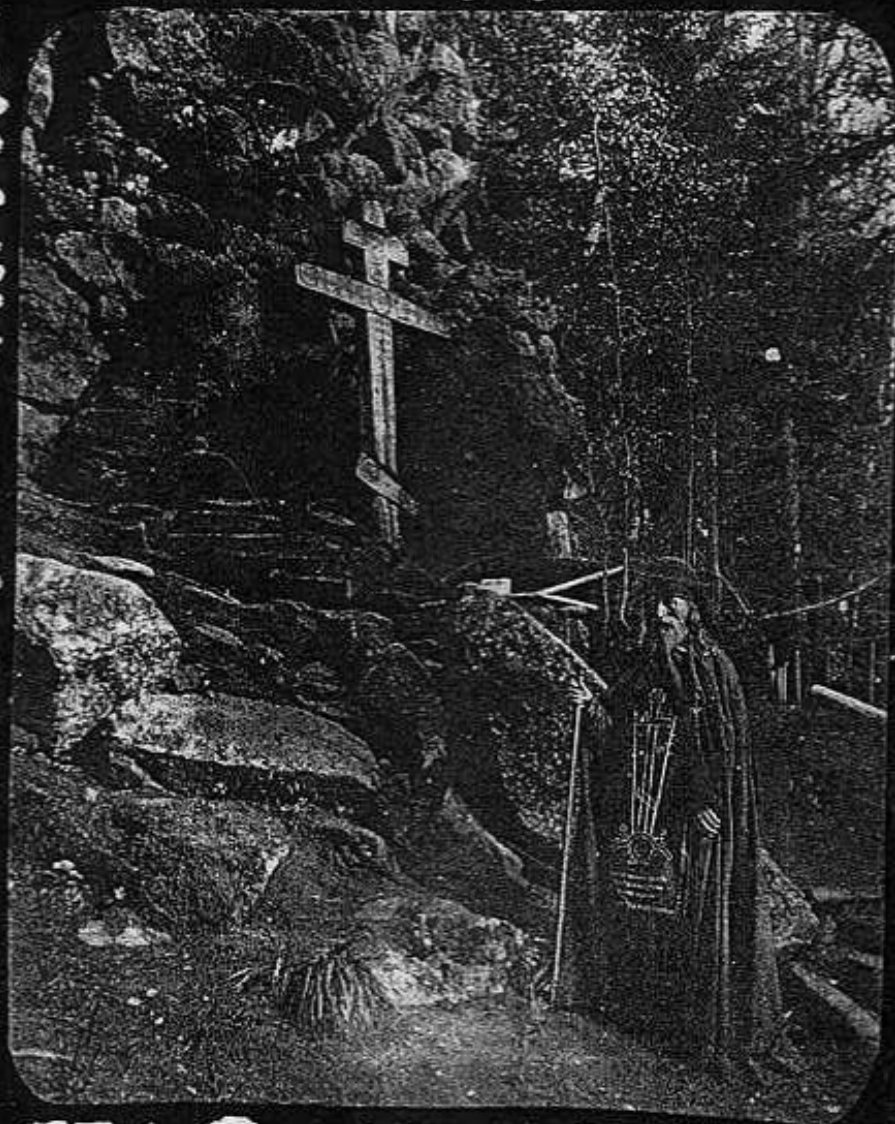


VALLEY OF THE

THOUGH I WALK THRU THE



SHADOW OF DEATH I WILL

FEAR NO EVIL...

# DEATH WORLD

*The Last True Rebellion*



ISSUE

— ❧ № 11 ❧ —

1997



# SICK OF SICKNESS

OUR WHOLE PROBLEM lies in the fact that we listen

to satanic whispering that says to us: *Do what thou wilt*. We want our own way, we want to be on top of everything, we want to be a God unto ourselves. This generation is driven by this philosophy. Although it finds its roots in satanism, it was begun by satan himself at the Fall of mankind when he whispered to Eve: *Do what thou wilt*. This philosophy has become the anthem of this generation. This generation has become sick through living, dying and selling out for this philosophy.

We make ourselves sick in the never-ending pursuit of self-gratification and "fun," often at the expense of others. From childhood we are raised to seek distractions at all costs, and the soul is only sickened by chasing after them. This sickness we experience as inward conflict. In order to drown out the pain of the conflict we resort to trying to satisfy pleasures through sex, music, drugs, and alcohol, which leads to the darkening of ideals in the mind.

Listening to these satanic whispers is the source of our sickness and disease, which results in utter unhappiness. All negative fallen things become as a faith in itself. The belief in the triumph of evil is the essence of all fears and phobias, which paralyze us, and makes us vulnerable and even attracted to evil. This is a sickness of the nation and perhaps even the universal sickness of modern humanity.

Being sick of sickness is the first step to recovery. The second step is forcing ourselves to do God's will instead of our own, as Christ taught to pray before His Crucifixion: "Not my will but Thy will be done." The third step is to fall to the earth and water it with our tears. Tears are the remedy to the sickness. We must admit to God our sickness of depression, anger, resentment, rage and pride. This medicine may burn, and inside we may scream, but the scream turns into a cry - a cry to God. We must cry out to God as to a living Person and not worry about using the right words, because God sees the heart. We must let our hearts yearn for Him, let them cry out to Him.

When we recover we will be able to see the world in a different light. We will be capable of embodying in our souls Divine Light which is the Light of Life, God Himself. A person is even able to transmit this inward light to others. This is why God became man in Christ, and died on the Cross and Resurrected from the dead. Through this God gave sick humanity a remedy.

— The Editors

## 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.

DEATH TO THE WORLD

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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

This page: Ancient fresco of Christ being taken down from the Cross



# WE SHALL BE EVEN AS THEY ARE

From time to time I like to go where the mystery of our life is concealed, where it may be that I myself shall be concealed when I have drunk the cup of death. Here I spend some time when I am worn down incurably by despair, and it is here that I find refreshment for my soul that is sorrowing unto death. Here the tumult of life is silent, and in place of prideful thoughts there comes a series of severe considerations of the judgement that knows no hypocrisy, that is righteous.

Before me is a simple chapel, a charnel house where the bones of the dead are laid to rest. These bones testify for us what we ourselves shall also be.

A few years ago, when these visitors to earth were yet alive, they also did not have the strength to control themselves at times, and, being human, they argued over dust. But now they have gone "to their own city," leaving behind only these bones. Now they are content with fate and lie there without bothering one another; they don't argue over whose shelf is whose.

We, too, are visitors on earth, and our path leads to the same place. But we walk in a kind of haze, without seeing the threshold of eternity. We pursue happiness, and are unhappy. Every day we are rushing off somewhere and forget what is important. We are afraid of death and judgement; we want to live here all the longer, taking our ease and hoarding our wealth.

We cannot endure a single offensive word, not even a slightly unfriendly glance, and the cross of sorrow-filled tribulations is more torturous than hell for us. We are forever blaming others, while we ourselves are angering God, and do not dare to blame ourselves even in the smallest things. We are prepared to exert ourselves to the utmost, to go without sleep for nights on end and risk any danger in order to satisfy our whims. We twist our conscience and grab at whatever tickles our fancy. We are prepared to defend our own "honor," to value our own efforts and knowledge, and if anyone slights them, our soul is tormented.



Such is man, a creature of passion, the boastful god of earthly paradise! He spends his time in vanity, with no rest day or night, and holds everything here so dear—as long as he is in good health. But when illness brings him down, then he becomes entirely different.

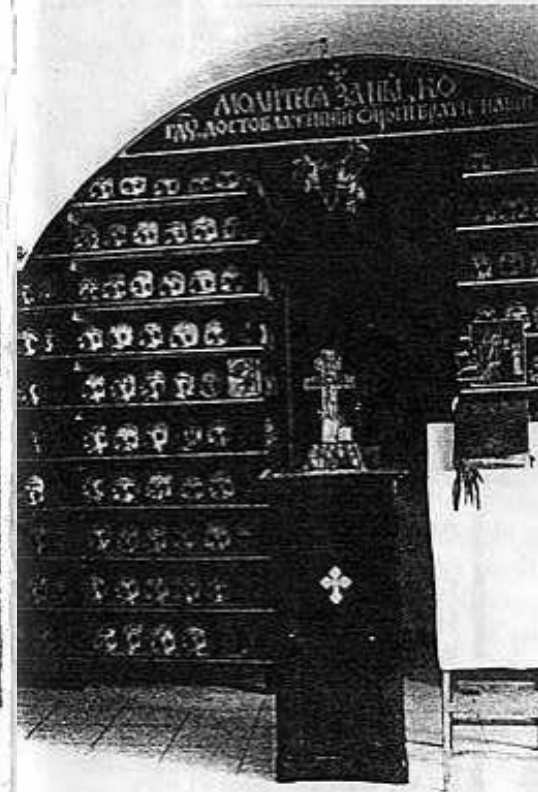
The terrible hour of death strikes. The sinful soul panics. We must bid farewell to all that is dear to us—and forever. Of no use are the kindnesses of friends, the value of property; they cannot add a single moment to our lives. In vain they rush for help, and doctors summon all their expertise. The ailing man breathes heavily and, in the end, he dies. His breast grows cold, his gaze is fixed, his senses cease to function. The remains are disposed of, buried in the ground.

After that, there is not much you need to know about what happens to us. These bones tell it all; our conscience trusts them. A single instant, and life is but a dream. And what were all the worries and vanity and bitter pleasures for? We forget the lesson that death repeats for us, that life is given to us for a set time, and only once.

O death, who is not afraid of you? Who desires you? Blessed is the one who awaits you like sleep, who remembers that his soul is immortal. By contrast, there is no one more hapless than the person who is

afraid to think about you; all his life is torment and even this, in the end, he will lose. On the one side—the repose of the righteous and eternal rejoicing with the saints; on the other—for the sinners, hell in outer darkness and eternity in the company of the evil demons.

The time and the road for that departure into eternity are not far away. Remember the wise old saying: Know yourself and you will know God. Remember where you came from, who you are, where you are going, and why; remember that you are great, that you are nothing, that you are immortal, and that you must die.







## GENERATION X

Sunset generation,  
Light is fading fast,  
Darkness overwhelming  
Blinded to the past.

In Bondage they live  
Enslaved to this earth,  
Fallen from Paradise  
Since the day of birth.

Nowhere are the answers.  
Everywhere a lie.  
Hopeless filled confusion,  
A void-filled question - Why?

Given no direction,  
Left to seek their own,  
Tradition long forgotten,  
Wisdom never known.

Awake I say, O stranger,  
For Christ has made a way  
Through death he conquered darkness,  
And was raised on the third day.

Fear, despair and death  
Shall rule no more with sin.  
We can overcome the battle  
That rages from within.

Beaten down by passions,  
As we walk this path of life  
His mercy He has given,  
With grace and afterlife.

As all shall come full circle,  
From corruption of the Fall,  
The sunrise Son of God  
Will gather all in all!

Michael Gingras  
Apple Valley, CA.



## HUNGER

Hunger and thirst for a clear, single mind;  
Open my eyes to see  
Show me the deepest knowings...  
Forgive me the distractions,  
The side glances at the beautiful things now ruined  
Enlighten my inner being  
Fill my outer shell with your love and strength,  
For you are my God.  
To see as you see;  
Out of my deepest need  
Pour in your fullness  
Your holy, eternal life on display  
Through me,  
Even through me.  
Every man's desire  
One greater than Solomon, who knew yet  
stumbled,  
Delight turned inward possessively...  
The vanity of taking a moment captive.  
But indwelling my life  
The greater, the Greatest  
Spirit love born to highest fulfillment  
The strength of a man to love freely  
And to remain pure.  
He reaches out with one hand  
While holding another,  
And returns both to the heart,  
And remains pure and true.  
Each touch a discovery becomes a reality,  
The cup of Messiah, his love!

Gary Bertnick  
Silver Cord  
Spring Valley, WI.



## FAITH

Many will prophecy

In the coming of glory

As the lambs gather together

To watch the eating

Of their young.

You'll hear of wars

Upon nations unto nations

With the beginning

Of sorrow

There'll be abomination

The coming of desolation

Who will lie to its father

You hear the wind

Pour its mercy

Through the wall

Of flames

The soul of its Churches

Cries through the tears

In deep colors of Black

Over the burned offerings

Flames cracked a song

When the church crumbles

Through the material

Cracks of the Earth

See how past generations

Destroy your mind

With their hate

For all its works

In the rising

Of false Prophets

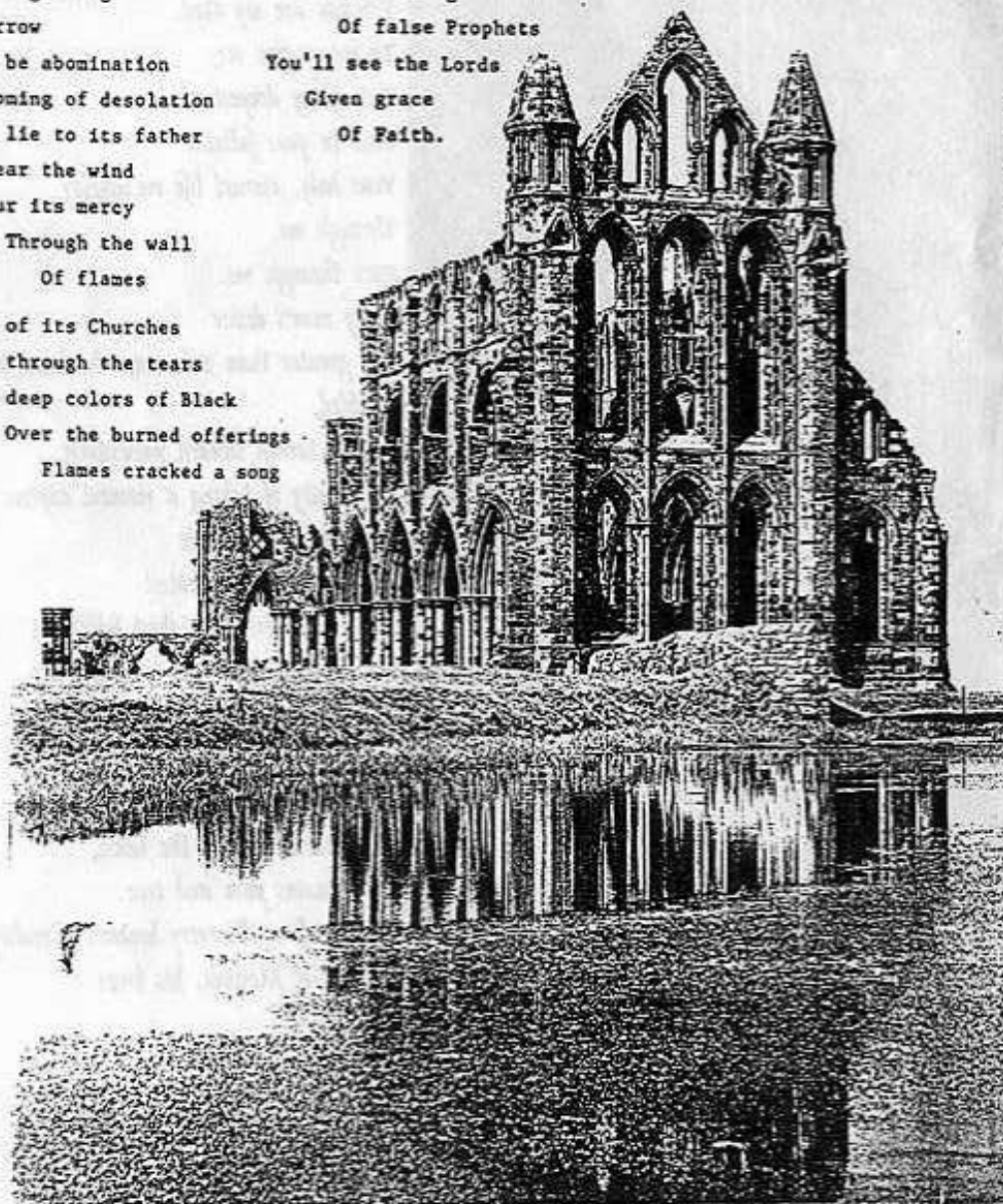
You'll see the Lords

Given grace

Of Faith.

Geno / '96

Bradford, PA.



## LOVERS OF TRUTH

Love is joy; the price of love is sacrifice. Love is life; the price of love is death.

-Elder Callistratius +20th century

Whoever gives himself over to God's hands in ultimate self-abnegation will attract God to himself, one in pain of heart, and will be made strong in His strength.

-St. Theophan the Recluse +19th century

I wish I was always in a state where I was about to be executed.

-Nun Seraphima +20th century

Do not let your soul go astray in matter, in the corruptible things of the world. Life has no value if we do not take care of the soul. Therefore, do not let yourselves go astray and lose your soul.

-St Raphael of Lesbos +1463

If an evil thought comes to you, do not accept it. Never allow your mind to be dragged down, but always raise it on high, and God will help you.

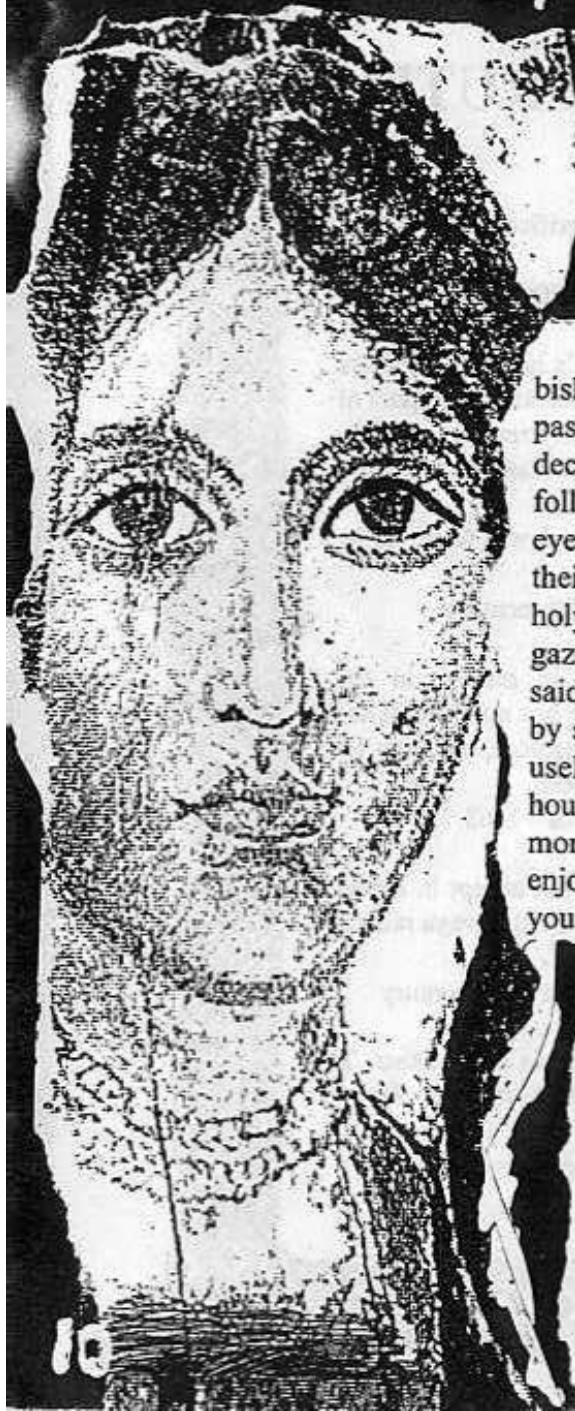
-St Macarius the Great +4th century

Vanity and truth are directly contrary to one another. The desires of this world are vanity; but Christ, Who frees us from the world is Truth.

-St Augustine +4th century



# A Harlot of the Desert



Pelagia was a woman of great fame, wealth, and beauty, renowned as an actress in the city of Antioch, which at that time was the capital of Syria. Her extraordinary beauty drew many lovers after her, and her life was one of debauchery and seduction, without the least restraint.

It happened one day that several Christian bishops were gathered outside the church. Pelagia passed before them in grandeur, scantily clad, decked with gold, pearls, and precious stones, followed by a crowd of youth. Her beauty drew the eyes of all her fond admirers, while the bishops hid their faces from the sight. Only one monk-bishop of holy life, Nonnus, seemed to take notice of her, and gazed openly upon her splendor and wept. He then said to his fellow bishops: "Were you not delighted by such great beauty? Woe to us the negligent and useless ones, because we shall be ashamed at the hour of judgement by this harlot who, to please mortal men, diligently adorns herself, so she might enjoy but bitter pleasure. For how many hours do you think she has spent this very day in washing,

dressing, adorning, and embellishing her whole person to the best advantage, in order to exhibit her beauty to please the eyes of the world, and particularly her unhappy lovers, who, though alive today, may be dead tomorrow? Where we Christians, the mindless ones, indifferently dismiss, without regard, the soul, instead of preferring the immortal and living God, and are far from taking as much pains to wash and purify our souls from their stains, and adorn them with those bright ornaments of virtue and sanctity."

The next day Pelagia was in the crowd in front of the church, that had gathered to hear the Holy bishop Nonnus. His sermon made such a deep impression upon her that she could not refrain from sighing and sobbing, and pouring out floods of tears, through the deep sense of her defilement. As soon as the service was over she sent a letter to the holy man saying:

*To the holy disciple of Jesus Christ, from a sinful wretch, a servant of the devil.*

*I have learned that the God whom you worship came down from heaven to earth, not for the sake of the righteous, but to save poor sinners, and that He humbled Himself so far as to suffer harlots and thieves to come to Him; wherefore, as I understand, that though you never have seen Him with your mortal eyes, you are nevertheless a follower of His, and have served Him faithfully for many years, I beg you, for His sake, to show yourself to be a true disciple, by suffering a poor sinner to come to you, and not despise the extreme desire I have to approach to Him through your assistance."*

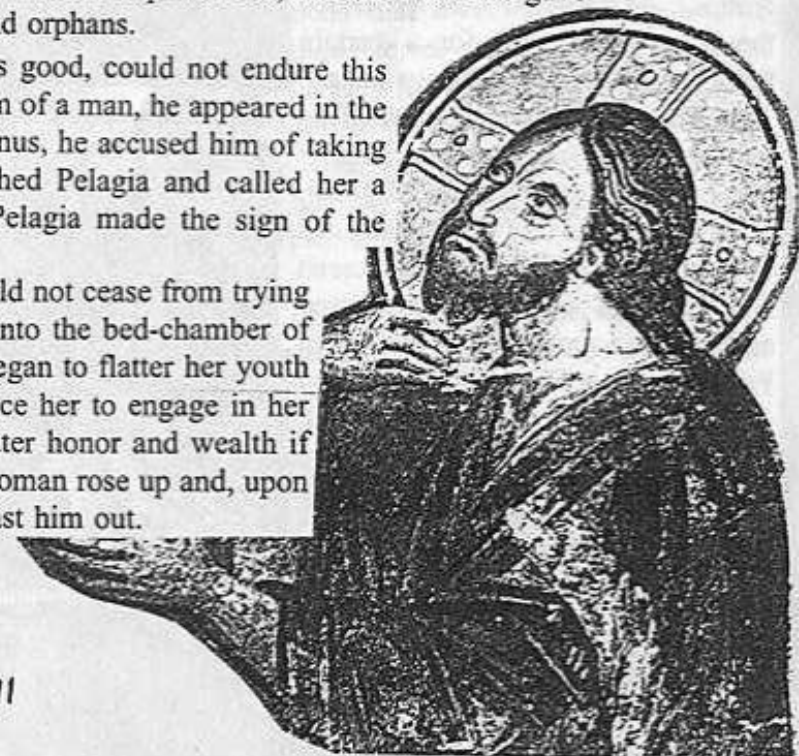
*"Baptize me and guide me unto repentance, because I am a sea of iniquity, an abyss of destruction, and the devil's snare and spoil; for by reason of me, many have gone to damnation. Now, by the grace of God, I regret my harlotry and seek repentance. I desire to receive spiritual rebirth that I may be presented to the pure Bridegroom Christ as a pure and blameless Bride."*

Seeing the depth of her sincere repentance; and that she was sure never to return to her former life, the Blessed Nonnus baptized her, and she went and gave all of her goods over to the poor and orphans.

The devil, who hates what is good, could not endure this defeat and shame. Assuming the form of a man, he appeared in the midst of all. Shouting loudly at Nonnus, he accused him of taking away his powers. Then he approached Pelagia and called her a traitor and a faithless one. When Pelagia made the sign of the Cross, he vanished.

Nevertheless, the enemy would not cease from trying to win her back. At night he went into the bed-chamber of Pelagia and woke her up. He then began to flatter her youth and beauty and attempted to influence her to engage in her former deeds. He promised her greater honor and wealth if she did what he said. But the holy woman rose up and, upon making the sign of the Cross, she cast him out.

\* Pelagia lived in  
3rd century





On the eighth day after her baptism, Pelagia secretly went and exchanged her feminine apparel for poor men's clothing. Without informing anyone but the Blessed Nonnus, Pelagia left for Jerusalem, and remained in a small cell upon the Mount of Olives, in prayer and fasting. She was unknown to all since she took on a man's appearance, and went by the name, Pelagius. She struggled and accomplished so many virtues against the devil and spiritual warfare that she was admired for the strength and sanctity of her life.

Three or four years later, I, James the deacon, who recorded this Life, wanted to go to Jerusalem, and I asked the bishop to let me go. "Go in peace my child," said the Blessed Nonnus. "After thou hast venerated the holy places, ask for a certain Pelagius, who is a virtuous monk. Thou shalt receive great benefit from him because he is a close friend of our Lord." I readily found the cell, not thinking that this was the famous woman Pelagia who I had seen baptized, and who had disappeared and was no more heard of. When Pelagius came from her cell, I did not recognize her at all, even though she recognized me. She said that Nonnus is an apostle of God. "I beg that he will pray to God for me." With that she left and returned to her prayers. I was much comforted to have seen such a holy person.



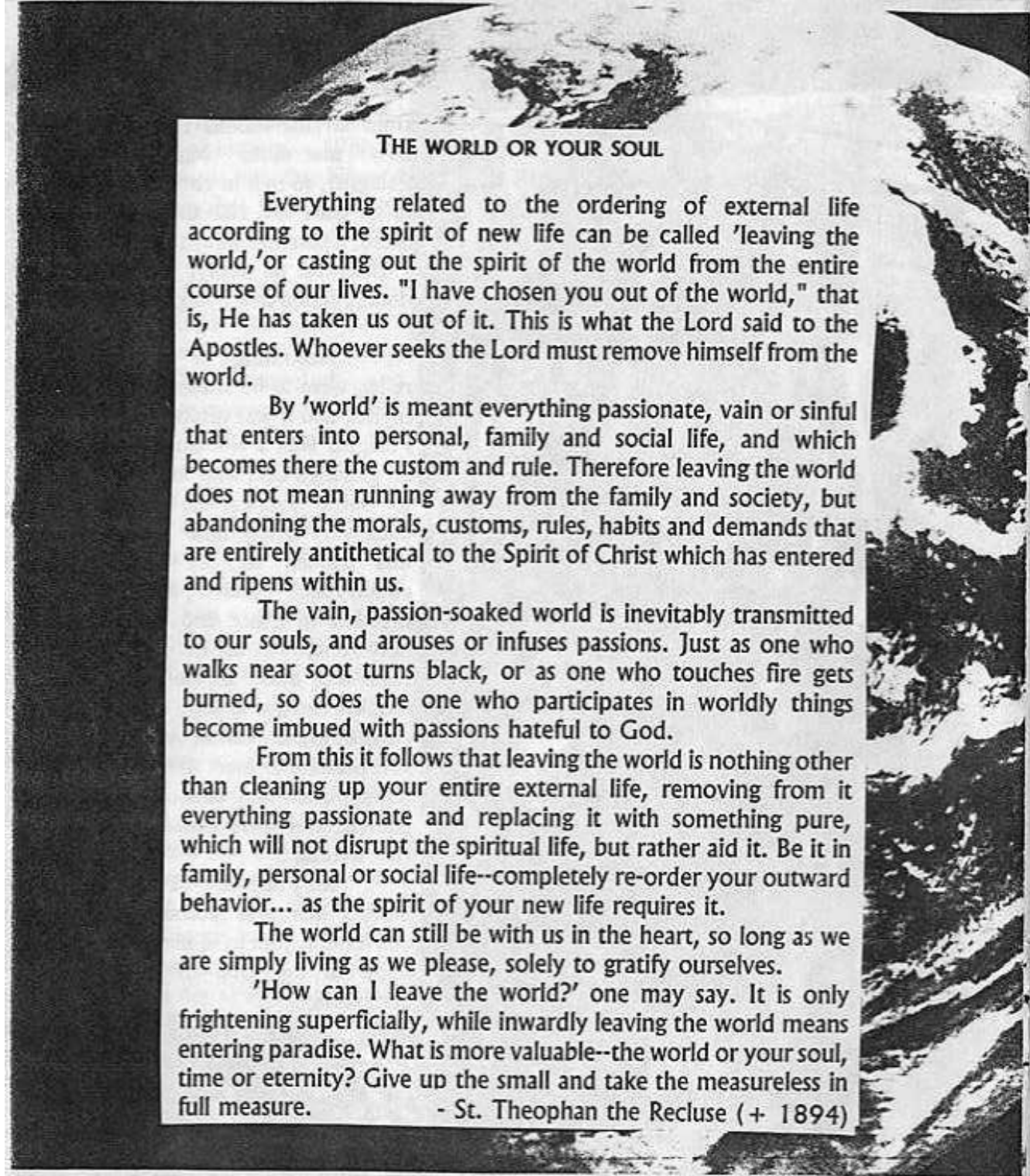
As I continued in my travels, from all the monks I met I heard how marvelous was this holy Pelagius, so rich in virtues. I decided to go back and visit this monk once more. Upon knocking at the window, I received no reply. Opening the door, I found that Pelagius was dead.

According to custom, the relics were to be anointed with holy myrrh, and it was discovered that Fr. Pelagius was a woman. Astonished, all glorified God who empowered her to battle against the enemy and decisively defeat him. The fame of this spread to the surrounding countryside, and people came together to honor and embrace the holy relics. All the holy monks and nuns that dwelt in the surrounding monasteries came forth with lighted candles in their hands, singing hymns and psalms, to meet the body of the Saint, which they conducted to their church, and there deposited it as a rich treasure.

May the life of this former harlot, this true account of total conversion, join us to her and give us hope in the God of mercy and compassion.







## THE WORLD OR YOUR SOUL

Everything related to the ordering of external life according to the spirit of new life can be called 'leaving the world,' or casting out the spirit of the world from the entire course of our lives. "I have chosen you out of the world," that is, He has taken us out of it. This is what the Lord said to the Apostles. Whoever seeks the Lord must remove himself from the world.

By 'world' is meant everything passionate, vain or sinful that enters into personal, family and social life, and which becomes there the custom and rule. Therefore leaving the world does not mean running away from the family and society, but abandoning the morals, customs, rules, habits and demands that are entirely antithetical to the Spirit of Christ which has entered and ripens within us.

The vain, passion-soaked world is inevitably transmitted to our souls, and arouses or infuses passions. Just as one who walks near soot turns black, or as one who touches fire gets burned, so does the one who participates in worldly things become imbued with passions hateful to God.

From this it follows that leaving the world is nothing other than cleaning up your entire external life, removing from it everything passionate and replacing it with something pure, which will not disrupt the spiritual life, but rather aid it. Be it in family, personal or social life--completely re-order your outward behavior... as the spirit of your new life requires it.

The world can still be with us in the heart, so long as we are simply living as we please, solely to gratify ourselves.

'How can I leave the world?' one may say. It is only frightening superficially, while inwardly leaving the world means entering paradise. What is more valuable--the world or your soul, time or eternity? Give up the small and take the measureless in full measure.

- St. Theophan the Recluse (+ 1894)

# SORROW

SORROW IS THE GREAT BIRTH-AGONY OF IMMORTAL POWERS, --sorrow is the great searcher and revealer of hearts, the great test of truth; for Plato has wisely said, sorrow will not endure sophisms, --all shams and unrealities melt in the fire of that awful furnace. Sorrow reveals forces in ourselves we never dreamed of. The soul, a bound and sleeping prisoner, hears her knock on her cell door, and awakens. Oh, how narrow the walls! oh, how close and dark the grated window! how the long useless wings beat against the impassible barriers! Where are we? What *is* this prison? What *is* beyond? Oh for more air, more light! When will the door be opened? The soul seems to itself to widen and deepen; it trembles at its own dreadful forces; it gathers up in waves that break with wailing only to flow back into the everlasting void. The calmest and most centered natures are sometimes thrown by the shock of a great sorrow into a tumultuous amazement. All things are changed. The earth no longer seems solid, the skies no longer secure; a deep abyss seems underlying every joyous scene of life. The soul, struck with this awful inspiration, is a mournful Cassandra; she sees blood on every threshold, and shudders in the midst of mirth and festival with the weight of a terrible wisdom.


AND YET SORROW IS GODLIKE, sorrow is grand and great, sorrow is wise and far-seeing. Our own instinctive valuations, the intense sympathy which we give to the tragedy which God has woven into the laws of Nature, show us that it is with no slavish dread, no cowardly shrinking, that we should approach her divine mysteries. What are the natures that cannot suffer? Who values them? From the fat oyster over which the silver tide rises and falls without one pulse upon its fleshly ear, to the hero who stands with quivering nerve parting with wife and child and home for country and God, all the way up is an ascending scale, marked by increasing power to suffer; and when we look to the Head of all being, up through principalities and powers and principedoms, with dazzling orders and celestial blazonry, to behold by what emblem the Infinite Sovereign chooses to reveal himself, we behold, in the midst of the throne, "a lamb as it had been slain."

SORROW IS DIVINE. Sorrow is reigning on the throne of the universe, and the crown of all crowns has been one of thorns. There have been many books that treat of the mystery of sorrow, but only one that bids us glory in tribulation, and count it all joy when we fall into divers afflictions, that so we may be associated with that great fellowship of suffering of which the Incarnate God is the head, and through which He is carrying a redemptive conflict to a glorious victory over evil. IF WE SUFFER WITH HIM, WE SHALL ALSO REIGN WITH HIM.

- Harriet Beecher Stowe



# THE POST-MODERN PILGRIM



My parents divorced when I was 4 years old. I was the youngest child and I lived with my mother and sister in a small cottage in the woods. I tried to be a consolation to them when they fought. I needed consolation. My grandmother, a painter and direct blood descendent of Abraham Lincoln, taught me the word compassion. My only consolation was quietly sitting in the woods thinking about compassion until I cried.

If I could feel sorrow I knew I was alive. It was dear to me. It was the Truth. My acting professor in college loved me because I could cry practically on cue. Everywhere I found reason to mourn. I was mourning the Fall. The distance from God.

I always sought to be mocked. I wanted to be persecuted and I wanted the world to hate me. The world was unforgiving so I didn't care if it tortured me or hung me or left me for dead. When I was 19 I tried going to a Methodist church. I left confused. It seemed the world was everywhere. I came back one week wearing a shirt that said, "Keep the Faith - the Catacombs" with a fist on it. No one would talk to me.

I grew up near New York city. I would take the bus to the city all the time by myself. My mother always worried, so I lied. I hung around homeless people and wrote graffiti everywhere. My tag was "Monk." I was friends with anyone who wasn't "going somewhere in this world," mostly skinheads and punks. I wore the same clothes everyday for months at a time, and rarely bathed.



I knew I didn't belong anywhere. I wanted to *be* alone and *feel* alone. I wanted everything to go away so I could listen. I can't really explain what that means. When I was around people who were talking I was quiet. When I opened my mouth everyone kind of just looked at me. I always felt like I didn't have a clue. I was incompatible.

I listened to only very few cello selections and Morrissey (the Smiths). I wrote songs, my band was called "Monk." My friends called me "monk." I wished I knew what a monk was. I attempted suicide time after time and battled therapist after therapist in school who depressed me most of all. I loved hard physical work, but I couldn't grasp employment. The only person that made any sense to me was Christ. I didn't question Him. I studied Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism in search of Christ.



*"Therefore I say to you, take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor yet for your body what you shall put on." (Matt. 6:25)*

I was a bike messenger in New York city riding through the streets like a maniac. I was in despair, there were more important things to be living for than food, clothing, and shelter. The world was like a cruel gutless machine hard at work digging its own grave.

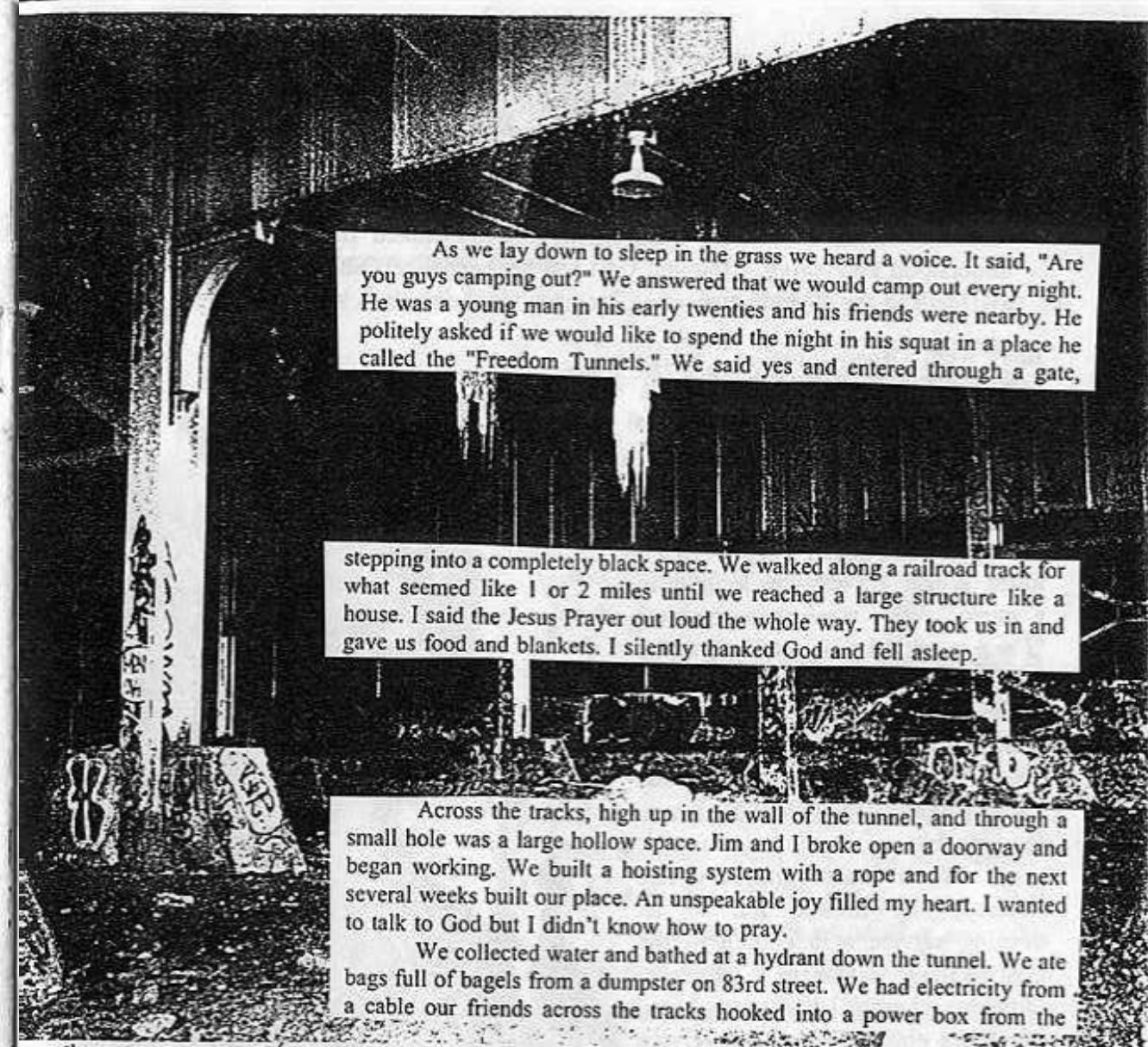
In 1994 I moved into a unificationist temple and lived there for 9 months. I thought maybe I was a monk. I sold flowers to cars at red lights in Queens. One night a young woman was crossing the street coming from the college. I gave her a flower. Her name was Natalia and she asked what I was doing. I said I was searching for God, I was listening. She seemed to understand. I had long accepted that *no one* understood. We exchanged addresses. The temple was now asking me to make a commitment that I for sure could not make, so I was gone.

That summer 1995 my good friend Mike visited me where I was in the woods in eastern Pennsylvania. He brought with him a book to give to me. He said, "I read it and knew you had to have it right away." It was called "The Way of the Pilgrim." No words could ever express my gratitude to my friend for this little book. It seemed to describe Heaven. The pilgrim wandered the Russian countryside seeking spiritual guides to show him unceasing prayer. There were monasteries, spiritual fathers. It was surely a fictional story! But no, it was true. What were the strange words: Matins? Liturgy? Philokalia? I carried only this book and a small bible in my two back pockets.

*Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head."*

The summer was ending and it would no longer be possible for me to remain where I was. At this time it was becoming difficult not knowing what my life was about. I had no agendas, I only wanted to cooperate somehow with something bigger than me, bigger than the world. I packed a few things in my backpack, my "Way of a Pilgrim," and met a good friend Jim in times square.

It was a Sunday afternoon, the 1st day of September, 1995. I was 23. As we walked down the empty street the world trade towers loomed, gray and ominous ahead. I was repeating in my head this "Jesus Prayer" I had learned from the Pilgrim. "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me." Soon we would need a place to sleep. I remembered a spot I used to go for peace on the upper west side in a park on the river. On the subway going there I repeated the Jesus Prayer.



As we lay down to sleep in the grass we heard a voice. It said, "Are you guys camping out?" We answered that we would camp out every night. He was a young man in his early twenties and his friends were nearby. He politely asked if we would like to spend the night in his squat in a place he called the "Freedom Tunnels." We said yes and entered through a gate,

stepping into a completely black space. We walked along a railroad track for what seemed like 1 or 2 miles until we reached a large structure like a house. I said the Jesus Prayer out loud the whole way. They took us in and gave us food and blankets. I silently thanked God and fell asleep.

Across the tracks, high up in the wall of the tunnel, and through a small hole was a large hollow space. Jim and I broke open a doorway and began working. We built a hoisting system with a rope and for the next several weeks built our place. An unspeakable joy filled my heart. I wanted to talk to God but I didn't know how to pray.

We collected water and bathed at a hydrant down the tunnel. We ate bags full of bagels from a dumpster on 83rd street. We had electricity from a cable our friends across the tracks hooked into a power box from the

*The Tunnel under  
New York streets.*

marina above us. Garbage right above provided all our needs and even tempted us to be extravagant. We gathered wood from construction dumpsters, and rugs, mattresses, paint and all our needs, working like ants. Living high in the wall deep inside of a dangerous rat-infested tunnel, I only felt unworthy to have such abundance.

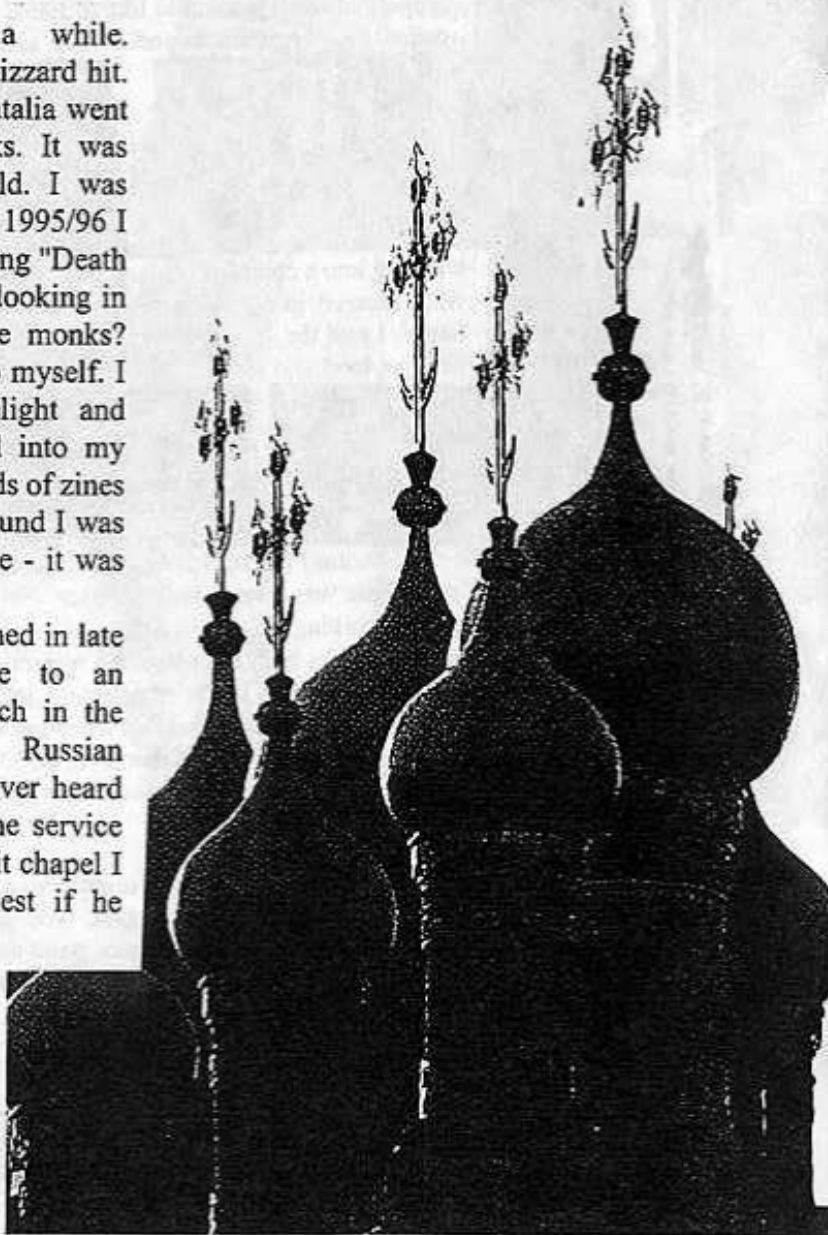
It was the worst winter in New York history. It was 10 degrees above ground which made it -20 degrees in the tunnel. Huge ice formations reached from the cathedral-like ceilings all the way to the ground. There were three record blizzards before January. The wind howled like a hurricane through the tunnel. A person living one mile back from us died. Our place was like a cold tomb.



I remembered the young woman Natalia I had met. I contacted her and we met in the park. I showed her my "Way of a Pilgrim" book. It was familiar to her. How did she know? I told her I built a place in a tunnel and was trying to live like this pilgrim. I was surprised when she asked me to take her there. I held her hand tightly as we walked the tracks. She understood *everything*. I thought God had sent an angel. She left me with a "Death to the World" zine.

Jim went away for a while. Just after he left the big blizzard hit. The power shorted out. Natalia went away on a trip for weeks. It was unspeakably dark and cold. I was alone. On New Years eve, 1995/96 I lit a candle and began reading "Death to the World." It was like looking in a mirror. Who were these monks? "I'm a monk!" I thought to myself. I drew near to the candlelight and began copying each word into my journal. Among the hundreds of zines and publications laying around I was afraid I would lose this one - it was too valuable.

When Natalia returned in late January, she invited me to an evening service at a church in the East Village. It was a Russian Orthodox church. I had never heard of such a church. When the service ended in the small candle-lit chapel I asked the black-robed priest if he would see me sometime.



The homeless coalition was removing people from the tunnel, and I would have to leave soon. Where would I go now? I remember praying for God to see through my inability to pray and reveal his will that I may cooperate. I saw in a newspaper ad these words: "Alaska employment, earn money." I was greatly and mysteriously drawn to this ad. Money! Perhaps this time I have some. Knowing my poverty, and from the kindness of her heart, Natalia offered to send me off. I packed a small bag and in the middle of a cold February night, I abandoned my underground cell.

Within days I was off the shore of a distant Aleutian Island on a ship that was not unlike a medieval slave operation. For two months I worked a grueling shift of 16 hours on, 6 hours off. For weeks I didn't see the light of day and one could barely stand due to the enormous swells of the Bering sea. I had with me "The Way of a Pilgrim," and when I was weak (often), I repeated "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me."

Meanwhile, Natalia had dropped her college courses and had flown to Seattle. There a woman gave her a free ticket to Anchorage and while I was out at sea she sought a place to celebrate the Orthodox church's Feast of feasts - Holy Pascha (Easter). She found a small ascetic community in the mountains north of Anchorage. They invited her to stay with them. When I was finally released from the ship I joined her there, unsure of what exactly it was. I was only filled with gratitude to have a place to stay.

I walked into a room, and there on a table lay piles of "Death to the World" zines, the very one I had read in the tunnel and had copied into my journal, and many others. I couldn't actually believe my eyes. I wondered how could this be! Soon a man in a black robe and a long black beard appeared whose name was Fr. Paul. I was introduced as a pilgrim. He welcomed me and asked me to prepare for Matins in the morning. *Matins? Like in my book?* I was unable to speak, so I silently thanked God and fell asleep.

In the morning, the Matins service was held in a small chapel in the woods of St. Sergius. There was chanting and all were saying "Christ is Risen." Throughout the next few days I began to realize that I had been delivered by the grace of God to a real life of "The Way of a Pilgrim." There was liturgy and spiritual teachers. Fr. Paul spoke of monasteries and of the very monks I read about in "Death to the World." I rarely said a word. I reflected back to just three months earlier in the dark tunnel. Here the sun did not set for weeks. From unspeakable darkness to unending light. In a daze I shared with them my testimony - the tunnel, the "Way of a Pilgrim" book, the church in the East Village, the ship. They directed me to a monastery on a small island near Kodiak where I would meet living *monks* for the first time.





What happened on this island within my innermost parts happened not with words and therefore cannot be explained on paper. There was a peaceful loneliness. The stillness and utter silence pierced my soul. Everything around me - the huge moss-covered trees, the jagged cliffs of the shore all listened to God, perfectly obedient. How much lower I was than all creation in my stubborn willfulness! How I longed to stand with this creation and listen in perfect obedience to God! As I stood in the midst of the silent forest I wanted only one thing more than life itself - to be forgiven. I wanted only to be an Orthodox Christian.

The monks accepted me - a misfit from a rat-infested tunnel under New York - an outcast of society. In the small church following a service commemorating the dead, I fell to the floor on my face before the living God and wept uncontrollably. How lost I had been on my search! How far I had strayed from life! My very soul was exposed to me. It was as if I stood in a bright light and could see all of my prideful thoughts, words and deeds. How many in number they are! How could I judge others? I once thought that repentance was a foolish notion, but now it became to me the very thing I needed to live on more than food, more than any earthly thing! I begged to be baptized. Soon I would be torn from this place, my home.

The monks knew the very same priest in the East Village in New York, Fr. Christopher, that I had visited months earlier, and they said he is a great friend of theirs. Another miracle of God's Providence!

On March 8th, 1997 I was baptized with the name Sergius, after the desert-dweller saint whose repose date is commemorated on my birthday, and who called me from a cold dark tunnel to Alaska, where my life found me. As I came up out of the water during my baptism, Fr. Christopher solemnly chanted from the ancient Psalms:

*"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered.*

*Because I kept silence, my bones were waxed old through my crying all the day long. For day and night thy hand lay heavy upon me, I was reduced to misery while the thorn stuck fast in me...*

*Thou art my refuge from the affliction which surroundeth me, O my rejoicing, deliver me from them that have encircled me...*

*I will instruct thee and teach thee in this way which thou shalt go. I will fix Mine eyes upon thee. Be not as the horse or as the mule which haveth no understanding..."*

I wept as I understood.

To all youth who recognize the soul-corrupting passions of the world within us, and the unrelenting temptations of the world around us, let us, on the wings of Christ, whose image is preserved in the holy monasteries of the Orthodox faith, soar above the distractions and l i s t e n...

