on the path of prayer.

"E. *Cereal-eaters* comprise the fifth degree of fasting. To this degree belong monks—especially hesychasts and desert-dwellers—who eat once a day only black bread, cereals, and soaked grains of wheat, corn, millet, lentils, beans, peas, etc.

"F. *Dry food* is the sixth degree of monastic fasting, which is usually attained only by the most zealous desert-dwellers. Those who live in this harsh asceticism eat only dried bread soaked in water, with salt or a little vinegar, once a day and by measure. This is how the hesychasts of the Nile valley lived.

"G. *Divine food or manna* is the last and highest degree of monastic fasting, which is attained by very few ascetics after prolonged asceticism, being strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. These are satisfied with the Most Pure Mysteries alone, that is, with the Body and Blood of Christ, which they receive once or twice a week, without tasting anything else but water only. After difficult temptations and asceticism, and by the grace of God, I have come to be satisfied with the Most Pure Mysteries alone, and no longer feel hunger, or have need of bread and vegetables...."

"Behold, Fathers, to what measure of spiritual asceticism holy John had arrived. Then I asked him: 'Your holiness, there in the forest where you live, aren't you cold in winter?' Father Theodulus, I am a citizen of the Carpathian Mountains, and the Lord takes care of me; for wherever He has found me, I have never lacked anything. I feel neither the cold of winter, nor the intense heat of the sun, nor hunger, nor thirst, nor any other earthly need! 'Your holiness, I greatly wish to withdraw to Sihăstria Monastery to be near monks! I would have more quiet there and time for prayer.' And he answered me: 'If you were ordered by the metropolia to go to Agapia, be obedient, since you were sent there by the will and command of God!'

"Observing then that the great hesychast didn't want to talk long so as not to interrupt the Jesus Prayer which he had in his mind and heart, I thanked him from my heart for the counsels and profitable words he had given me. I made a prostration to him, kissed his hand, and asked his blessing to leave. And the holy Bishop John blessed me with the sign of the holy cross and said to me: 'May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you and forgive me!'

"Another year passed with troubles and trials enough. I didn't hear any more about Bishop John. In the spring of 1946, my thoughts urged me to go for a few days for a retreat to Sihăstria Monastery. I made the usual prayers for travelling, took my staff, and crossed the mountain with the thought that I would once more see the holy hesychast John. When I reached Trapeza clearing, the miracle happened for a third and last time. At the edge of the clearing his holiness John was waiting for me. The same luminous face, the same limpid and cheerful eyes, the same joy and spiritual peace in his soul, the same rough clothing of wool on his thin and elderly body. I made him the customary prostration and kissed his hand, and he kissed my forehead, and we both sat on the trunk of a fir tree blown down by the wind. Nothing earthly interested him. After some moments of silence his holiness said to me: 'I would like to go back to my native village, to die there. We also have forests enough....' 'How can you go now, when the nations still haven't quieted down?' 'I believe in God, that He will always cover me with His hand!'

"Then the Elder, seeing my sadness, strengthened me in hope and counselled me to have great care for the souls that had been entrusted to me at Agapia Monastery, that here will be my salvation. At the end, he blessed me with both hands and kissed me in the Lord. I made a prostration to him, and thus we parted, I with tears in my eyes. He withdrew to his greatly-desired desert, towards the Sihla Mountains, and I descended towards Sihăstria. This was my last meeting with him."

"Since 1946 I haven't met him again. No one said any more about him. I thought he had departed to the eternal realms, from somewhere in the Sihla Mountains. After five years, however, I heard that a brother of Sihăstria who kept the monastery's sheep met him in the forests towards Chitele Mountain. Going to the pasture with the sheep, he suddenly noticed that all the sheep had massed together, and the dogs stood as if in astonishment. When he looked around, he saw an old monk with a white beard in their midst. It was the holy John! 'Indeed, in what have I sinned today before God that I am revealed to men!' the desert-dweller said to himself. Then he said to the brother who kept the sheep: 'Brother Stephen, come here and don't be afraid! I know that you confess to Father Elder Joel. But please don't tell anyone that you met me today!'

"Brother Stephen received the Mysteries one week and didn't tell it to anyone. But his thoughts still urged him to tell it at confession to Father Joel. And the Elder, when he heard about this, immediately took some dried bread and food in a bag and walked through the forests around the monastery for a week with Father Bessarion, the Abbot of Sihla Skere, hoping to meet with the holy John. But they didn't meet him. Then, after a month or two, Brother Stephen was walking with the sheep through the forest, and all of a sudden he met John the Desert-Dweller. He was barefoot and with his head uncovered. He beckoned to him with his hand and said to him: 'Brother Stephen, I asked one thing of you and you didn't do it! Know that you will go into the army and will not return again to the monastery!' And thus it was. The brother went into the army and remained in the world. From that time I have heard no more about holy John the Hesychast."



## LOVERS OF TRUTH

The path to God is a daily cross. No one has ascended to heaven by an easy way. We know where the easy way leads!

-- St. Isaac of Syria

Faith with self-denial, or dying to everything, constitutes the base of the inner cross; the upright portion is patience strengthened by hope; while the crossbar is obedience inspired by love.

-- St. Theophan the Recluse

Love is ready to sacrifice everything, is not sparing of labor, does not take into account loss of time, effort or means. Where there is love, everything is done easily, quickly and willingly.

-- St. Theophan the Recluse

Our love of God is measured by our willingness to accept sufferings and misfortunes and to see in them the hand of God.

-- Fr. Alexander Elchaninov

Passions make even an intelligent man stupid.

-- Fr. Alexander Elchaninov

A monk is he who forces himself.

-- St. Abba Dorotheos of Gaza

If a man be not crowned with martyrdom, let him take care not to be far distant from those who are.

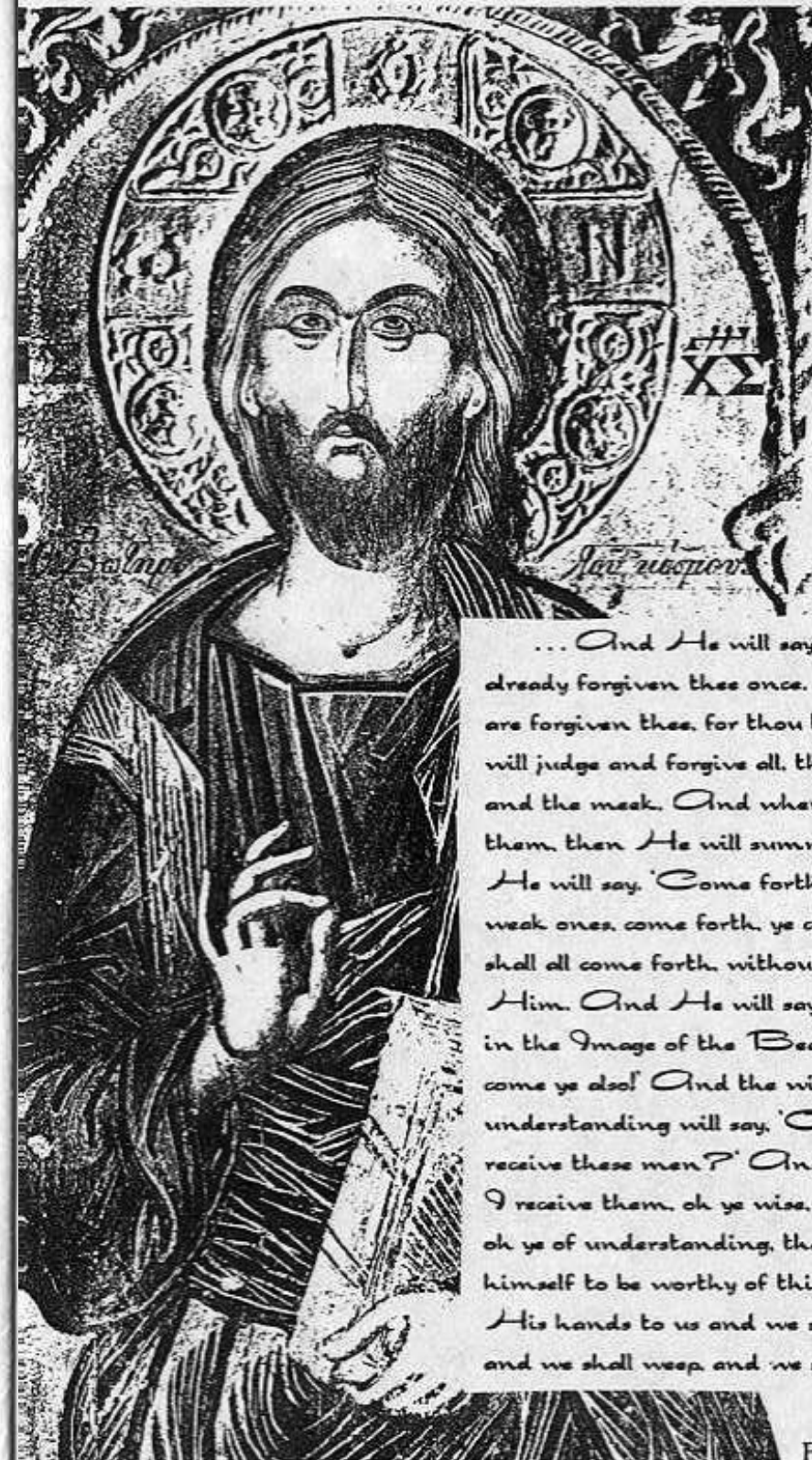
-- Blessed Clement of Alexandria

He who wishes to serve God, let him prepare his heart for tribulations.

-- St. Basil the Great

Withersoever the soul of man turns itself, unless toward Thee, it is riveted upon sorrows, yea though it is riveted upon things beautiful.

-- Confessions of Blessed Augustine



## CRIME and MERCY

... And He will say, 'Come to me! I have already forgiven thee once. Thy sins which are many are forgiven thee, for thou hast loved much.' And He will judge and forgive all, the good and the evil, the wise and the meek. And when He has done with all of them, then He will summon us, 'You too come forth.' He will say, 'Come forth, ye drunkards, come forth, ye weak ones, come forth, ye children of shame!' And we shall all come forth, without shame, and stand before Him. And He will say to us, 'Ye are swine, made in the Image of the Beast and with his marks, but come ye also!' And the wise ones and those of understanding will say, 'Oh Lord, why dost Thou receive these men?' And He will say, 'This is why I receive them, oh ye wise, this is why I receive them, oh ye of understanding, that none of them believed himself to be worthy of this.' And He will hold out His hands to us and we shall fall down before Him and we shall weep, and we shall understand.

--Fyodor Dostoyevsky  
From *Crime and Punishment*