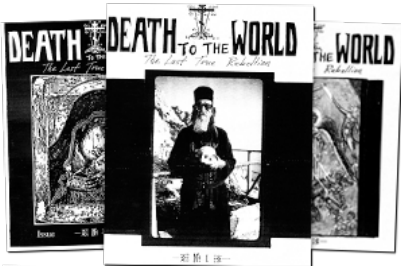
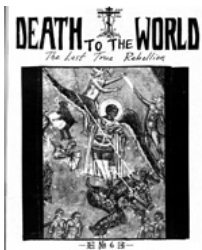


ARTICLES DEATH TO THE WORLD.COM



SUBSCRIBE TODAY!

Get Death to the World now! [click here](#)



This article is from Issue 6.
Click [here](#) to order

SILENCE A Vision of Eternal Rest

Silence

(Written by Monk Damascene, 1995)

"Silence is the mystery of the future age, but words are the implements of this world." +Saint Isaac the Syrian



HELEN KONTZEVITCH
IN HER YOUNGER DAYS

IN BERKELEY, CA, right next to TELEGRAPH AVENUE, there lived a 94-year-old Russian woman named Helen Kontzevitch. Almost stone-deaf, she was as if untouched by the world around her. Telegraph Avenue was one of the counter-culture capitals of the world, but she had already gone beyond, not only the culture, but the counter-culture as well. She had gone beyond this noisy world, her spirit awakened by the voice of an eternal silence. She had a vision of heaven, of eternal rest.

I used to visit her every week. During the week I was very active, riding my bike all around Berkeley, but at her place everything was slowed down, and I had to slow down. All my communications with her had to be handwritten. Every little thing took a seemingly interminable amount of time. It took her ten minutes to walk into the next room to get some tea and come back, which she insisted on doing herself for me, even though I usually jumped up and offered to do it in an instant.

From Helen Kontzevitch I have my first tangible experience of the power of the soul, or spirit, which outlasts the body. After 94 years, her body was practically dead. She could hardly move around on her tired and swollen legs. Even when she was sitting her movements were exceedingly slow, as if physically she was hardly present. But what struck me so deeply was that, in this practically dead body, her spirit was so incredibly strong and powerful. It's hard to describe it in words. One just felt that one was in the presence of a very strong and indomitable woman, a woman who could not be fooled or bowled over by anybody, despite her physical frailty.

She had lived a rich and varied life. Born in Russia, she was the niece of a famous spiritual writer, whose work she had continued in America and Russia, being the author of several books. One of her main contributions was that she fought against a widespread false teaching that tried to demean the Cross of Christ, by which we are saved and drives away demons.

At 94, her mind remained sharp and clear as a bell. She lived a conscious spiritual life, and therefore, as her experience increased, so did her inner wisdom. Once she said: "Now I know that the soul is immortal. All the things that my soul has acquired through the years, all that it has accumulated and learned! It's impossible to believe that it will all be destroyed at death. It must continue: spiritual growth must go on after death."

It was rare to hear her talk that way. She did not speak much of her spiritual acquisitions. We would not even know of her vision of heaven if it were not for the following occurrence.

After I had left Berkeley and went to live at the monastery, I learned that the Abbot of the monastery had once found a very interesting article in an old, pre-Revolutionary Russian magazine. The article, it was claimed, was written by Elder Ambrose of Optina: a seer of heavenly mysteries to whom thousands of spiritual seekers flocked in 19th century Russia. People suffering in heart, soul and body sought Elder Ambrose out, and many were the healings and miraculous spiritual transformations in people wrought through him. Among the people who visited Elder Ambrose was the novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who later made him the model of the character of Elder Zosima in the book *The Brothers Karamazov*.

In the article which our Abbot had found, Elder Ambrose had written of a vision he had experienced of heaven. Because the article had been published after Elder Ambrose's death, our Abbot wondered perhaps if it was a forgery. Perhaps someone had just invented the story and signed Elder Ambrose's name to it?

Our Abbot wanted to republish this article, and since he always turned to Helen Kontzevitch whenever he has questions about literary matters, he came to her with a question: was the article authentic or not.

Helen Kontzevitch read the article and replied: "Yes, it is authentic. I know it is, because I myself had an experience which is identical to the one described by Elder Ambrose in this account."

Here is that article...

SILENCE, OR A VISION OF ETERNAL REST: A MANUSCRIPT BY ELDER AMBROSE OF OPTINA

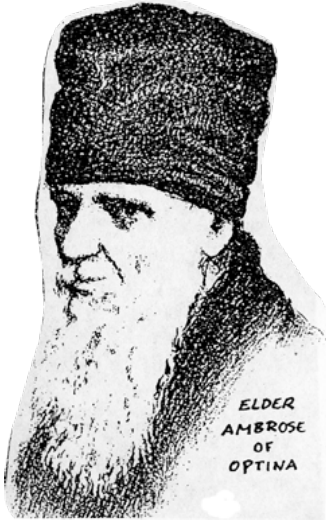
IT WAS A WONDERFUL TIME IN SPRING... I could not resist its allurements to through myself into nature's embrace, and that paradise of spring, which I chose as a place of my daily visits. It was the dark thick forest situated on the high bank of a big wide river, the Oka, that washes with its milky waters several central Russian provinces.

Giving myself over to this blessed state in the bosom of nature, I drank in its aromatic breath and went deeply into the spiritual apprehension of the Creator, Who is too immense to behold...

The surrounding world from which I came forth then retreated from me to somewhere far away, and disappeared into the realm of concepts foreign to me...

I was alone, and around me there was only the slumbering forest. Its ancient giants stretched far to the skies; they searched for God, and I also was in search of Him.

But suddenly I am outside the forest, somewhere far away in another world quite unknown to me, never imagined by me...



There is a bright white light around me! Its transcendence is so pure and enticing that I am submerged, along with my perception, into limitless depths that cannot satisfy myself or my admiration for this realm; cannot completely fill myself with its lofty spirituality. Everything is so full of beauty all around. So endearing this life... So endless the way. I am being swept across this limitless clear space. My sight that is directed upwards, does not descend anymore; does not see anything earthly. The whole of the heavenly firmament has transformed itself before me into one general bright light, pleasing to the sight... but I do not see the sun. I can only see its endless shining and bright light. The whole space in which I glide, without hindrance, without end, without fatigue, is filled with white transparent as a ray of sun, just as its light and beautiful beings, and through them I am admiring this limitless world. The images of all these beings unknown to me are infinitely diverse and full of beauty... I also am white and bright as are they. Over me, as over them, there reigns eternal rest. Not a single thought of mine is enticed by anything earthly, not a single beat of my heart moves any longer with human cares or earthly passion. I am all peace and rapture. I am still moving in this infinite light, which surrounds me without change. There is nothing else in the world except for the white bright light, and these equally radiant numberless beings. All these beings do not resemble me, nor are similar to each other; they are all endlessly varied and compellingly attractive. Amidst them I feel myself incredibly peaceful. They evoke in me, neither fear, nor amazement, nor trepidation. All that we see here does not agitate us; does not amaze us. All of us here, as if we have belonged to each other for a long time, are used to each other and are not strangers at all. We do not ask questions, we do not speak to each other about anything. We all feel and understand that there is nothing novel for us here. All of our questions are solved with one glance, which sees everything and everyone. There is no trace of the wars of passions in anyone. All move in different directions, opposite to each other, not feeling any limitation, any inequality, or envy, or sorrow, or sadness. One peace reigns in all the images of entities. One light is endless for all. Oneness of life is comprehensible to all.

My rapture at all this supersedes everything. I sank into this eternal rest. No longer was my spirit disturbed by anything, and I knew nothing else earthly. None of the tribulation of my heart came to mind, even for a minute. It seemed that everything that I had experienced before on earth never existed. Such was my feelings in this new radiant world of mine, and I was at peace and was joyful, and desired nothing better for myself. All my earthly thoughts concerning fleeting happiness in the world died in this beautiful life new to me, and did not come back to life again; so it seemed to me at last there in that better world.

But how I came back here I do not recall. What transitory state it was, I do not know. I only felt that I was alive, but I did not remember the world in which I lived before on earth. This did not seem at all to be a dream. Actually, about earthly things I no longer had the least notion. I only felt that the present life is mine, and that I was not a stranger in it. In this state of spirit I forgot myself and immersed myself in this light-bearing eternity, and this timelessness lasted without end, without measure, without expectation and without sleep in this eternal rest. Thus it seemed to me that there would not be any kind of change...

But then suddenly the thread of my radiant life was cut off and I opened my eyes. Around me was the familiar forest, and a beam of spring sunlight was playing on its meadows. I was seized with terrible sadness. "Why am I here again?" I thought. And that radiant light emanating world which I had just experienced, with all its host of numberless visionary entities, vividly remained impressed before my mental eyes, but my physical vision did not see it longer. This terrible and tearful sorrow I could not endure and I began to cry bitterly.

"Only after that experience I believed in the concept of the separation of the soul from the body, and understood what the special spiritual world was. But the question of what is the meaning of life still remained a mystery for me. In order to penetrate this mystery, I left this world into which I was born and embraced the monastic life.