
**CHILDREN LOST BY THEIR PARENTS:
"GOTHS" AND OTHERS**

SOLOVETSKIY LISTOK



**EDITION BY SPASO-PREOBRAZHENSKY THE SOLOVETSKY
STAVROPEGIAL MONASTERY**

ISSUE №1. JANUARY 2012

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What can parents do when their children become estranged? How can they prevent the breakdown of family relationships?

Mending the relationship between parents and their children has always been a serious issue, and is particularly acute today in the 21st century. Our society is often afflicted by ills that can not be cured or controlled. This article is not only about the problems of young people who identify themselves as Goths. We will examine what Goths have in common with drug-addicted teenagers, and also with normal children.

Goths and drug-addicted teens share several common elements: they have lost sight of the meaning of life, they have no desire to live, they lack their family's love, and they have no God in their souls. If you are in this position it is very hard to escape from the effects of such profound crisis, even by having a family, by dedicating yourself to your spouse, to your children, to a sport or to your job. You are starting from rock bottom. In order to reset your life you have to climb up in ways that bypass conventional boundaries of mental healing.

Where do these troubled people come from, whose way of life seems to defy society? What can we say about Goths? What can we say about their cult of death, their frequent cases of suicide? What is the origin of their black clothes and black eyes? What should parents do about all this? What should they do with their children?

All the issues described in this article apply not only to Goths but to many others as well, both young and not so young. They may be very aggressive, or may simply say: «I'm sick and tired of everything.» Outward appearance, hairstyle and other means of expression should not divert us, or prevent us from understanding the important reasons that lie hidden behind such behaviour. Parents who want to reconnect with their children should think about these hidden motives. But what are they?

Some say that young people's behaviour has been programmed by 'smart' individuals: they say that youth subcultures have been manufactured. Is it true? It looks like it is. But can we therefore say that only those so-called smart people are responsible for this? Why

do teens get obsessed by their ideas? Cancer cells cannot live on bare bones, and fungus does not infest a healthy body. Young people take in intellectual poison because they have a predisposition to it, something that is inside them. What can we say about this predisposition?

Christianity says that the Fall of man – who was once perfect and unspoiled – corrupted the entire natural world, including human nature, causing all people to be born into original sin right up to the present day. And in ourselves we find a terrible disorder. A dreadful chasm has been opened up inside us. When facing it, we confront a mystery, and we do not know what to do with it. But that is not the end of our torment. A complex feeling develops in every person, a feeling that has been described by Venerable Justin (Popovich) as follows: «As long as man feels, as long as man thinks, he cannot help crying over the terrible mystery of the world, crying endlessly and inconsolably, because in chaos and grief human nature is endless and infinite. This is man's immortality. An annoying and cursed immortality. Oh, if only the exhausted and worn-out man could find death, in which all thoughts would die without trace – and forever!». The yell that ends this quotation is reflected in many souls. Why do children commit suicide? Perhaps in this unavoidable fact of our existence we should look for the answer.

Those who create youth subcultures would never be so successful if it were not for the terrible inner insecurity inside human beings. The creators of cults are deceiving people, promising to save them from this insecurity. Some men don't feel this insecurity so acutely, and may set themselves in opposition to their children - even though they are potential self-murderers. They may say they do not feel such inner torments. Even if that is true, it is not always due to some inner merit on the parent's part. Perhaps it is simply a kind of senselessness, an atrophied perception of the spiritual world, of self-actualization. The clamour of internal contradictions has not reached that person yet, it has simply not been heard. The person feels the increasing pressure of terrible internal problems, but continues to dismiss them: he has no time, he is busy with his family, his job, and so on. Someone who has devoted himself to such a worldly agenda is like a man who deals with a toothache by anaesthesia alone. The disease remains, but the person temporarily feels no pain. But nowadays the cover of coarse

materiality has been frustrated, and people of the 21st century are more vulnerable to all influences, both internal and external.

People are beginning to feel pain. Some have turned to the Genuine Doctor, but those who haven't learned about Him have begun taking 'painkillers' to somehow get rid of their inner torments. Drug addiction, alcoholism, gambling addiction, the Goth subculture – these are pills, which modern mankind is taking in an attempt to deal with inner pain. Often this inner pain is felt by people who have some degree of spiritual awareness. They hear the inner scream, but have no idea what to do with it. Some people believe that young souls suffer from a huge flood of information. That is probably true. Yet it seems that people are destroyed not only by the intensity of information, but by a lack of reliable criteria with which to evaluate it. Without these criteria, awful lies are sometimes accepted as truth, and death – as freedom. Without these criteria one can not avoid confusion.

It is Christianity that provides these criteria. It contains the knowledge necessary to heal spiritual sickness. But it has been rejected, and with it this knowledge and these criteria have been rejected. Perhaps Goths represent the self-denunciation of our society, which mostly rejected Jesus Christ, the one who is able to heal a human's terrible internal damage. People can choose to ignore Christianity, to fight it, to dismiss it as old-fashioned, useless and even harmful. After their daily working life, they return home exhausted. And what do they find waiting for them?

They don't find the peace and comfort that they desire, but children dressed in black, children eager to die: the parent's calling has reached its logical conclusion. Freedom from spirituality turns out to be freedom from healing.

Parents can provide many things for their children, but if they only try to give them education, money and pleasure, all these things will not be enough to fill the terrible chasm that has formed in their souls. The loss of meaning in life cannot be replaced, even by the most expensive of pleasures. Parents will try to do something to awaken their children's enthusiasm for life. But what can they do if teens are indifferent to such attempts? After a pilgrimage to the depths of the world's mysteries, it will seem to them that everything is meaningless. For only the Truth can persuade them. The Truth

rejected by so many people. You can give medicine to a child, or treat him with psychotherapy – but can any injection cure his belief in the meaninglessness of life? What can help, if an invisible passion for death lives in him, a mistaken belief that this is an escape route?

Who has not lamented the arrival of autumn? Warm days when the sun shone and warmed us have gone. Days are becoming shorter, cold winds are beginning to blow. Sometimes they blow so hard that sheets of iron are ripped from the roofs. They blow all night long, as if death has taken the place of life.

The inner state of man can be compared with the darkness of autumnal days. St Justin (Popovich) writes: «Human feeling, in the true sense of the word, is God feeling, Christ feeling. Without God the Word, it raves, writhes, dies with passions, sins, absurdity, diabolism, despair, selfishness, with eternal existence and the unachievable. Trying always to come true, it will never come true in reality, wholly. Godless and senseless human feeling is always dying, but nowise can die. That is the Gospel worm itself which does not die, and the very fire which is never quenched, that is hell (compare Mark 9:44).»

Imagine that a young soul has a vision of his disorganised inner world. This man then tries to find at least some way out of his terrible condition, but he can't. He is not satisfied by advice that he needs to work more, to take up sports or manage his condition scientifically. Such a person can be told stories about social responsibility, or duty to parents, or the value of health. You can talk to him for a long time, be convincing and logical, but you will never get any result.

Work, science and permanent employment can help a lot. A man who is always busy is less vulnerable to depression than someone who does nothing. But if a person can not see any sense in his job, then it can't bring him joy. And it is hard to find any sense in your job if you see no sense in your life.

Perhaps adults' mistake is that they forget about the reality of human existence, as described above. This fact can't be dismissed or forgotten.

If you try to ignore it, you might end up in a conflict situation. What kind of situation is that?

By saying that no internal disorder exists, adults start to ignore their children's laments. From the child's point of view, their thoughts about suicide are a reality, but for adults – they are just a nonsense. Adults start to believe that teens' laziness is the cause of their stress, and that teens understand nothing about life. Yet it never occurs to them that teens feel more acutely some of the realities of life. Without teaching the true meaning of life, parents begin to force and to denounce. In return they get back resistance from their children and the breakdown of relationships.

The next problem comes from the fact that adults don't want to listen to their children's explanations about why they are as they are. One young Goth said their black clothes are mourning dress for the pain that reigns in the world. We can't fully agree that pain really rules the world. But neither we can dismiss the fact that it is present, and that its presence is sometimes felt very acutely. The words of this young man in some way resemble the words of the Apostle Paul, who wrote that «the whole to creation groaneth and travaileth in pain» (Romans 8:22).

It would be a terrible mistake to label such a man as schizophrenic. The man has seen the emptiness in himself, has felt its deadly chill. He wants to escape from this terror, to stop feeling its pressure. He appeals to his society in hope that it can help him. But what does he see around him? Only people who are forcing and denouncing him without educating him about the meaning of life. This whole environment creates a terrible pressure through its commonness, dullness, and pettiness. He comes home and enters a hell of abuse and anger. How can this child escape, this child who gets hysterical because of parental abuse, who is suffocating from lack of spirituality and the meaninglessness of everything around him?

If such a person is given the label schizophrenic, he will become yet more convinced that he isn't understood by society. He will become more convinced that the world is full of pain, more and more determined to follow his own way. By imposing the label on such a man, we will probably lose our last opportunity to reach him. By imposing the label, we affirm the gap that exists between us and him. This man, who began to wear mourning dress for the pain that reigns on earth,

may have started wearing it for a reason: he did not experience love. In this world he faced pain.

The following episode from the life of St Alexius Mechev may help us think about this, and also about the fact that love and the meaning of life can not be replaced by material wealth.

«Once father Alexius was called to visit a wealthy family – for Holy Communion. He was told that the son had shot himself. The priest came immediately. He was taken through luxurious rooms to the bedroom where a young man with a bandage on his head lay on a bed. The priest approached, speaking tenderly. Silence. And no matter how the priest tried to warm and soften the boy's frozen heart, he remained stubbornly silent. After many unsuccessful attempts to find an approach to boy's soul, Alexius simply put his arm around boy's head and gently clasped it to his chest. Tears flowed from the boy's eyes, and sobbing he began to tell how stifled he felt in the refined surroundings, how unbearable it was to live in an atmosphere of hypocritical social proprieties, without sincerity or love in his family. Everything was said.

In the end the young man began to recall all the details of his life that weighed on his conscience: «Father, I want to say this... and that...» Soothed and peaceful, the boy received the Eucharist. Living in material prosperity, he most likely lacked parental warmth and cordiality.»

You can only reach such a person through love. It seems that the way to deal with young people such as him can be found through a change of heart. If you change your heart and see the young man not as a Goth or Satanist, or schizophrenic, who is to be put into a psychiatric hospital and cured, but just as a man who is sick and cold in this world, then perhaps you will be able to make contact with his heart. If you love this man, then you'll find the right words. There is an interesting example from the life of Elder Porphyry Kavsokalivit.

Elder Porphyry Kavsokalivit said: «Once a hippie came to me – all in amulets and rings, and he had some very colourful, strange clothes. He asked me to accept him. The nuns were worried, went to ask me and I told them to let him in. As soon as he sat in front of me, I saw his soul. He had a good soul, but wounded and therefore rebellious. I spoke to him with love, and he was touched. 'Geronda,' he said to me, 'until this

day no one talked with me in such a way' [...] We talked a bit about his problems, and he left very satisfied. The next week he came again with a whole company of hippies. They came to my cell and sat around me. Among them was a girl, and I felt pity for her. They had good souls, just wounded. I did not talk about Christ with them, because they were not yet ready to hear about Him. We discussed things that were interesting to them. When we finished our conversation, and they were ready to leave, they said to me: 'Geronda, please, let us kiss your feet.' I was embarrassed, but well, I allowed them to do it. After that, they gave me a blanket [...]

«After a while the hippie girl came back. Her name was Mary. I saw that spiritually Mary was ahead of her friends, and for the first time spoke to her about Christ. The girl accepted my words. She came several times and got on a right path. Mary even told her friends: 'Guys, I could never imagine that being a hippie I would know Christ'.»

Probably this is the only way to succeed in dealing with lost children. Of course it's easier to do it in a quicker and simpler way: for example, by tearing them off a strip. Parents who wish to find their children would do better to forget about such things. Nothing happens without reason. Perhaps the situation is not accidental. Those parents who see the futility of the impact that habitual actions have on the child finally understand that in addition to material needs there are also spiritual ones. Perhaps the situation will prompt parents to think about their souls and to reconsider their lives. If adults have not understood the great art of love before, it is now time to learn. And it is time to learn not just how to love, but also how to pray. It is time for prayer, too. If all attempts at persuasion do not work, it means that we should pray. We can reflect on another episode from the life of Elder Porphyry.

«One Sunday morning Father Porphyry with his friend, an elderly farmer, went to the village church. On their way they met a company of six or seven young men going in the opposite direction. The farmer asked: 'Where are you going, boys?' They replied: 'To a cafe'. Then the farmer, a very strict man, exclaimed indignantly: 'Aren't you ashamed of going to cafe on Sunday morning instead of going to church? Aren't you Christians?' And he zealously began delivering a sermon to them. The boys answered him in a rather rude manner, and then went on their

way. The elder was silent. Excited and pleased with himself, the farmer asked him: 'Well, was I right?' 'No, you were not.' The farmer, expecting some praise, was upset by this answer. They came to the church. The old man went to the altar, and the farmer went to his place. Less than half an hour later the whole company of young people walked into the church. The farmer rubbed his hands with pleasure. Immediately after the Divine Liturgy ended and the elder went out from the altar, the farmer hurried to meet him. Pointing to the teens, he said: 'You see, I was right, teaching them a lesson. They thought over my words and came to church.' The Elder replied with a smile that they had come because he secretly prayed for them, but not because of his 'sermon'.»

Prayer can act where nothing is to be gained by human effort. Prayer will change those who pray. It will consecrate them. Seraphim of Sarov said: «Child, acquire the spirit of peace and thousands close by you will be saved». Not one child, not two, but thousands of them will be saved.

It is hard for parents to abandon old habits that do not require any personal spiritual effort. Yet sorrow calls for a change of lifestyle. To save a child, it is only natural that you need to start with yourself. This is hard to accept.

It is also hard to recognise the need for God's grace. But it is only divine grace that can help. Writers and psychologists can hardly do anything at all. Here the parent must act only by grace. Pills might withdraw an acute condition, but can not replace the experience of grace.

You can try to cure a child with pills, but if the expression in his parents' eyes caused his disease, can these pills can change his parents' eyes? Will pills bring back the sun and turn cold autumn to summer? Will pills bring back a lost paradise?

In this article there are references to a book by Saint Justin (Popovich), Philosophical Gulfs. We recommend you to pay attention to the chapter «Paradise Lost: Confessions of a doe», which describes the sorrows of our fallen world through the eyes of a mountain doe. What the doe describes in her lost paradise seems to have ideas of extraordinary relevance to our problem. Saint Justin put words into

the doe's mouth that can help us understand the state of mind of those on the verge of suicide.

What if Goths are the does of the lost paradise that he describes, a place where flowers are trampled, trees are cut down, and the sky is darkened? Goths paint their eyes, which makes them appear bigger. This suggests a comparison between Goths and does, for a doe has large eyes. Do you know why?

«All things seem strange and unusual to me, that's why I'm afraid. Aren't my eyes so large as to take in what is obscure, comprehend as much as possible and make visible the invisible?». Once this doe lived in paradise. She talks not only about her eyes, but also describes her pain. Perhaps many Goths would put their name to her experiences... What do you think?

«... my eyes weep tears and my heart hurts from longing. My eyes ache from the many midnights they have observed. Last night the sun set in my eyes, but this morning there was no sunrise. The sun is submerged in the darkness of my grief. Something terrible and horrible is piercing my being. I am scared of everything around me and above me. Oh, if only I could escape from the fears of this world! But is there a world without fear? Hemmed in by torture, sated by gall, I have alerted my heart to the poison of sorrow, yet it is poisoned even more. I cry out for the return of my soul, frightened and driven by the horrors of this world, but it runs away without looking back, dismal and sad...»

These days we are very fond of proving something to somebody, and of accusing someone of something. Yet sometimes the psyche can't bear it. People tire of the stream of evidence and exposure. They want warmth and love. They are ready to run away, even very far away, in search of a place where they can get a little love and understanding. A city has many streets – but which of them lead to these almost mythical places where people love and understand?

If a mother punishes her child with love, the child feels this love. If parents forbid their child to do something with love, the child feels this love. Feeling love, he can accept their prohibition and punishment. But if punishments and prohibitions are given without love, that is bad. The child feels it. He feels he has been engaged with

intellectually, but without kindness and love. You wonder why kids commit suicide? You can seek the answer in the words of the doe.

«I heard from the heavenly angels when their wings were washed in my tears, that the devil has great intellectual ability, without kindness and love. After all people are the same if they lack kindness and love. An intelligent man who has no kindness or mercy is hell for my tender soul, hell for my sad heart, hell for my good-natured eyes, hell for my gentle being. My soul's one desire is not to live in this world or the next alongside a man who is intelligent but has no kindness or gracious tenderness. Only then I will agree for immortality and eternity. If not, destroy and obliterate me, my Lord!» You can not keep the doe in this world with stones and whips if it wishes to die. Sometimes we say: «What about your duties?», «You should», «You must», but the doe doesn't listen to us. Do you know what it desires? Do you know how to keep the doe with its tearful eyes in this world if it does not want to live?

«The white doe told me: «Long ago He, the Most Good and the Most Merciful, walked the land and turned Earth into paradise. Where he was standing, paradise began. Unending goodness and love, tenderness and mercy, grace and wisdom breathed out from Him upon all creatures, upon every living thing. He walked and brought down heaven to earth. His name was Jesus. We have seen in Him that man can be divine and beautiful only when he is sinless. He yearned like us, he wept because of evil inflicted by people. He was together with us, He stood against those human creations of sin, evil and death. Loving all creatures fondly and mercifully, He caressed them with divine sorrow and protected them from human evil and human death. He was and has remained forever our God – God of sad and grieving creatures, from the smallest to the biggest.

«Only people who are like Him are dear to us. They are of our nature. They are our immortality, and our love».

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Desember 2011, Solovky*



«Solovetskiy Listok» is blessed for publishing by Holy
Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Kirill

The issue is prepared by the publisher's department of the
monastery

Translator: Anna P. Yakovleva,
Editor of the translation: Nick Mayhew Smith, author of the
book: Britain's holiest places (2011)
Chief Editor: Deacon Vyacheslav Oumnyagin
Design and make up: M.A. Komrakov

Printed at the publisher's department of the monastery
30.12.2011

Circulation: 100 copies