

**ELDER MACARIUS  
OF OPTINA**

by Fr. Leonid Kavelin

Edições



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# *The Optina Elders Series*

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Vol. 1 ELDER LEONID OF OPTINA

*by Fr. Clement Sederholm*

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Vol. 3 ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

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*by Tatiana Torstensen*





ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA



Elder Macarius of Optina: official portrait.  
*From the Kontzevitch photograph collection.*

# ELDER MACARIUS

## *of Optina*

by  
FR. LEONID KAVELIN

Translated by Valentina V. Lyovina



ST. HERMAN OF ALASKA BROTHERHOOD

1995

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*Front cover:* Portrait of Elder Macarius by an unknown painter,  
19th century, preserved in Optina today.

#### FIRST ENGLISH EDITION

Translated from the Russian edition: *Skazanie o Zhizni i Podvigakh Blazhenia Pamiati Startsa Optinoi Pustyni Ieroskhimonakha Makaria [Narrative of the Life and Labors of Elder Macarius of Optina Monastery, of Blessed Memory]*, published by Kozelsk Optina Monastery of the Entrance of the Theotokos, Moscow, 1861. Second Russian edition published by the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina, California, 1975.

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Dedicated to the memory of  
an Optina disciple,  
PROFESSOR IVAN M. KONTZEVITCH  
on the thirtieth year of his repose.



Optina Monastery today.  
*Photograph by Optina monks.*

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Prof. I. M. Kontzevitch and his wife Helen  
in front of their icon corner, Paris, 1950.



## INTRODUCTION

# *The Image of “Smirennomudrie” —Humility of Wisdom*

*The brothers left for two days.... Fourteen inches of snow fell in their absence, and I am left in solitude, drawing inspiration from the life of Elder Macarius of Optina. In truth, whether a single person or community or a family—all Orthodox zealots today must be constantly living in another world, inspired by the example of holy men, resolved to follow them according to their strength.*

Chronicle of Fr. Seraphim Rose  
Platina, December 13/26, 1974

THE ORIGINAL *Prima Vita* of Elder Macarius was published soon after his death, and was the result of the careful gathering of information by one of his loving disciples, Fr. Leonid Kavelin. After this biography Kavelin continued writing other books, and ended his life as the ruling archimandrite of the most prestigious monastery of Holy Russia, the Lavra of St. Sergius of Radonezh. The biography of Elder Macarius went through several editions, to which new materials were added. A large biography compiled by many authors, including the great Optina Elder Barsanuphius, has been recently discovered in Russia and is nearing publication. The main original text of this book is presented here in a translation by the late Valentina V. Lyovina, a language

instructor in Hawaii. She is also the translator of the Life of Optina Elder Anthony, published in an earlier volume of the Optina Elder Series. (Elder Anthony was Elder Macarius' co-struggler.) No other translation exists in any language. Twenty years ago, the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood published a second edition of the original Russian biography of 1861, adding a new introduction and a brief biographical sketch of the author.

The original Russian biography of 1861 was presented to the Brotherhood by the late Professor Ivan M. Kontzevitch, himself a lay disciple of Optina Elder Nectarius. He had acquired the book in Paris from a used-book dealer who was peddling books from the Skete library of Optina Monastery after the Communists had liquidated that ancient bastion of spirituality which had gathered the original manuscripts of St. Paisius Velichkovsky.

The horror that Professor Kontzevitch and his wife Helen experienced in watching the liquidation of books and other material from the great citadel of spirituality in Russia was indeed great, especially since the peddler was obviously selling stolen goods, and the Kontzevitches had dedicated their whole lives to the preservation of the Optina heritage. Moreover, the Kontzevitches were very poor, and therefore were able to rescue but a handful of books.

Among the books they did save were this volume on Elder Macarius and a volume of his letters to laymen. These became the Professor's constant companions, without which, as he himself said, he could not live. In moments when he was in distress or doubt, or sought for the resolution of life problems, he would, after fervent prayer to Elder Macarius, open up the book of the letters and would receive the necessary answer or advice as from a living elder, and the dilemma would be resolved. Elder Macarius was his favorite Optina Elder.



Sunrise over the domes of Optina Monastery.  
*An art-photo by Optina monks, 1990.*

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

Professor Kontzevitch's life's work was a book called *The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit in Ancient Russia*, which he intended as an introduction to a proposed multi-volume, definitive encyclopedic work on Optina, entitled *Optina Monastery and its Era*. He did not live to bring this latter work into reality. A shortened version of 700 pages, compiled by his widow with our participation, was published posthumously.

When the St. Herman Brotherhood was formed in 1963, Fr. Seraphim Rose (†1982), who was studying Russian, frequently visited Professor Kontzevitch. The Professor desired that Fr. Seraphim translate this biography of Elder Macarius and make it available to contemporary people, especially the young generation. Although other of the Kontzevitch's treasured volumes were translated, the biography of Elder Macarius was put on hold, and Fr. Seraphim, in spite of his love for Elder Macarius, never translated this work in full.

To show how Elder Macarius originally entered into the life of the St. Herman Brotherhood, we present the following story:

It was the height of summer, and the fields of alfalfa were ready for mowing. The harvest was to be gathered in huge bundles and put into the barn next to the beautiful Holy Trinity Monastery located on a rolling plateau in upstate New York, near Jordanville. School was out, and the seminarians were on vacation. Those who stayed in the monastery-seminary were working off their tuition in the fields. There were few of us, and the weather was splendid—sunny and windy. I was then working part-time in the fields, my other job being in the icon-painting shop, where I put golden haloes on Fr. Cyprian's icons. The birds were singing, and our work in the fragrant fields, our closeness to the earth, filled us with youthful vigor. As we lifted huge bales into a truck and brought them to the barn, I fell from the top of the truck and broke my leg. Fr. Sergius, the infirmarian, applied ice to my leg, and I was rushed

## INTRODUCTION

to the hospital. In a day I returned as an invalid in a cast and was placed in my cell, where I could behold the fragrant fields only through a window, and hear the wind only as it whistled through the corridor. That was when Elder Macarius entered my life.

The young Hieromonk Vladimir visited me, and made the following statement: "Do you know that this September (of 1960), on the eve of the Nativity of the Theotokos, it will be a hundred years since the repose of Elder Macarius of Optina?" I knew next to nothing of the details of that Elder's life because I was mainly interested in the life of Elder Nectarius, whose disciple, Fr. Adrian, was my most cherished Father-confessor. Fr. Vladimir suggested that I try my pen at writing a brief article in commemoration of the forthcoming jubilee. He brought me a stack of books, but there was no full-length biography—mostly there were short articles from chapters in literature available at that time. And he said, "Let's go to church and serve a panikhida for him." With difficulty I hobbled downstairs on my crutches from the second floor, and the two of us sang a Pannikhida and then a Moleben before undertaking this good work. That summer I was engrossed in the world of Elder Macarius. I read fascinating accounts and memoirs, and I was struck by his clairvoyance, but especially by his love that stemmed from the power of his humility of wisdom. While reading some of his letters, I could almost see the compassionate tears he shed for suffering people. Yet he was strict, firm, no-nonsense. His opinions were clearly not his own, but came from the Patristic voice of the Church's doctors of souls. In a short while, I presented my first feeble literary attempt—an article on Elder Macarius—to the editor of one of the monastery's publications, Archimandrite Constantine (Zaitsev). After thoroughly editing it, Fr. Constantine published it, and even bestowed upon me mod-

erate praise. When the article was printed, complete with the Elder's portrait—the first time he was presented in this publication—I was overjoyed. Furthermore, I received a letter from Professor Kontzevitch and his wife in California soon after the article's publication, which began: "God be praised, we have found another lover of Optina." The letter contained a two-page list of literary material on Optina hitherto unknown to me.

At the time I received this letter from the Kontzevitches, I had hardly even heard about them. They were not particularly liked at the Jordanville Monastery, where people were prejudiced against them because they had come from Paris—and Paris was a center of the liberal Russian intelligentsia (of which, however, the Kontzevitches had never actually been a part). I began to correspond with them; and later, after my graduation, I felt compelled to visit them on my way to Spruce Island, Alaska (the home of St. Herman). I was then able to see them face to face and really get to know these living transmitters of the Optina spirit.

It was a foggy San Francisco afternoon when I came to Bishop Nektary's house on Divisadero Street. Bishop Nektary, as I learned, was Professor Kontzevitch's brother. Although I had known the Bishop earlier, when he was a hieromonk, now I saw how he lived. His Victorian apartment made quite an impression on me. From floor to ceiling all the walls were covered with books and portraits of righteous people. (Especially remarkable was a portrait of Elder Gabriel, an Optina monk who was a spiritual elder of Archbishop Tikhon. Archbishop Tikhon was the spiritual father of Bishop Nektary, who was at that time in the rank of Abbot.) Right underneath his apartment, down a narrow staircase, was the tiny, low-ceilinged apartment where lived Professor and Mrs. Kontzevitch, whom I then saw for the first time.

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Professor Kontzevitch was of medium stature, with refined features and bright blue eyes which looked quite stern. He was a typical gentleman of the Victorian era: proper, since he had been in the military; sensitive, as he was very religious; and intelligent—his entire visage bespoke a man of letters and depth. In Russia he had been a spiritual son of Optina Elder Nectarius and the righteous lay priest Nicholas Zagorovsky, about whom there is a chapter in Professor Kontzevitch's *magnum opus* on Optina (*Optina Monastery and Its Era*). While in the White Army, Professor Kontzevitch met an Optina monk, Innocent, with whom he corresponded all his life. The monk was also a disciple of the Optina Elders, who had even taught him to carve Optina wooden spoons (one of which I inherited). After emigrating to France, Professor Kontzevitch graduated from the Sorbonne, as well as from the St. Serge Theological Academy. Due to his conservative orientation, however, he was not encouraged to join the faculty, and thus he became isolated. He continued to work in his original profession as an electrical engineer, installing electricity in rural areas of the South of France. There his heart was very much at peace, because this whole area, once ancient Gaul, was covered with traces of fourth-, fifth- and sixth-century ascetics, mostly disciples of St. John Cassian the Roman, who had inhabited these abandoned ruins when they were glorious Byzantine monastic centers.

To his great surprise, in Paris Professor Kontzevitch met the niece of Sergei Nilus, another disciple of the Optina Elders. Nilus was the author of several books based on archives in the Optina scriptorium. The meeting of these two Optina fledglings was providential, because they were united not only by a mutual attraction, but also by their common orientation and tradition. They married and, quite characteristically, their honeymoon was spent separately—he went to Mt. Athos, while she stayed in a nearby town. They then read their wedding gift:

twelve volumes of the Lives of Saints and Martyrs. After the Second World War they came to America to join Professor Kontzevitch's brother, the future Bishop Nektary, whom he had not seen since the Revolution. He then taught Patrology for several years at the Holy Trinity Seminary. By 1954 they had settled into the apartment in San Francisco where I later met them.

It was rather dark in the basement apartment, even in broad daylight; and votive lamps hanging before huge, ancient icons dominated their living room. There was the traditional table near the window, where intellectual activity was conducted, and where I was now entertained with tea and pirog, baked especially for me. The atmosphere was that of the Old World, and the couple in this half-lit living room seemed to have spilled over from Holy Russia, living like recluses as the noisy world rumbled outside and planes flew overhead. Oblivious to this world so hostile to monasticism, they were virtually Optina monastics living in the world. It was a perfect atmosphere, in which the spirit of Optina thrived—concealed from the world, dominated by vigil lamps, and winged with the hope of Optina's future resurrection. They were especially kind to me, and quite insistent upon knowing my future life's path. They understood my artistic inclinations, and even considered them essential to the promotion of the Optina spirit. Our friendship lasted even up to their repose. I buried both of them, twenty-five years apart.

From this trip to California I carried with me a strong sense of the urgency of giving the image of the Optina Elders, and especially of Elder Macarius, to the modern world. Not long before I left, I attended a lecture by Professor Kontzevitch on the letters of Elder Macarius. This lecture was included in chapter seven of his book on Optina, and is included in its entirety in the present volume. My first article on Elder



## INTRODUCTION

Macarius became the main chapter on the Elder in Professor Kontzevitch's book.

Not long before he died, Professor Kontzevitch made me promise to help his wife fulfill her literary obligations. Our Brotherhood faithfully kept this promise, having Mrs. Kontzevitch as our main advisor in the publication of our periodical, *The Orthodox Word*, and subsequent books. Hardly a single issue or book was printed without her knowledge and participation. Until her dying day she kept alive her faith in Optina Monastery's revival—and her faith that her work would not be lost.

When Fr. Seraphim was attempting to present the Optina inheritance in the English language, he felt strongly that we should first reprint the original editions of the Lives of the Optina Elders in Russian, so that other lovers of Optina could participate in translating, publishing and promoting these texts. With God's help, ten years after our Brotherhood began its publishing activity, and ten years after the repose of Professor Kontzevitch, we began to produce these Russian texts of Lives of the Elders—the Optina Series—of which the present volume is number three.

To the complete text of the original biography by Kavelin we have added the following appendices: 1) a biography of I. V. Kireyevsky, a lay disciple of Elder Macarius (this is a chapter in Kontzevitch's book on Optina); 2) a chapter on the immediate disciples of Elder Macarius; 3) additional memoirs from one of Sergei Nilus' books; and 4) short accounts of the disciples of Elder Macarius.

It is important to mention that, in the English language, Elder Macarius has hitherto been treated in only three books by three different authors: 1) *Letters of Direction*, edited by Julia de Beausobre and recently reprinted by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press; 2) *Russian Saints* by De Grunwald (1949); and 3) *Russian*

*Mystics* by Sergei Bolshakoff, 1963. Finally, there is my brief biographical sketch in *The Orthodox Word*, no. 126, which is also a chapter in Professor Kontzevitch's book.

The spiritual image or icon of Elder Macarius represents a reappearance in the modern world of the ancient Holy Fathers from past ages of flourishing monasticism. His contribution to ascetic literature, made through the many letters he wrote to his spiritual children, is indispensable for those of the contemporary mind who want to gain access to genuine spirituality, and who are willing to pay a heavy price of self-sacrifice. For theologians or theological seekers of individuality, extraordinariness, or Patristic idiosyncrasies, the image of Elder Macarius is a let-down. His primary concern was to bring the sick modern soul to the living spring of Patristic wisdom through *smirennomudrie* (humility of wisdom), which is a virtue that disdains opinions, "originality," or any value that the world may hold in high esteem. The habit that modern scholars have of making studies of church figures like Elder Macarius in order to present them to the academic world as novelties, does not do justice to the significance of Elder Macarius. These scholars may know their subject well, they may view it from various aspects and praise it highly, but then draw nothing from it by which to change their lives. The essential value of Elder Macarius' legacy, on the other hand, is to help draw people to the living, vibrant Christ.

Where does Elder Macarius live in the hearts of people today? He is alive and well in the hearts of those humble God-lovers who seek daily to draw near to the ancient, ever-living spring of Christianity. He is valued as a teacher who himself, through humility and through daring to touch divine fire, received the gift of true Christianity from his preceptors (Elders Athanasius, Basil), etc., and from his active companions and co-strugglers (Elders Leonid, Theodore, Moses, Anthony, and

## INTRODUCTION

others). Sacrificing all forms of self-gratification, he died to the world as he helped others to follow the path of salvation in Jesus Christ, passing on his gift to us—if only we will sacrifice ourselves enough to receive it.

Abbot Herman  
Pascha, 1995  
Monks' Lagoon Hermitage  
Spruce Island, Alaska



Icon of St. Macarius, Elder of Optina, painted by N. A. Papkov for the glorification of all the Optina Saints in 1991.

# *Chronology*

- 1788 (November 20) Born Michael Nicholaevich Ivanov in Dmitrov District, Orel Province.
- 1797 (January 21) Mother, Elizabeth Alexeyevna, dies of tuberculosis.
- 1797 Moves to father's patrimonial estate, Schepyatino village.
- 1806 (March 7) Father, Nicholas Michailovich Ivanov, dies.
- 1810 (October 6) Goes on pilgrimage to Ploschansk Hermitage and stays there.
- 1810 (December 24) Tonsured as a ryassaphore monk with the name Melchizedek by Fr. Ioannicius in Ploschansk.
- 1815 (March 7) Tonsured into the mantle (stravrophore or full monk) with the name Macarius (the Great) by Fr. Paul in Ploschansk.
- 1815 (March 12) Ordained hierodeacon by Bishop Dositheus of Orel and Sevsk.
- 1817 Moves into Fr. Athanasius' cell to take care of him.

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

1817 (May 27)	Ordained hieromonk by the same Bishop Dositheus.
1824	Pilgrimage to Rostov, visits Optina for the first time.
1825 (October 17)	Fr. Athanasius dies in his arms.
1828	Elder Leonid (Leo) visits Ploschansk Hermitage and stays there for about six months.
1829	Elder Leonid moves to Optina, corresponds with Fr. Macarius.
1834 (February 5)	Moves to Optina.
1839 (December 1)	Appointed Superior of the Skete.
1841 (October 11)	Elder Leonid reposes.
1858	Photographed for the first time.
1860 (August 26)	Falls mortally ill.
1860 (August 30)	Receives Holy Communion and Divine Unction.
1860 (September 7)	Reposes at 7:00 a.m.
1860 (September 10)	Buried next to Elder Leonid.

## *Foreword to the Russian Edition of 1975*

THIS NEW EDITION of the Life of Elder Macarius of Optina has been published from the first edition of 1861 without any changes.

In the words of the late Professor Ivan Michailovich Kontzevich (†1965), an eminent theologian of true Orthodoxy and the custodian of this extremely rare book, Elder Macarius was a “Holy Father for the last days.” He was a preserver and transmitter of the true Orthodox “savor,” which cannot be measured by any scientific instrument. He possessed warmth of soul, iron courage, eternal wisdom that is not of this world, and a constant awareness of the presence of the other world. His life serves as an instructor and guide to the heavenly kingdom which begins here and now. The Optina Elders, particularly Elder Macarius, have been and will continue to be of enormous importance to the young generation, especially in Russia. They are a source of pure water in our troubled times—times which are polluted by pre-antichristian civilization, and in which everything that was once forbidden has now come to the surface in an attempt to strike down and obscure the Truth. Of particular importance are Fr. Macarius’ letters: “To Monastics” (the first volume, published in 1862) and “To Laymen” (the second volume, published in 1880).

Thanks to our dear Professor Ivan M. Kontzevich, who so greatly desired to republish this primary source, we are able to



View of Optina Monastery inside the cloister, with pilgrims.  
19th-century aquarelle.

pass this treasure on to others. With God's help we have done so within the first decade after his death,\* dedicating it to his memory and asking readers to remember his soul in their prayers.

Monk Herman  
Platina, California, 1975

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\* Professor Kontzevitch reposed in 1965, and the St. Herman Brotherhood's Russian edition was printed in 1975.



THE LIFE OF  
ELDER MACARIUS  
OF OPTINA

*By his close disciple,  
Fr. Leonid Kavelin*



*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord  
henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit,  
let them rest from their labors.*

(Revelation 14:13)

*Whosoever shall do (the commandments)  
and teach them shall be called great  
in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

(Matthew 5:19)

## *Author's Introduction*

*The cedar is fallen—wail, ye fir trees.*

(Zechariah 11:2)

ON the 7th of September, 1860, at 7 a.m. in the Skete of the Optina Monastery, Elder Hieroschemamonk Macarius reposed in the Lord. He was almost 72 years of age. Among our contemporary ascetics of piety, this great Elder was one of the most well-known to the Orthodox Russian people. His name has been spoken with reverence in the most distant parts of Russia, and his spiritual influence has spread far beyond the limits of the secluded monastery and small cell in which he spent his life hidden with Christ in God.

I have taken upon myself the task of composing the story of the Elder's pious life—of which I, a great sinner, was by God's will a close witness—at the request of the Elder's numerous disciples and people who have benefitted from his spiritual instruction. I venture to do so only in the hope that my story will be supplemented by the collection of the Elder's letters, full of spiritual wisdom, that has been prepared for publication. I find it necessary to mention that all the information I have gathered about the reposed Elder was supplied by the close disciples of our common father, teacher and benefactor.

In order to more readily comprehend the fruitful spiritual activity of the Elder's life, we deem it necessary to divide our story into three parts according to the most important periods of his life: 1) The period prior to his entry into the Monastery,

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i.e., his childhood, adolescence and youth (1788-1810); 2) his life at the Ploschansk Hermitage (1810-1833); and 3) his life at the Optina Monastery (1833–1860).

Archimandrite Leonid Kavelin  
Skete of Optina Monastery  
October 16, 1860

# I

## *Formative Years and Entrance into the Monastery*

1788-1810

*Those whom He did predestinate, He also called:  
and whom He called, them He also justified:  
and whom He justified, them He also glorified.*

(Romans 8:30)

**H**IEROMONK MACARIUS, in the world Provincial Secretary Michael Nicholaevich Ivanov, was from a noble family of the Dmitrov District, Orel Province. His great-grandfather, John (in monasticism Joseph), was a monk in the Karachev Nicholaevsk Odrin Monastery, and was remembered for his austere life and fasting. It was said that during the whole of Great Lent he ate cooked meals only on Saturdays and Sundays; on Wednesdays and Fridays he ate only one prosphora per day, and the rest of the week he completely abstained from food.

According to the testimony of Fr. Macarius' relatives, his grandparents were also pious people. His grandmother was renowned for her charitable deeds. Heeding the words of Scripture: *Give to him that asketh thee* (Matt. 5:42), she refused no

one alms according to her means, and on Saturdays she herself would secretly distribute homemade pies and doughnuts to the inmates of the city prison. One day this virtue saved the lives of her and her husband. According to Fr. Macarius' own words, it happened this way: His grandparents, while travelling somewhere in winter, were stopped by a gang of robbers. One of them looked into the carriage, and recognizing the woman from whom he had many times received alms in prison, he talked his comrades into sparing their lives. The robbers took their carriage, horses and most of the baggage, but they left all the necessary winter clothing and one horse to take them to the nearest village. Thus, the alms which, according to the Scripture, redeem a soul from a multitude of sins (cf. Dan. 4:27) this time saved the lives of the people who loved to give them!

Fr. Macarius' parents were the collegiate assessor Nicholas Michailovich Ivanov and Elizabeth Alexyeevna (nee Emilianova). In addition to their patrimonial estate, which was located in the Shepyatino village of the Dmitrov District, Orel Province, the Ivanovs owned other rural estates in other provinces. In the Kaluga Province, in the vicinity of the city of Kaluga, close to the St. Laurence Monastery, they owned the small village of Zhelezniki, where they also lived.\* In that

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\* This little village now belongs to Mr. Delianov. Fr. Macarius' father, who was a generous man, gave it as collateral to a friend who was in debt. The man never paid his debt, and the Ivanovs' estate was put up for sale. Shortly before his death (at the beginning of July), Fr. Macarius visited the St. Laurence Monastery in order to bid farewell to the Archbishop, who was leaving for St. Petersburg. While waiting for the Archbishop to finish receiving petitioners, Fr. Macarius went for a walk in the Monastery's garden. Stopping opposite the small village of Zhelezniki, he indicated the place where his parents' house and adjacent buildings used to stand, and told us impressions from his childhood preserved in his pure memory. Then, with the help of one of the Monastery's attendants, Fr. Macarius found the grave,

## ENTRANCE INTO THE MONASTERY

village, on November 20, 1788 a son was born to them, whom they named Michael in Holy Baptism in honor of St. Michael the Prince of Tver, commemorated November 22.

Let us mention that Zhelezniki village is located in an extraordinarily picturesque region. It is separated from the St. Laurence Monastery and the nearby settlement of Podzavalye by a deep meadow-covered valley. The winding river Yatchenka flows through it between completely flat banks before it empties into the Oka. Zhelezniki village is spread over the woody slope of the hill bordering the valley and stretches along the right bank of the Yatchenka.

At the very end of the village, opposite the northern side of the St. Laurence Monastery, stood a cozy little country house where Michael's relatives lived. As was customary, this house was surrounded by service buildings and a garden. Close to them, on the slope of the same hill, was a birch grove. From the windows of the house, from the yard, from the garden and from the grove, beautiful panoramas revealed themselves. Down below, at the foot of the mountain, between the flat meadow-bordered banks, wound the river Yachenka; and on the opposite hill stood the Monastery dedicated to St. Laurence the Fool-for-Christ, the wonderworker of Kaluga, where his covered relics repose. The Monastery is surrounded on all sides by a shady garden which makes the tops of its white buildings appear like white lilies in a basket full of greenery. Further to the right, at the same altitude as the Monastery, one could see a chapel dedicated to the Holy Cross on the Borov road (now there is a

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overgrown with grass, of Hieromonk Paul, the former Superior of the Ploschansk Hermitage, who had tonsured him a monk. With deep emotion he venerated his grave, and said: "He was a good elder...." After a short silence, he added: "We all face this journey sooner or later, but my time has already come...."

church here and the Diocesan almshouse), a public cemetery filled with many monuments, and the southern outskirts of Kaluga with its buildings and gardens. Finally, in the distance on the very edge of the horizon, the voluminous Oka River shines like a mirror where the Yachenka flows into it, and where traces of the ancient city can be seen.... Behind the house and barns and granaries, there lie more forests, and behind them stretch cultivated fields. Here, under the impression of these pleasant rural views of nature, gratifying to the eye and soothing to the heart, and of the quiet monastic community, from which the ringing of the bells calling monks to pray reach the ears of all the inhabitants of Zhelezniki, the future monk and man of prayer grew, as yet unknown to the world.

At the time that Michael's parents were living near the St. Laurence Monastery, its Superior was Archimandrite Theophanes, a pious and friendly man. He had a close spiritual relationship with them and received their children from the baptismal font. Whether he received all of them or not we cannot say, but we do know from the words of Elder Macarius himself that Archimandrite Theophanes was the godfather of Fr. Macarius' sister, Barbara. Among other personal memories about the St. Laurence Monastery, the Elder related a remarkable event from his childhood. Once while he and his parents were attending Liturgy there, he saw (probably during the reading of the Epistle) Archimandrite Theophanes, whom he loved very much, sitting in the altar, and he quickly ran to him through the open Royal Doors.\*

Michael, who was the eldest child of the family, had three brothers: Alexei, Paul and Peter, and a sister, Barbara.\*\* Ac-

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\* The author calls this remarkable because no one but the clergy is allowed to enter the altar through the Royal Doors [trans.].

\*\* See Supplement 1 to this chapter, pp. 43-44.



## ENTRANCE INTO THE MONASTERY

according to the testimony of a woman of his same age who is still alive,\* Michael's mother, a humble and God-fearing woman, especially loved her eldest son, and would say to her close friends, "I feel in my heart that something extraordinary will come of this child!" From early childhood Michael involuntarily attracted people's attention by his qualities: his gentleness, meekness and quietness. He never participated in the games of his brothers or other children his age, never leaving his beloved mother's knees, as though he sensed that he would not be able to enjoy her caresses much longer. And indeed, Nicholas Michailovich Ivanov had to leave his peaceful country refuge because of his wife's ill health, and move with his entire family to Moscow for her medical treatments. At this time, their eldest son Michael was five years old. In three years Elizabeth Alexeyevna died of tuberculosis\*\* and was buried at the St. Andronicus Monastery. After her death, Nicholas Michailovich moved three of his children, Michael, Alexis and Paul to his patrimonial estate in the village of Schepyatino.

In the year 1797, Nicholas Michailovich Ivanov moved from the village to the town of Karachev in order to live with his sister, Darya Michailovna, whose husband, Simeon Feodorovich Peredelsky, had been elected by the local nobility to serve in the District Court of Karachev. Nicholas Michailovich's boys, Michael, Alexis and Paul, together with their cousin Alexis, the Peredelskys' son, were then sent to the city parish school. (Michael was then nine years old.) Here young Michael, the future spiritual leader and teacher, began and finished his primary school education.

When Nicholas Michailovich left in the summer for his country estate in Schepyatino, the children, in order not to

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\* This was written in 1865 [trans.].

\*\* On January 21, 1797.

interrupt their studies, remained in Karachev in the care of their close relatives, Darya Michailovna Peredelsky and Avdotya Ivanovna Sandulova.\* Around the year 1801, when the Peredelskys moved to the country, they hired a tutor for the continuation of their son's education. According to the memoirs of their son, "the tutor's name was Artemon Petrovich ... (he wrote that he could not remember his surname). He was a man of noble descent, pious and knowledgeable." At that time, Michael and his two brothers moved into his aunt's house, where they continued their education together with her son; they studied calligraphy, grammar and arithmetic.

Michael lived in the village for no more than one year. In 1802 he was given the job of bookkeeper in the District Treasury of Lgov, where his relative S. Y. Sandulov was the treasurer. His brother Alexis and his cousin Alexis Peredelsky were appointed assistant bookkeepers. "We three minors," as the latter relates, managed the department of the Treasury meticulously. The Treasurer's job was very difficult, but the fourteen-year-old youth performed his duty with such zeal, precision and punctuality that he attracted the attention of the provincial authorities. After the death of Tsiturin, the head of the Financial Board (Treasury Department), Michael Nicholaevich was summoned to Kursk to take his place in the year 1805, and in the same year he received his first official rank.

The Councillor of the Treasury Department, Nicholas Michailovich Lenivtsev, became so fond of the gifted yet humble youth that he offered him lodging in his own house.

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\* Avdotya Ivanovna Sandulova, Fr. Macarius' cousin, was the daughter of his aunt, Anna Michailovna Verevkina. Anna Michailovna owned a part of the Schepyatino village, and was very close to her brother Nicholas Michailovich, Fr. Macarius' father.

## ENTRANCE INTO THE MONASTERY

Evidently, Providence arranged a close relationship with the family of his well-educated superior in order to protect the young man from harmful acquaintances and companions, and at the same time to help him uphold his moral education. This was especially important at this period of his life, when, as we know, a young man who has completed his home and school upbringing is almost irresistibly influenced by his social environment.

This period passed quietly and beneficially for the God-preserved youth. Having finished his work, which he enjoyed out of his sense of duty, he turned to occupations to which he was naturally inclined: music and reading. His favorite instrument was the violin which, according to his listeners, Michael Nicholaevich played well. In spite of his young age, he did not just seek entertainment in his reading; he especially sought to acquire new knowledge and answers to the most important questions of his heart and mind.

Three years of Michael Nicholaevich's service passed this way imperceptibly. In the year 1806, on the 17th of March, he lost his father. After a long illness, Nicholas Michailovich Ivanov died a peaceful Christian death, having received Holy Communion, and was buried near the parish church in the village of Turischev. Meanwhile, Michael's brothers had grown up, and his sister was thirteen years old. At a family gathering the brothers, who were always mutually friendly, decided to bring their sister home from their aunt's house, where she had been raised until then. The brothers also decided not to divide the estate amongst themselves, but to give it to Michael alone, on the condition that he pay Alexis and Paul for their shares with money expected from a suit against a Mr. Senyavin amounting to 20,000 rubles. Michael Nicholaevich unhesitatingly accepted his brothers' offer, and in the year 1806 resigned his job, receiving as a reward the rank of Provincial Secretary.

It is supposed that Michael saw his brothers' totally unexpected offer as an opportunity to satisfy his secret inclination, about which he had barely dared to dream—to devote his spare time to his favorite occupations, music and reading.

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Michael Nicholaevich lived in the country for two years. According to the testimony of his cousin, Pelagia Tikhonovna Markova, who lived with his family at that time, the farming did not go very well. It required careful personal supervision, and sometimes even punishment for negligence. But Michael Nicholaevich, being kind-hearted, did not want, nor was he able to follow the conventional order. Once the peasants, seeing that there was no real supervision, stole a large quantity of buckwheat. He summoned them and tried to persuade them for a long time, reasoning with them by quoting the Holy Scripture. "We," said Pelagia Tikhonovna, "laughed at him on the sly. But to our amazement and shame, the admonishment was concluded in such a way that the guilty ones fell to their knees, sincerely acknowledged their guilt and, explaining how they had done it, were forgiven." The neighbors, hearing of the young landowner's kindness, often asked him for various household accessories or grain and he refused them nothing. Pelagia Tikhonovna related, "We used to say, 'What are you doing, Misha! We will need it ourselves!' The answer was always the same: 'The Lord will provide! How can I say no if I have it? I am sorry, but I cannot do that. No matter what you may say, after having tested myself, I see that I cannot be a landowner.'" His brothers arrived and tried to persuade him to marry, recommending many brides, but after thoroughly discussing their characters, they had to admit that not one of their acquaintances had those characteristics suitable to their brother. When they indicated a neighbor who was a very modest and virtuous



Ploschansk Hermitage, on the shore of a lake of the same name. The Hermitage, founded in the 16th century, was surrounded on three sides by hills and woods during the time of the youthful Fr. Macarius.

maiden, Michael said, "Perhaps I should marry this one." The brothers were very pleased, and without consulting Michael they brought this proposal to the girl's parents. They, however, were not prepared for this, having never met the suitor before. Furthermore, the brothers had not followed the customary, formal course of marriage proposal that was strictly observed in provincial towns. Therefore the girl's parents said, "Thank you for the honor, but we cannot reach an agreement so quickly; we have to think it over and become better acquainted," and so on. Michael Nicholaevich, hearing about his brothers' failure, rejoiced and ran to his sister saying: "Glory be to God, they said that they have to think it over. Let them do so! I couldn't refuse, I obeyed my brothers, but now no one can talk me into it."

From these words it is clear that the pious youth, who was used to submitting everything concerning himself to the Will of God and obeying Him, gave in to his brothers' persuasion only in order to *hear what God the Lord will speak* (Ps. 84:8). He took the indecisive answer his brothers had received as a clear indication of God's Providence that he should tread a different, higher path of life, for which his pure soul had always longed *as the hart panteth after the fountains of water* (Ps. 41:1).

Hastening to satisfy this soul-saving thirst, Michael Nicholaevich went to the Kursk Monastery Fair, where he bought himself many books, mostly of spiritual content. Returning home, he immersed himself in them, nourishing his soul with the food proper to it. Sometimes he went to the carpentry shop and labored to weariness at the workbench, desiring in this way to teach his young flesh to submit to the spirit.

On October 6, 1810, he went on a pilgrimage to the Ploschansk Hermitage of the Theotokos, which was located 24 miles from their estate in Schepyatino—never to return again.

## ENTRANCE INTO THE MONASTERY

Alexis S. Peredelsky (his cousin of the same age) writes: "We never knew whether his visit to the Hermitage was planned or accidental, but Michael Nicholaevich wrote home that he would remain there, and that he was leaving the estate to his brothers. He wrote that he did not require anything from them for it, except a promise to donate 1,000 rubles for the erection of a stone church in the village of Turischevo (where his father was buried). This was done in due time by his brother Alexis Nicholaevich when he took possession of Schepyatino." Neither shall we presume to decide whether or not his visit to Ploschansk Hermitage was planned. One can postulate however, that it was premeditated, for a secret inclination toward the monastic life had formed imperceptibly within him under the influence of the call of grace, and the pious youth not only had not resisted this activity of grace, but had cultivated it in every way. He reverently preserved the fire of zeal that the grace of God had enkindled in his heart according to the words: "The things of God come of themselves, without one being aware of it, provided that the place (the heart) is pure and not defiled" (St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily Two, verse 14). On the other hand, one could in all probability assume that the thought to remain forever in this place and in no other, reached maturity in his pious soul only under the influence of the grace-filled impressions produced by the monastic way of life and even by the very sight of the secluded, hesychastic Monastery. For both impressions corresponded entirely with the image which had been created in the young man's thoughts as he had read about the labors of the Holy Fathers who shone in the monastic life. This assumption can be justified in part by the Elder's own words, that when he arrived for the first time at Ploschansk Hermitage, he felt that he did not know whether he was "in heaven or on the earth, and all of the monks appeared to him as God's Angels." Such a pure view of things was, of course, the

result of the special action of God's grace, which shows the way to those who ask with faith, according to the words of the Psalmist: *Cause me to know, O Lord, the way wherein I should walk, for unto Thee have I lifted up my soul* (Ps. 142:10). In reply, Michael was shown the path to salvation, and the suitable place, means and ways were indicated to him.

In concluding this chapter, we present the testimony of his childhood friend, A. S. Peredelsky concerning Michael Nicholaevich's qualities. He writes: "Having spent my childhood and part of my service with Michael Nicholaevich, I can say that his qualities and morals were always godliness, piety, chastity, meekness and moral purity. Most of the time he avoided our childish games and pranks, preferring instead to occupy himself with reading and handiwork, by which I mean the childish pasting together of cardboard houses, the cutting out of figures, or embroidery. When he came of age, while still in the world, he was not averse to decent social recreation, yet he still did not show any special inclination toward it. He loved music, and played the violin quite well. He also loved singing, and although he did not have a strong voice, his knowledge of music made up for it."

From an early age he was sickly. He was very thin and suffered from insomnia. Many of his acquaintances jokingly called Michael Nicholaevich a monk even before he entered the monastery because of his modesty and shyness.



## *Author's Supplements to Chapter 1:*

### 1. THE RELATIVES OF ELDER MACARIUS

On a calendar for the year 1840, Elder Macarius wrote in his own hand: "On Sunday, February 18, 1840, at 9:00 p.m., my brother Alexis Nicholaevich Ivanov passed away in Orel.\* He had a Christian ending, in faith and hope of the resurrection and eternal life. He received Holy Communion on the 4th and 15th of February, and several minutes before his death Holy Unction was celebrated and the Canon for the Departure of the Soul was read. Grant him, O Lord, rest in Thy Holy Kingdom and make his memory eternal! He was not married. Paul died in the year 1831. One of Paul's daughters, Barbara Pavlovna, devoted herself to the monastic life, and is now a ryassaphore nun with the name Melania in the Sevsk Convent. Peter died in childhood in Karachev."

Fr. Macarius' sister, Barbara Nicholaevna, was born in 1793. Being only a few months old at her mother's death, she was entrusted to the care of her aunt, O. P. Goldobina. When she reached the age of fourteen, one of her brothers, Alexis Nicholaevich, went with her to the estate of her aunt (near the Sudislavsky settlement in the Kineshma District, Kostroma Province) and took her to the village of Schepyatino. She stayed there, living with her brother and a cousin, until 1814 when she married a nobleman in Orel, the collegiate assessor P. N.

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\* He was born December 8, 1789; his life lasted 50 years, two months and ten days.

Glebov. They had several sons and daughters. Their eldest son, State Councillor P. N. Glebov, is currently Auditor General of the Maritime Ministry, and one of their daughters, Alexandra Nicholaevna, dedicated herself to the monastic life at the age of twenty-three, and now lives in the Sevsk Convent, with the name Athanasia.

Barbara Nicholaevna Glebova, as well as all of her children, enjoyed the fatherly love and spiritual guidance of Elder Macarius. She died of cholera on December 8, 1852, in St. Petersburg. The Elder, who had always been patient, sympathetic and loving with everyone's griefs, received the sad news of his beloved sister's death with deep sorrow; but submitting to the inscrutable ways of God's Providence, he increased his paternal attention to her children (they had been deprived of their father long before). In his declining years he was consoled by seeing that his wise counsels and fervent prayers to God for them had placed some and strengthened others on the path of pious Christian life.

## 2. A LETTER OF ELDER MACARIUS ON THE DEATH OF HIS GRANDMOTHER

Dear Sir and Esteemed Uncle, Paul Joachimovich!

On the 20th of January, the letter announcing to me the sad news of the death of my esteemed grandmother, A. P., reached my hand. Thanks be to the merciful God, Who allowed her to leave this world when she had reached her declining years, in the white garments of sincere repentance and confession of her sins, bearing the seal of Holy Unction upon herself, and having Christ within her by partaking of His Holy and

## ENTRANCE INTO THE MONASTERY

Life-giving Mysteries! I thank you for the details of her death, for they all give hope for her future well-being. I thank you also that you did not conceal from me the feelings of your saddened heart, because I like to share grief with the grieving. I owe you the greatest sympathy, since your love inspired you to look for me in this distant, silent and unknown corner.

Having lost a person we realize his actual value, dearest Paul Joachimovich, and maybe even overestimate him. The law of destruction was inscribed within me since my conception; on each newly developing member, death applied its menacing seal, saying: "This is mine." The links of my days are a chain of greater or lesser suffering; every new day of my life is a step that draws me closer to decay. Sicknesses come, and my trembling heart asks them: "Are you just the forerunners of my death, or have you already been given the authority to separate my soul from my body with a dread and terrible parting?" Sometimes my spiritual eye, distracted by the cares of life, abandons the contemplation of my sad destiny. Yet, as soon as an unexpected sorrowful event strikes me, I quickly come back to my favorite teaching, like a baby to its mother's breast, i.e., to a discourse on death, for in sincere grief is hidden true consolation, and the wise remembrance of death breaks the bonds of death.

Thou, Who by Thy unspeakable goodness hast created us, tell us, why didst Thou fill our lives with grief? Dost not Thy mercy make Thee pity our sufferings? Why dost Thou grant me being and later take it away through a painful death?

I do not enjoy, says God, your illnesses, O man. But, out of the seeds of your grief and sorrow, I want to bring forth for you fruits of eternal and majestic joy. I imprinted the law of death and destruction not only in your body, but also in every object of this visible world. I commanded the whole world, together with your body, to cry out to you that this life is not the true and real life, that there is nothing permanent here to which your

heart should become attached through justifiable love. When you do not hearken unto the threatening voice of the entire universe, then My paternal mercy, which always wishes you unlimited good, compels Me to lift the scepter of chastisement. When I torment you with temptations, wear you out with illness, with pangs of remorse, it is that you might abandon your folly, become wise, cease seeking after shadows and return to the path of truth, and at the same time to the path of salvation. My unutterable mercy and unlimited love for human beings compelled Me to take your flesh upon Myself; through My abasement I have revealed the greatness of God to the human race (cf. John 14:9). By suffering on the Cross for the salvation of men, whom I desire to draw to Myself, I first afflict them with grief, and with these arrows of affliction I deaden their hearts to temporary pleasures. The scepter of punishment is an emblem of My love for men. Thus, I first afflicted the heart of My servant David, and when a torrent of temptations separated him from the world, then some unusual thought arose and took possession of his mind. He writes: *I called to mind the years of ages past, and I meditated*, i.e., I glimpsed the past days of my life and they appeared to me as a momentary dream, an apparition that quickly disappeared, dead to life. Then I thought about eternity and compared it with the brevity of my past life, and comparing the eternal with the short and temporary, I came to a conclusion. What is this conclusion? *Man like a shadow shall pass away and disquiets himself in vain* (Ps. 38:6). That is, no matter how much a man may bustle about, no matter how much he may care for acquiring different passing goods, all this has no value for he does not cease being an incidental brief apparition, a guest and wanderer in this world. Such feelings and reflections made him retreat from the world of the passions, and he began to study the law of the Lord day and night and to strive toward knowledge of himself and of God, as the thirsty

## ENTRANCE INTO THE MONASTERY

hart runs toward a stream of fresh water. Being a King, David had opportunities for temporary pleasures, but after he tasted the sweetness of inner blessings, he even forgot to eat his bread.

I have written you, my dear uncle, of my feelings. If they do not correspond with worldly thinking, at least they are sincere, and this sincerity might be a consolation in this time of grief.

Your late mother, before her death, exhorted you to be a good Christian, and I wish this for you with all my heart. Then in your eyes death will lose its threatening aspect and will become a most pleasant transition from temporary affliction to unending delight. It will carry you to the chambers where, as we may almost certainly suppose, your mother now dwells. Grief for the dead, in the light of the right way of thinking, disappears, and is replaced by a good hope that consoles you and makes your soul rejoice. Fanaticism hinders man's thinking—true faith gives it freedom. This freedom reveals itself through a man's steadfastness in all possible good or unpleasant events. The sword that severs our bonds is a purified mind, which recognizes in every circumstance its true, hidden, mysterious cause. Anyone who strives towards this goal may reach it by examining his own nothingness, and reverently asking for Divine protection and help.

Glory be for all things to the most merciful God, Who pours out His ineffable blessings upon us in every circumstance. For the Fount of Goodness can produce no other waves but waves of goodness. Man, often not recognizing this, murmurs against the All-Gracious One.

Hieromonk Macarius



Holy gates of the Ploschansk Monastery in the 19th century.

## 2

# *Life in the Ploschansk Hermitage*

1810-1834

*Lo, I have fled afar and  
have dwelt in the wilderness.*

(Psalm 54:7)

IN ORDER to portray Fr. Macarius' spiritual lineage and show precisely who influenced his spiritual development, we must begin this chapter by briefly naming the elders of spiritual life alive at the time when Fr. Macarius entered the Monastery. At about that time, several remarkable elders of spiritual life came to live in certain Russian monasteries, instituting within them the statutes and traditions of the holy ascetic fathers. It happened in this manner:

After many small monasteries and hermitages had been closed down following the enforcement of the Ecclesiastical Statutes in 1764, many monks and laymen renounced the world and all that is in it for the salvation of their souls, and wandered throughout Palestine, Mount Athos and the Moldo-Vlachian Princedoms. They gathered the honey of salutary teachings from the ascetics who lived there, like bees from

blossoms, and in particular from the monastery of the great Elder Paisius Velichkovsky.\* A Russian by birth, Elder Paisius was the Abbot of the Niamets Monastery in Moldo-Vlachia, Romania. By following the example of his pious life and lofty spirit-filled teachings on monastic labors and the inward activity, monks and laymen found the greatest benefit for their souls. Elder Paisius died on November 15, 1794, at age seventy-two. Some of his Russian disciples, together with Russian monks who were in contact with him while he was still alive, returned to their fatherland—either due to the political changes which allowed them to return to Russia, or because they were bereft of the material and moral support of their spiritual instructor and father after his repose. They settled in Russian monasteries, freely transmitting the spiritual treasures they had acquired to others who were seeking salvation. Several of them headed monasteries, while others were to be found among the ranks of the brethren.

After returning to Russia, most of these memorable elders settled down in monasteries of the Kursk and Orel dioceses.\*\*

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\* Now a canonized saint. See *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1976).

\*\* Thus, the first among others to flourish was the Sophroniev Hermitage—which began to flourish when Archimandrite *Theodosius* became the abbot. Fr. Theodosius had been one of the disciples of the wise Elder Basil of Merlopolanyi [in Romanian Poiana Marului]. Basil was also the Elder of Paisius Velichkovsky, whom he tonsured. In 1787, during the Turkish war, Theodosius and his disciples were summoned to Russia by Count Potemkin. Throughout his entire life he maintained friendship and correspondence with Elder Paisius. From Sophroniev Hermitage, the good order he established later passed on to the Glinsk Hermitage of the same diocese under the direction of Theodosius' disciple *Philaret* (1817-1841). One of Philaret's disciples we shall mention is Hieromonk *Samuel*, who, as we shall see, had a spiritual friendship with Fr. Macarius.





Holy gates of White Bluff (Beloberezhsky) Monastery.  
19th-century engraving depicting the sight which the young  
Fr. Macarius encountered upon arriving at the entrance of  
the holy monastery.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the Orel Diocese gave refuge to the future elders. The secluded *White Bluff Monastery* became well-ordered and blossomed as did the Cholnsk and Svensk Monasteries. Later the Ploschansk Hermitage followed their example, adopting their external good order as well as their spiritual renewal. There Fr. Macarius laid his monastic foundation.

The elder of spiritual life, *Basil*, known in the world as Vladimir Timofeyevich Kishkin, a member of the Kursk nobility, settled down in the White Bluff Hermitage, and around the year 1801 became its superior. He had first lived (from 1780)

with his disciples for several years on Mount Athos and in Moldavia, Romania. At the same time, Hieroschemamonk *Cleopas* and Schemamonk *Theodore*, who had been tonsured by Elder Paisius and were well-grounded in the spiritual life, arrived in Russia. Cleopas settled in White Bluff Hermitage, but Theodore lived at first in the Cholnsk (Trubchev) Monastery. Later, however, when Hieromonk *Leonid*, who had been tonsured by Elder Basil, replaced the latter in White Bluff (in 1804), Fr. Theodore left his monastery and settled down in the White Bluff Hermitage. Enjoying the spiritual love of the Superior, the two elders lived in the Monastery in a quiet, remote clearing. At first there were just the two of them, but later, in the year 1808, they were joined by Fr. Leonid, who had voluntarily relinquished the burden of his position as superior. Together they engaged in mental (noetic) activity and, through their spiritual counsel and instructions, brought benefit to their neighbors who came to the door of their cell; and thus they were glorified by God.

In the year 1806, Schemamonk *Athanasius* (Zakharov), a disciple of Elder Paisius, also settled at the White Bluff Hermitage. In 1815 he went to live in the Ploschansk Hermitage, where, until his blessed repose in 1825, he was Fr. Macarius' elder. After the repose of Elder Athanasius, Fr. Leonid became Fr. Macarius' spiritual father and friend, at a time when the latter was himself older in years and already spiritually mature in the monastic life.

Elder Basil, whom we have mentioned above, resigned his abbacy and went to live at the Svensk Monastery, where around the year 1818 one of his favorite disciples, Hieromonk Seraphim, served as treasurer. Later Fr. Seraphim became the Superior of White Bluff, and in 1818, the Superior of the Ploschansk Hermitage, both of which owe him much for their good external and internal order.

## LIFE IN THE PLOSHANSK HERMITAGE

At the Svensk Monastery, yet another Schemamonk, *Athanasius*, found shelter. He was a former Secretary of the Senate and also a disciple of Elder Paisius. Among other things, he is known for bringing the manuscript of the *Philokalia*, translated by Paisius Velichkovsky, from Moldavia to St. Petersburg for Metropolitan Gabriel. In 1811 he died in the arms of his namesake, Elder Schemamonk Athanasius (Zakharov).

Having briefly enumerated the elders of spiritual life who lived at the time of Fr. Macarius and influenced his spiritual development directly or indirectly, let us return to his biography.

The Ploschansk Hermitage of the Theotokos (which Fr. Macarius entered in 1810) is located at an almost equal distance (about 27 miles) from the two towns of Dimitrov and Sevsk. According to one who described it, it had no monumental buildings or great wealth, nor did it delight visitors with its surrounding wilderness, which had no views of extraordinarily magnificent nature. Everything there was simple and modest, yet that very simplicity made it attractive. This Hermitage, being far away from populated areas and surrounded on all sides by forests, was a very suitable place for the isolated monastic life.\* In the year 1810, when he had reached twenty-two years of age, Michael came there to live. Hieromonk Ioannicius was in charge of the Hermitage. He was a simple and good-natured man, but little experienced in the spiritual leadership of the brethren and uneducated in domestic management.

The brotherhood, in spite of its limited status, consisted of fifty men. There were elders of strict life among them; yet, according to the personal testimony of Fr. Macarius and his contemporary, Elder Hierodeacon Palladius, this strictness ap-

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\* *The Historical Description of the Ploschansk Hermitage of the Theotokos* (St. Petersburg, 1855).

plied only to external rules and activities: attending church services, fasting, regular prayers and common and individual work. No attention was paid to inward activity.

The Monastery's management observed the external regulations relating to the time and order of church services, common meals and monastic obediences; but there was no specific order governing inner work which, as is known, depends not so much on the literal observances of rules as on the monastery superior's spiritual skill in guiding those souls entrusted to him towards salvation. The most important rules related to inward activity are: the revelation of thoughts\* by the brethren to the elders, the preservation of one's conscience through this revelation of thoughts, and complete submission to the elder's guidance. These practices were not observed at the Monastery. According to the unanimous testimony of the Holy Fathers,\*\*

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\* Or confession [trans.].

\*\* "Inasmuch as this holy labor (i.e. the revelation of thoughts) is so great and soul-saving, the enemy and foe of our salvation, the devil, opposes it; he hates even to hear about it—that is, not only having it as a rule for the spiritual guidance of souls, but even the mere mention of the word, for through it his evil influence on people is exposed" (Abba Dorotheus Homily Five). "If someone wishes to live differently (i.e. according to his own will and power and without an instructor), does he think he can live the Lord's life according to His word? No, in no way" (Sts. Kallistus and Ignatius, *Writings from the Philokalia*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky, Faber and Faber, 1981, section. 14, p. 175). "He who has no preceptor easily loses his way just as one who walks on the monastic path according to his own will easily falls into perdition, even if he has all the wisdom of this world" (St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Massachusetts, 1978, Step 4). "Who would dare," the same ascetic fathers reason, "to walk an unknown path without an experienced guide? Who would dare to entrust his life to the waves of the sea without an experienced steersman? Who would begin to study arts or sciences without a teacher? And the path to the highest perfection is even more difficult than

these practices are the foundation and assurance of a monk's progress, and the best intercessor for it. They are the cause of the many flourishing coenobia and sketes on Holy Mount Athos today [1861], and also of several secluded monasteries in Russia.

In spite of an abundance of natural resources,\* Ploshansk Hermitage, which owned much land, was in need of money,

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any other path. The revolt of the body is more awful than the fiercest waves of the sea. The craftiness of the enemies is more mysterious than any science or art. Without an experienced instructor, who can learn how to arm himself against his body or passions or the demons? Who would instruct him how to teach his bodily feeling and strength to be in harmony with each other as on a psaltery? Moreover, how would one be able to distinguish divine words, revelations, consolations and visions from the devil's lies, snares, deceptions and visions? It is impossible, truly impossible!" (Sts. Kallistus and Ignatius, *Writings From the Philokalia*, p. 180). According to the unanimous teaching of the ascetics, obedience to a spiritual guide should have the following features: a) such faith in his teacher as though he were seeing and obeying in him Christ Himself, rejecting any disbelief or doubt (ibid., p. 176); b) complete truthfulness to him in word and deed, i.e., confessing to him all one's thoughts (ibid., p. 177); c) never doing anything according to one's own will—such action would be vanity; d) never contradicting or arguing, for contradiction and arguing come from reasoning with disbelief and presumption (ibid.); and finally e) complete and pure confession of the secrets of the heart (ibid.); because wounds when exposed are healed, as *The Ladder* says, and do not fester (*The Ladder*, p. 23, Step 4). This is what perfect obedience should be according to the unanimous teaching of all the great ascetics!

\* The Monastery's land, in earlier times had amounted to 2,645 desyatins and 154 sazhen, or over 7,000 acres. Out of this, 650 acres were ploughed, hay was grown on 880, timber on 425, and firewood on 4428. They kept a large herd of cattle for agricultural use; because of this the Monastery had plenty of bread and other agricultural products. Fr. Palladius, describing the rural economy of the Monastery said, "One could bathe in butter but could find nothing to wear."

which in part was due to poor management. It was also in need of everything that had to be bought outside of the Monastery. The brethren were in need of clothing; they walked around in patched tatters (except when they went to church) and for footwear they wore bast shoes.\* Besides all this, the brethren of the hermitage led a very strict and labor-loving life, doing all the Monastery's obediences just as they perform them now. In addition to working in the church and the refectory and chopping their supply of firewood, they grew hay and grain and had a vegetable garden. Michael's fervor did not diminish because of the privations and labors which he encountered at the very beginning of his monastic life. On the contrary, his fervor made them seem not only easy, but even pleasant. Guided by his faith, the young ascetic, in spite of his ill health and delicate upbringing, submitted himself in complete obedience, like iron to the blacksmith, to Elder Jonas (a commoner by birth from Bolkhov). Fr. Jonas was the Monastery's confessor, and by means of his rigid external strictness with himself and others, as well as by his ascetic life, tireless love of labor (due to extreme physical strength) and straightforward character, he was "one of the ancients." Michael spent the first six years of his monastic life at the Ploschansk Hermitage with Fr. Jonas.

Due to the quietness and uncomplaining obedience of the novice whom the Superior of the Monastery had entrusted to

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\* Fr. Macarius liked to lovingly remember how he "laid his foundation" (as he put it) at the Ploschansk Hermitage. Often he told us how, because he came there with sincere willingness, all the deprivations in food and clothing seemed to him easy to bear. He even liked the bast shoes [woven from dried reeds], for they are the humble footwear of Russia's humble peasants, who are the most Christian [of all the social classes]. "To me, as a man of lesser nobility," he said, "were given not crude bast shoes, but some kind of footwear also made of bast, but made skillfully, called 'bakhirs.'"

his special care, the simple Elder came to love him. He started diligently teaching the neophyte the church order and monastic rules. Since Michael knew the basic principles of music and singing, he easily learned how to sing the church tones. He learned the order of the daily church services, and later he began to learn from Fr. Jonas the church typicon, first as a canonarch and then as the director of the left choir. However, we must mention that all this knowledge, so necessary for the monastic life, is not acquired easily nor by everyone. Since Michael had already learned some of it beforehand, it helped the young ascetic prepare for his future duty as an instructor of monks. Therefore, one month after he had entered the Monastery, on November 16, 1810, Michael was enrolled among the novices of Ploschansk Hermitage by decree of the Ecclesiastical Consistory of Orel. On December 24th of the same year, the Superior, Fr. Ioannicius, tonsured him a ryassaphore monk and named him Melchizedek. In November of 1811, he accompanied Fr. Ioannicius on his fund-raising trip through the Bryansk District and the Kaluga Province (as is mentioned in the Elder's own notes), and they collected more than three hundred rubles. Thereafter, Fr. Melchizedek became the secretary and was continually occupied with monastery correspondence.

Although the fear of God guarded the young ascetic from any wicked deeds, he still must have suffered attacks of mental warfare, which no spiritual warrior can avoid. The more he progressed in external labors, the more he felt the need for a preceptor who possessed the gift of discernment of thoughts and could guide him toward progress in inner activity—without which, as was said above, one cannot reap the fruits of the monastic life. Fr. Melchizedek especially grieved because he had heard that in the forests of Bryansk, and in some monasteries of the Kursk and Orel dioceses, there lived elders of spiritual life. Rumors of their teaching reached the Ploschansk Hermitage

and inflamed the heart of the young novice, who yearned to see them and hear their soul-profitng discourses.

In the year 1814, Fr. Melchizedek went on a pilgrimage to Kiev to venerate the relics of the saints that repose there. On his way he visited some secluded monasteries in order to meet and converse with elders of spiritual life. After returning to the Monastery, the new superior, Fr. Paul,\* a man of spiritual wisdom, noticed his salutary fervor for the monastic life, his efforts to acquire the monastic virtues, especially humility and silence, as well as his ardent zeal in fulfilling the obediences assigned him. He hastened therefore to bring him into the ranks of monks at the monastery entrusted to him.

On March 7, 1815, Fr. Paul tonsured Melchizedek a monk and gave him the name *Macarius* in honor of our holy Father Macarius of Egypt. He thus encouraged him to follow the steps of that guiding light of Eastern monasticism.

On March 12 of the same year, by the recommendation of Fr. Paul, Bishop Dositheus of Orel and Sevsk ordained Fr. Macarius a hierodeacon. In June of the same year, by the resolution of the same bishop, he was placed in charge of the

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\* In the year 1813, the Superior of the Ploschansk Hermitage, Fr. Ioannicius, retired and went to live at the Svensk Monastery. His successor, Hieromonk Kallistus, who came from a family of Orel merchants, encountered obstacles in his efforts to correct deeply rooted deficiencies in the Monastery's internal order, and resigned his post as superior after holding it for less than a year. He was replaced by Hieromonk Paul, who came from a family of Rostov merchants, and who was tonsured on Mount Athos. When he returned from there, he lived in White Bluff Hermitage and Svensk Monastery, being in spiritual contact with the elders living there. He was then appointed treasurer of the Orel Monastery, and from there, at the end of the year 1813, he was assigned the post of Superior at the Ploschansk Hermitage, which he held until 1818. For Fr. Melchizedek, this change was both desired and beneficial.



vestry. In the same year that Fr. Macarius was tonsured, one of Elder Paisius' disciples, Schemamonk Athanasius, an Elder of spiritual life, came after an accident\* to settle in the Ploschansk Hermitage. Fr. Macarius entered into a spiritual relationship with him, and in the year 1817, with the Superior's blessing he moved to his cell, cared for him, loved and honored him like his own father and teacher, and was vouchsafed to serve Fr. Athanasius until his blessed repose (in 1825). According to the personal testimony of the late Fr. Macarius, his Elder, Schemamonk Athanasius, had a great impact on his spiritual development. In order to explain this, we consider it necessary to describe some details of the life of this remarkable disciple of Elder Paisius Velichkovsky. We render this testimony in the same way, and almost in the same words, in which it was handwritten in the notebook found among Fr. Macarius' papers. It can be assumed that Fr. Athanasius' biography, if not composed by Fr. Macarius himself, was composed by a person who had been very close to him.

*"Schemamonk Athanasius, of noble lineage, was surnamed Zakharov. He had served in the military as a cavalry captain in*

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\* Elder Macarius himself mentioned this in the notes he wrote about the Ploschansk Hermitage in 1815: "In this year Elder Schemamonk Athanasius from Florishev Hermitage in the Vladimir Province, who had lived in White Bluff, came to our hermitage. While visiting the Superior's cell, he fell from the bench on the stove, dislocated a joint in his leg, and suffered from it for over a year."

- In his notes of 1816 it is written: "This year, according to the wish of Archimandrite Caesarius, Fr. Athanasius moved to the Cholnsk Monastery to stay with him. There he partly recovered, but he could no longer walk without a crutch."

In his notes of 1817 it is written: "In April Schemamonk Athanasius moved to this hermitage from Cholnsk Monastery, and lived in the cell of Hierodeacon Macarius Ivanov."

the Hussar regiment. At thirty years of age he entered the Niamets Monastery in Moldavia, where he was tonsured by Elder Paisius, and lived there for seven years. He returned to Russia for a personal reason, but was not able to return to Moldavia, and because of this he suffered many afflictions. He was then assigned to the Florishev Hermitage (in Vladimir Province), and served there for some time as treasurer. He also lived at the Gorokhov Monastery, and in both monasteries he had many grievous trials. In 1806 he went on a pilgrimage to Kiev, and on his way back he stopped at the White Bluff Hermitage due to an illness. In 1815, with the blessing of Archbishop Dositheus, he went to the Ploschansk Hermitage, and in December of that year, while staying there, broke his right leg and settled there permanently.

"During his ten years of residence at the Ploschansk Hermitage he served as an example for all the brethren. Many of them benefitted by his life, his teaching and his love. This Elder was meek, condescending, humble, kind, sympathetic and loving toward everyone. If he heard that anyone was sick or needy, he tried in every way to help and console him. He was also hospitable; it seldom happened that he let a stranger pass by without consoling him or giving him something for his journey. Sometimes it happened that he gave away his own food to his brother without leaving anything for himself, saying, 'Thank God! People send it to us, but these are ailing people—where are they going to get it?'

"We will cite one of the many examples of his kindness to those who offended him. One brother, tempted by the demon of envy, slandered the Elder, saying that he went to the Monastery guesthouse in order to rob visitors of tea, sugar and other inexpensive items. In reality, the zealous visitors gladly gave them to him, having received spiritual benefit from his edifying counsels. This brother not only grumbled

about it himself, but also instigated some other brethren to do so; they, however, did not really believe him, but simply felt confused as they knew of the Elder's righteous life. I am a witness to the Elder's intention, and with what grief he would go to the guesthouse. He went because many monks and laymen, believing in his wisdom, asked the Superior to let them see the Elder or allow him to visit them there. As for the food which they gave him in return, he distributed it among the brethren and beggars, leaving less than half of it for himself. Fr. Athanasius, hearing the gossip and slander spread about him by this brother, tried in every way to appease him. He said to many people that he was a very good man. When that brother left the Monastery, Fr. Athanasius felt sorry for him, and loved not only that brother who hated him, but many others as well. He was also kind to animals. Sometimes in winter he could be seen feeling sorry for the birds, which could not eat ordinary human food, and worrying about how to feed them.

"In spite of his poor health, he never missed reading his cell-rule or attending the church services. Following the teaching of Elder Paisius, this was his rule: after Matins he read the Akathists to the Savior and the Mother of God, a prayer recalling the Passion of Christ, and kontakia and troparia from the Canons in the Akathist book; then two chapters from the Epistles and one chapter from the Gospels. Then he prayed to the Mother of God and the saints for the health and repose of the fathers and brothers of the Monastery, and for his relatives, acquaintances and benefactors. The Elder read these prayers regularly every morning and evening, making about two hundred prostrations. During the church services he always remained until the dismissal and, in spite of his infirmity, never sat down, not only during the church hymns and the reading of the Epistle and Kathismata, but even dur-

ing the appointed reading from the *Prologue* and the commentary on the Gospel after the sixth ode of the Canon. On the contrary, at that time he paid special attention. In order to hear better he would leave his usual place and approach the reader. Leaning on his crutch and lowering his head, Fr. Athanasius would thoughtfully listen to the reading. Often when it was finished, forgetting everything around him he would exclaim with tears in his eyes, 'O words full of great benefit! I must write them down!' Then returning to his cell he would hurry to put down what had been read, as if he had heard it for the first time. From standing on his feet so long, his joints swelled and some sort of growth had formed. Instead of using medications, the Elder would anoint them with oil from the lampada burning before the icon of the Most Holy Mother of God, in whom he had such real faith that, while performing his usual rule of prayer, or when anyone would mention the name of the Most Holy Mother of God in his presence, he would magnify Her name with joy and tears. While anointing his swollen legs with the oil from the lampada, he would remember the future torment and the unquenchable fire, asking our Lord Jesus Christ and His Most Pure Mother to deliver him from it.

"Fr. Athanasius received with love the brothers who came to him for spiritual benefit and counsel. His conversation was simple; he spoke little from books, and if he did, he spoke with extreme humility, as if he himself knew nothing but was only speaking about virtuous elders and good monastic customs. He especially loved to tell us (his disciples), about his Elder Paisius, the Archimandrite of the Niamets Monastery in Moldavia. He said that he was virtuous and wise in words and spiritual discretion, that he had the gift of tears, and that when a brother came to him for spiritual benefit, he, consol-

ing him, himself wept and made the brother weep, too. He spoke also of other virtuous elders.

“When lay people came to him, Fr. Athanasius talked about the Heavenly Kingdom, the future torments, and about compassion to beggars. He said that our life has been given to us to earn the future life. He spoke with such humility and love that it caused his listeners to look at his face with emotion, and his words touched the hearts of many, especially those who came to him with faith. He also pitied the schismatics and pleaded with many of them, trying to convince them to abandon their false beliefs. And indeed, through the grace of God some of them came to their senses and returned to the Orthodox Church. In his time free from services and receiving visitors, he copied soul-profitting precepts from the Patristic books, in order to later compile and arrange the excerpts according to topic. Death, however, prevented him from finishing this God-pleasing work. Because of Fr. Athanasius’ righteous life, and even more because of His own goodness, the Merciful God deemed the Elder worthy of a blessed repose. On the 11th of October, 1825, Fr. Athanasius fell ill. During this illness he received Holy Communion three times. On the 16th he received Unction; and the last time he received Holy Communion was on the day of his death, the 17th. His illness consisted of an accumulation of fluid and mucus in his chest cavity. He suffered when it increased, but prior to his death the pain stopped. At the end of Vespers on Saturday evening, after the reading of the Canon for the Departure of the Soul, Fr. Athanasius surrendered his soul into the hands of God. He died in the arms of his close disciple, Hieromonk Macarius, who had lived with him—and who, because of his great faith, greatly benefitted from the example of his Elder’s God-pleasing life, so full of love and humility.”

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This short description is sufficient to show how beneficial it was for Fr. Macarius to live for ten years with such an Elder as Athanasius. He was a good branch sprouted from a good tree, one of the many disciples of the great Elder Paisius. His meekness, humility, and childlike goodness and simplicity served as a living example for those who followed in his footsteps. They edified one without words, while his simple words, full of love and humility, also edified one in times of peace and times of sorrow.

With Elder Paisius' blessing, Fr. Athanasius took notes from Patristic and ecclesiastical textbooks about prayer, humility, patience, obedience, love and other Christian virtues he had always striven to acquire. He had exact copies of all the written works of his ever-memorable Elder, such as the book by the exalted teacher of the inner life, St. Isaac the Syrian, the ancient Slavonic translations corrected by the Elder of the writings of St. Macarius the Great, St. John of the Ladder, St. Barsanuphius, St. Thalassius, and St. Symeon the New Theologian (*Twelve Homilies* and his *Hymns*); as well as the writings that Fr. Athanasius translated himself: a discourse consisting of questions and answers by St. Maximus the Confessor, the Catechetical Homilies of St. Theodore the Studite, the Life of St. Gregory of Sinai, the Homilies by St. Gregory Palamas, and several others.

With Fr. Athanasius' blessing, his inquisitive disciple began to satisfy the fervent zeal of his spiritual eagerness and thirst by the attentive reading and assiduous copying of those manuscripts, having first learned to write uncial script. The words of the Holy Fathers, which the young monk spent many sleepless nights working on, became deeply imprinted in his pure heart and mind. All this, as time revealed, was providential. The acquisition of faithful copies of Elder Paisius' translations made it possible to later publish these translations for the common

benefit. And by assimilating and committing to his receptive memory the many sayings and thoughts from Patristic writings, fruit was brought forth a hundredfold when God's Providence called His chosen one to serve for the salvation of many souls.

The more the wisdom-loving monk immersed himself in the reading of the Holy Fathers, the more eager he became to reach his desired goal of spiritual activity: to learn the mental Jesus Prayer, the ceaseless prayer performed by the mind in the heart. His Elder, Fr. Athanasius, having been forbidden by his own Elder, St. Paisius, even to begin this sublime activity, taught only the oral Jesus Prayer. Because of his deep humility, as was mentioned previously, he did not like to speak from books. Consequently, Fr. Macarius' inquisitiveness could not be satisfied by this source. These same writings indicated that it is harmful for one to take up this labor without a teacher. This left only one possibility: to wait for an opportunity to come into contact with elders who had acquired this gift successively from other experienced instructors.

On May 27, 1817, Fr. Macarius was ordained hieromonk by Bishop Dositheus of Orel and Sevs. In 1818, the Ploschansk Hermitage saw a change of abbots: the kind and sickly Fr. Paul, according to his own wish, retired and went to live at the Bishop's residence in Kaluga, and was replaced by Hieromonk Seraphim, a disciple of Elder Basil (Kishkin), the Superior of the White Bluff Hermitage. The new Abbot was allowed to bring about ten brothers to the Ploschansk Hermitage in order to improve the church services and order. Fr. Seraphim replaced the Znameny chant, which until then had been used at the Ploschansk Hermitage, with the Kievan chant that had been introduced at White Bluff by Schemamonk Theodore. He also established better order throughout the Monastery and in the refectory. Being a man of spiritual life, Fr. Seraphim was a good instructor and father to the brethren.

During his time, the number of brethren at the Hermitage increased to a hundred. Fr. Seraphim led a sober life; he was pleasant in conversation, and meek and quiet by nature. He governed Ploschansk Hermitage until 1826. These good changes introduced by him were welcomed by all the well-disposed brethren, including Fr. Macarius. After Fr. Macarius resigned his duty as vestry-keeper on account of his poor health (August 5, 1818), he still continued to labor tirelessly for the prosperity of the Monastery by helping with correspondence, both by his experienced counsel and his personal labors. He constantly helped with the church services, singing and reading, and took an active part in the introduction of the Kievan chant. This chant agreed with his desert-loving spirit, and he became so accustomed to it that later, when Superior of the Optina Skete, he introduced certain aspects of it there also, for example, the singing of special melodies. For all this work, and for the thorough fulfillment of his obediences, Fr. Macarius, on the recommendation of the new Abbot was awarded the epigonation\* on June 8, 1819, when His Eminence Bishop Jonas visited the Monastery. At the same time he asked for a leave to make a pilgrimage to the holy places of Kiev.

According to his co-traveller Fr. Palladius (an Elder and hierodeacon at the Optina Hermitage), who survived him, Fr. Macarius made the round trip on foot, with a pilgrim's staff and very poorly clad. He spent ten days in Kiev and was consoled by the kindness of the Lavra's Abbot, Archimandrite Anthony.\*\*

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\* A rectangular piece worn at the hieromonk's hip when he is in full vestments [trans.].

\*\* Archimandrite Anthony died in the rank of Archbishop of Voronezh and of Zadonsk.



Fr. Macarius served the Liturgy in the Far Kiev Caves, and on his way back visited Glinsk Hermitage. There he met and entered into an intimate spiritual relationship with Hierodeacon Samuel, a disciple of the Monastery's Abbot, Philaret (who was a disciple of Archimandrite Theodosius of Sophroniev Hermitage). Fr. Samuel was practiced in mental prayer under the guidance of his Elder. According to Fr. Palladius, they spent three days together reading the book of St. Isaac the Syrian and conversing to their hearts' content about the inner activity of the spiritual life. Yet, from some later hints of Elder Macarius, one can confidently surmise that conducting mental prayer at that stage of his spiritual growth was premature and nearly harmed him. Later, after the Elder had acquired the mother of all gifts, humility, and was guarded by it in the exalted activity of mental prayer, he warned everyone connected with him against learning this exalted activity before purification from the passions, directing all in the work of prayer against passions and thoughts. This warning was based on the Elder's long experience in spiritual activity, and was confirmed by many examples of people who harmed themselves by self-willed (without an experienced director) and premature practice of mental prayer. According to St. Isaac the Syrian, hardly one out of a thousand will progress properly and attain the fruits of mental prayer (Homily 23, p. 117). This fact instigated the Elder, not long before his death, to compose a warning based on the teaching of the Holy Fathers and confirmed by his own personal experience, for readers of the Patristic texts who wish to practice the mental prayer of Jesus.

In 1824, Fr. Macarius went to Rostov to venerate the relics of St. Demetrius, the Wonderworker of Rostov. On the same trip he visited Optina Monastery and its newly established secluded Skete for the first time. This skete was later to

shelter him within its walls, and in turn became indebted to him for upholding the good order and high caliber of its spiritual life.

In the year 1825, Fr. Macarius lost his good Elder, Schema-monk Athanasius, who was an embodiment and living example of all the Christian virtues.

In the following year, 1826, Fr. Seraphim, the Abbot of the Ploschansk Hermitage, also passed away. His Eminence Gabriel appointed Hieromonk Marcellinus (whom he had also taken from the brotherhood of the Hermitage to be the Bishop's steward) as Abbot of the Ploschansk Hermitage. After being appointed to this post however, Fr. Marcellinus continued to live in Orel for more than two years, still working for the Bishop as steward, while the Hermitage was governed by the treasurer, Hieromonk Anatole. On June 10 of the same year, Fr. Macarius was appointed dean of this Monastery, and on January 30, 1827, he was given the obedience of confessor at the Holy Trinity Convent in Sevsk. This appointment was the beginning of a new period of spiritual activity for the Elder that continued until the end of his extremely difficult life. At this same time his spiritual correspondence likewise began and lasted until the beginning of his fatal illness. Thus, it was not he who considered himself ready to take up the difficult task of spiritual leadership; rather, he only submitted to the will of his bishop. He could not help but see in this the call of God. This idea strengthened him when he experienced manifold afflictions in this service.

With what lofty understanding, with what skill and patience, wise condescension and unwavering steadfastness did he administer this duty! His letters to his spiritual children—and to all who sought his help, support and counsel—testify to these virtues better than words.



Archimandrite Theodosius, co-struggler of St. Paisius Velichkovsky.  
† January 12, 1802

In 1828 the Abbot of the Ploschansk Hermitage, Fr. Marcellinus, was completely relieved of his duties as steward, and placed in charge of his own Monastery. In the same year, Hieroschemamonk Leonid (Leo in schema), whom we have already mentioned, came to the Ploschansk Hermitage from the St. Alexander of Svir Monastery with several disciples. After living there for about half a year, he moved permanently to the newly established Skete of the Optina Monastery. Fr. Macarius' close contact with this instructor, who was experienced in the spiritual life and hardened in the struggle with temptations, had a strong impact on his future life. We have seen that in his zeal for monasticism he had already acquainted himself with the writings of the Holy Fathers, and had also followed the edifying example of the pious life of his Elder, the late Schemamonk Athanasius. Veracity demands, however, that we also note that Fr. Athanasius, being "simple," could not satisfactorily answer the questions which involuntarily arose in the inquisitive and penetrating mind of a monk who already possessed a rich knowledge of the Patristic writings. The important duty of confessor gave rise to even more questions requiring the counsel of an experienced elder. Sorrowing over his spiritual orphanhood after Fr. Athanasius' repose, Fr. Macarius increased his prayer to the "God of Knowledge," asking Him to send a teacher with the gift of spiritual discernment who could steer the ship of his soul on a course free from harm.

Fr. Macarius felt that Fr. Leonid's arrival at that time in his life was the answer to his prayer. He considered the Elder's arrival to be a consolation in his grief, sent to him by the Lord's Providence at such an important time in his life. He hastened to profit from this consolation as far as he was able. He found in Fr. Leonid the man of spiritual wisdom for whom his soul had been longing—a man whose life, in the



Elder Basil Kishkin  
† April 28, 1831

words of St. Isaac the Syrian, was the result of his victory over the struggle with temptations.\* This Elder was especially experienced in the struggle with visible and invisible foes, and therefore was able to help others with his gift of spiritual discernment when they were in temptation. By this gift he easily resolved confusion and gave beneficial advice to all who approached him with faith and humility. Fr. Leonid in turn was very happy to meet such a gifted and learned monk. He considered Fr. Macarius to be his co-laborer and spiritual friend, and it was only because of Fr. Macarius' sincere humility and persistence that he yielded and agreed to treat him as his close, true, beloved son and disciple in the Lord. When Elder Leonid moved to the Optina Monastery in 1829, Fr. Macarius continued this spiritual relationship through correspondence.

After Fr. Leonid, the above-mentioned Elder Basil (Kishkin) moved to Ploschansk Hermitage from Glinsk and settled there permanently with the intention (as his disciples assumed) of ending his life of wandering. According to his wish, he was granted a peaceful repose in November of 1831.

Fulfilling his duty as dean, Fr. Macarius diligently helped Abbot Marcellinus in the management of the Monastery until the latter's terminal illness in December of 1831. Fr. Macarius spent the greater part of the summer of 1831 in Sevsk. Bishop Nicodemus had appointed him a member of the committee for the reconstruction of the Sevsk Educational Complex. As he was the confessor for the Sevsk Convent, he became a member of yet another committee for the erection of a stone wall around that convent. Some of these occupations did not agree with his nature and burdened him. He expressed his feelings in letters to

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\* *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), Homily 61, pp. 295-6.

## LIFE IN THE PLOSHANSK HERMITAGE

his elder, saying that he had become “bogged down by committees.”

In October of the same year, Bishop Nicodemus of Orel and Sevs, who was departing for St. Petersburg to serve his term at the Holy Synod, quite unexpectedly summoned Fr. Macarius to Orel and took him to St. Petersburg to appoint him treasurer and steward. Fr. Macarius spent almost the whole year—until October 21, 1832—in this capacity. Fr. Macarius’ disciple, Monk Ioannicius, a Moscow commoner by birth who lived with him at the Ploschansk Hermitage, accompanied him on this trip. (In 1844, having been ordained hieromonk, this Fr. Ioannicius moved from Ploschansk to the St. Sergius Hermitage close to St. Petersburg, from whence he later returned to the Ploschansk Hermitage and died as a schemamonk, with the name Ignatius.)

On his way from Orel to St. Petersburg, Fr. Macarius visited the Optina Monastery (located one third of a mile from the highway to Kiev), in order to seek counsel and take leave of his spiritual father and friend, Fr. Leonid. One can see how consoled he was by this visit from the following letter to his Elder, dated October 23, 1831:

Your Reverence!

Highly esteemed and most loving Fr. Leonid,  
with the beloved-in-Christ brethren!

I wish you joy and health!

Although the Lord granted us only a short visit, I consider it a great grace of God, and thank Him for His goodness. I also entreat Him to grant me to be with you in the future also, not only temporarily but permanently, and to guide my life by your prayers and instructions. I thank you very much for the paternal kindness and love which you have shown me. After departing from you, our trip proceeded very slowly and

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

with great monotony due to the bad weather. Finally, on the 21st of October we reached the capital, St. Petersburg, where we found our Archpastor expecting us. He had gone ahead of us from Tver, a fact we had not known, and which we learned only later on our way. We spent twenty-four hours in Moscow and went to the cathedrals to venerate the holy relics. On the day after our arrival here we went to the Nevsky Lavra and were vouchsafed to venerate the relics of St. Alexander Nevsky. I also visited Fr. I. and was very pleased by his brotherly disposition and love. The distance hinders me from visiting him more often; besides, this depends not on my will but on my responsibilities. I have nothing else to report, except to mention again my infirmity. I do not feel able to handle finances, and even less so at this time, when nothing has yet been put in order, and I do not know what is going to happen to me in the future; but I leave it to the will of God. I have not come here of my own will, nor for the sake of honor or anything else, but only out of obedience. If I am unable to do anything and am discharged from my duty, I will think that God's Providence is disposing things for the better.

In his letters to Fr. Leonid from St. Petersburg, Fr. Macarius constantly described how unhappy he felt after having to abandon his isolated abode and monastic life, and how hard it was for him to live amidst the tumult and care of the city, since this kind of life did not agree with his spiritual inclinations. "Most esteemed Father," he wrote in a letter of June 2, 1832, to his Elder:

Although I wrote to you that by the grace of the All-Merciful God, thanks to your prayers to Him, nothing especially unpleasant has happened to me here, yet almost every day something causes me such confusion and grief that it is impossible to describe. On top of being deprived of my solitude and the monastic life and order, I am listless and





Elder-Saint Leonid (Leo in Schema) of Optina  
† October 10, 1841

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

depressed. Also my bad disposition, laziness toward prayer and zeal for laxity make my soul grieve and this hangs heavy on my conscience.\* I think the Lord is punishing me for my sins by allowing this to happen. I should thank God's Providence for everything happening to me, but I cannot find within myself the strength and humility to do so.

In a letter of June 30th of the same year, he expressed even more strongly his involuntary grief, and also his humility:

You, Father, are consoling me because of your extreme paternal love, not seeing my bad disposition, which I cannot describe in detail to you, being able to convey only the smallest part of it. You wrote that I am here not by my own will, but fulfilling my obedience, which is indeed true. However, I cannot see that I am fulfilling it since I grumble and do it against my will, considering that it does not suit me at all. Also, I do not bear reproaches with humility. I have already explained to you how far I am from the level of Acacius. I cannot describe it all on paper, but I should always blame myself for everything and not be this way. Yet, even in this, God's Providence might be directing everything to our benefit although we do not fully comprehend His wisdom—that is, if things had happened in a different way, I might have become even worse. Pray, Father, to our Lord that He straighten my path to Him and grant me to spend the rest of my life peacefully in sincere repentance and in the place assigned me by His will....

The One Who hears the prayers of the humble of heart heard the prayers of His faithful servant. Such a place had already been prepared for him by the judgment of God's

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\* Probably the Elder speaks about himself this way because of his deep humility and the distractions of the external cares of his duty.

Providence as a reward for his patient submission to the sorrowful trials about which he had only humbly intimated in his letters to his Elder.

On his return trip from Petersburg Fr. Macarius stopped in Moscow and was consoled by a visit to Elder Hieroschemamonk Philaret at the Novospassky Monastery. Elder Philaret's spiritual conversation, his profound mind strengthened and enlightened by grace, and his love became forever imprinted on Fr. Macarius' heart.

Fr. Macarius again saw Fr. Leonid and asked his blessing, and also asked about the agreement of Abbot Moses to let him live at the Skete belonging to Optina Monastery. Fr. Macarius submitted an application to the Abbot requesting admission to the Skete whenever he might deem it appropriate, and he himself returned to the Ploschansk Hermitage. He left everything to the will of God and waited patiently for the Lord's decision. In the meantime, he was made one of three candidates recommended for the position of abbot at the Ploschansk Hermitage. Fr. Marcellinus had been ill since December, 1831, and did not recover; he died in 1834. Fr. Macarius, however, who had experienced many tribulations in fulfilling his duties, did not desire this appointment, as he had already made up his mind to live and work together with his Elder, Fr. Leonid, surrendering completely to his will and guidance. In one of his letters to his Elder after returning to the Ploschansk Hermitage, he wrote:

You write, Father, that you do not feel they will let me depart from here. I don't dare say anything about it, except that I have the sincere wish to live at your feet, leaving everything else to the will of the Omniscient God. If it is not to be, that will truly be a punishment for my unworthiness. Yet, since I do not know the destiny of God's Providence concerning us, I must obey His holy will, though not without feeling sorry

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

because of our weakness. As for the authorities, I do not worry, knowing what a bad opinion they have of me in Orel. Besides, the work on the presentation of candidates has stopped. I have also heard that our Abbot still hopes to remain in charge—and I, on my part, wish him good health and that he may remain at his post.

In the month of March, 1833, Fr. Macarius was informed by Fr. Leonid that work on his application had begun. In reply, he expressed his joy in these words (in a letter to the Elder of April 11, 1833):

Your very kind fatherly letter of March 23 brought me great consolation because of your paternal love for me, and also because of the information that work on my application for admission has begun.... But let the will of our Lord be done! Although I am a great sinner, I have placed myself under the protection of the Most Pure Theotokos, who intercedes for and saves all of us sinners; I wait to learn the will of the Lord through Her holy prayers for the benefit of my soul. I wrote to you on March 22 that I had been planning to ask for permission to make a pilgrimage to Voronezh. But, after receiving your letter, it would not be proper to send my request to the Bishop. So I have abandoned that idea. I will wait for the will of God; I can go after that.

This transfer was held up for almost an entire year. On January 14, 1834, Fr. Macarius received the desired decree concerning his transfer from Ploschansk to the Optina Monastery. With tears he took leave of the Monastery in which he had spent twenty-three years and three and a half months\* and,

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\* Until his death, the Elder cherished a reverent memory and love for the Ploschansk Hermitage, which he often expressed in words and writing. In a letter of June 18, 1843, he wrote to one of his spiritual daughters: "I am very glad that you visited the Ploschansk Hermitage. I myself love it very

having given thanks to the Heavenly Queen, to Whose protection he had entrusted this matter, he hastened to join his loving Elder. On February 5, 1834, Fr. Macarius arrived in the Skete of Optina Monastery and lived there twenty-six years, seven months, and two days.

## *Editor's Supplement to Chapter 2:*

### A NOTE ON ELDER ATHANASIOS OF PLOCHANSK, THE ELDER OF FR. MACARIUS

In order to get a deeper understanding of the Paisian influence on Elder Macarius' spiritual make-up and psychological apprehension of life, it is appropriate to supplement the preceding chapter with some meager information drawn from other sources which perhaps the author, Fr. Leonid Kavelin, did not have on hand to enrich his narrative.

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It is known that, according to the tradition of St. Paisius Velichkovsky, all of the disciples of St. Paisius, besides training

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much—but how could I not love it after spending twenty-three years there? The icon of the Heavenly Queen is of wonderful, indescribable beauty; it is impossible not to be deeply moved by looking at it. Although I left there by my own will, it was not by persistent request, but in obedience to God's Providence, and my wish to benefit my soul through Fr. Leonid. Thanks be to God I am satisfied with my life here; but how it will be in the future is known to God alone."

themselves in the Jesus Prayer and other monastic virtues, spent all their remaining time in copying out quotes, passages and even whole books from Patristic literature in careful calligraphic style. Elder Athanasius was especially taken with Elder Paisius and reflected many of the aspects of that great leader in his own personality. Many of these aspects which interest us today were taken for granted by both Elder Macarius and Fr. Leonid Kavelin, since these aspects were impressed on them un-self-consciously. Elder Athanasius used to emphasize the practice of the Jesus Prayer whenever he could. He was very loquacious and did not hesitate to speak on the intimate subject of prayer whenever the opportunity presented itself. He could spot people's interest in his enticing narrative. His talk was "sweet and engaging." It was obvious that he had a gift from God and his speech flowed forth so wonderfully that people would want to listen for hours without interruption.

We have a brief account of Elder Athanasius' teaching as recorded by one of his admirers, who was saved from delusion (prelest) and was then taught the humble practice of the Jesus Prayer that is pleasing to God. Once a certain layman begged Elder Athanasius that by his prayer he would help him to love the Lord and to do His holy will. Hearing this, the Elder at once got up to pray with the young man. Having completed his prayer and blessed the man, he said in an almost prophetic spirit: "Well, according to your request I prayed to the Lord for you that He in His mercy would bestow the grace upon you to fulfill your good intention. And I believe that the Lord heard my sinful prayer because your request was good and expressed from a sincere heart. From now on, your spirit will strive ever so more toward God rather than toward the world. But be diligent! Be ever on guard over your thoughts and desires. The enemy of your salvation will not leave you in peace in his effort to try to distract you from the love of God. Humble yourself

and pray diligently to the Heavenly Father that He will help you to live as a true son of the Church ought to live. Only with the help of God can we do that which is pleasing to Him and that which is for the good of our own soul. Without His help we cannot even conceive of a good deed, let alone do it.

*Without Me ye can do nothing* (John 15:5), said the Lord. On the contrary, with the help of the grace of God any good deed will not be difficult for us. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me* (Phil. 4:13), said the Holy Apostle. That is why you must pray to God that He will give you His grace through helping you to lead a Christian way of life. And if God will grant you to do something good, then watch out that you do not attribute it to yourself.

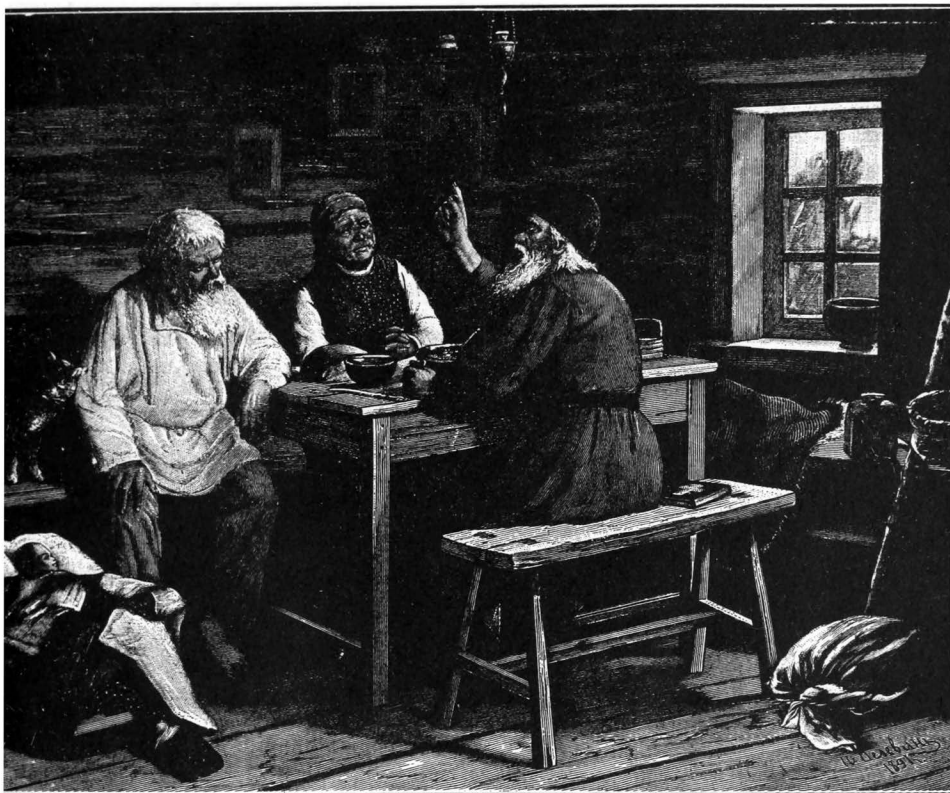
“Humble yourself in everything. Only to the humble does the Lord give grace. And the Holy Fathers teach us: As a man humbles himself before God and other men, so the treasure of grace will be given to him. As for the enemy of our salvation, the devil, remember that he will not leave in peace those who work for the Lord in fear. He will use all means in order to divert you from the true path and to damn your soul. Therefore, be diligent and valiant. Always be ready to encounter temptations. If thou comest to serve the Lord God, the word of God says, prepare thy soul for temptations (cf. Sirach 2:1).

“However, even though the devil has a lot of anger and his tricks are numberless against those who work for the Lord, nonetheless you must not be depressed, having as you do on your side such a Helper as our Lord Jesus Christ. We have two powerful weapons which the devil fears and which make him tremble: first, we have the sign of the Cross applied with faith in our Crucified Christ, and second, with the sign of the Cross we also have the sweetest name of Jesus pronounced prayerfully and sensibly by the lips from the depths of the heart. ‘At My name,’ said the Lord to believers, ‘the demons

flee' (cf. Luke 9:49). And St. John, the author of the *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, says: 'There is no mightier weapon against the devil either in heaven or on earth than the name of Jesus' (*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 21:7). Therefore each work you are about to do should be begun by making the sign of the Cross and by saying the Jesus Prayer as often as possible, with every breath: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!'"

Elder Athanathius' listener would read the Psalter and the daily cycle of services, and at times, sitting by himself alone, moving the prayer rope through his hand, he would say the Jesus Prayer. Often tears would stream forth from his eyes and sometimes loud sobbing would be heard. This pious layman, John Michailovich Nemytov, changed his life thanks to the Jesus Prayer as taught by Elder Athanasius to such an extent that even though he had a family and daily cares on his shoulders, he was able to achieve a considerable height in the art of the Jesus Prayer. He had a portrait of Elder Athanasius in his room, hanging on the wall always before his eyes. He would say: "That was an Elder of great spiritual life and my unforgettable benefactor. He pulled me out of the claws of the demons. From various talks about holy elders and from reading the Patristic books, I had found out that there is a prayer besides what is usually thought of as prayer, and which is called mental prayer. So I, out of ignorance, not even knowing how to cross myself correctly, decided—modelling myself after the perfect elders—to pray this mental prayer. I would abandon secular work, lock myself in my cell, and sitting down would 'pull' the prayer rope while pronouncing in my mind the Jesus Prayer. Meanwhile, the enemy on his side did not slumber. He began to reveal to me secret deeds as if these things were occurring right before my eyes. Thus, for example, one acquaintance of mine would come to me on certain matters and I would say to him: 'While you





An elder-pilgrim teaching lay people, just like Elder Athanasius would have done. An engraving by Palevin from *Russky Palomnik* (*Russian Pilgrim*) no. 30 of 1906.

are here with me in my place, in your house such and such a thing is taking place.' And this man, upon returning home, would find that indeed things occurred as I had told him from the demonic prophecies. After that people began to be amazed and to call me clairvoyant. I began to imagine that I was holy and a righteous man. I do not know what would have happened to me. Most likely the demon, having completely ensnared me in pride, would have destroyed my soul, but thanks be to our most merciful Lord! He did not allow the demon to rejoice over my destruction!

"When I visited Ploschansk Hermitage, I candidly told the Elder what was happening to me. Elder Athanasius at once understood that I had fallen into demonic prelest. For the sake of humility, the Elder gave me a penance. Concerning the mental prayer with which I used to occupy myself, the Elder said that I had undertaken work beyond me, and that few would dare to embark upon such prayer. And he ordered me to pray like other people pray, just as our Mother Church commands us to pray."

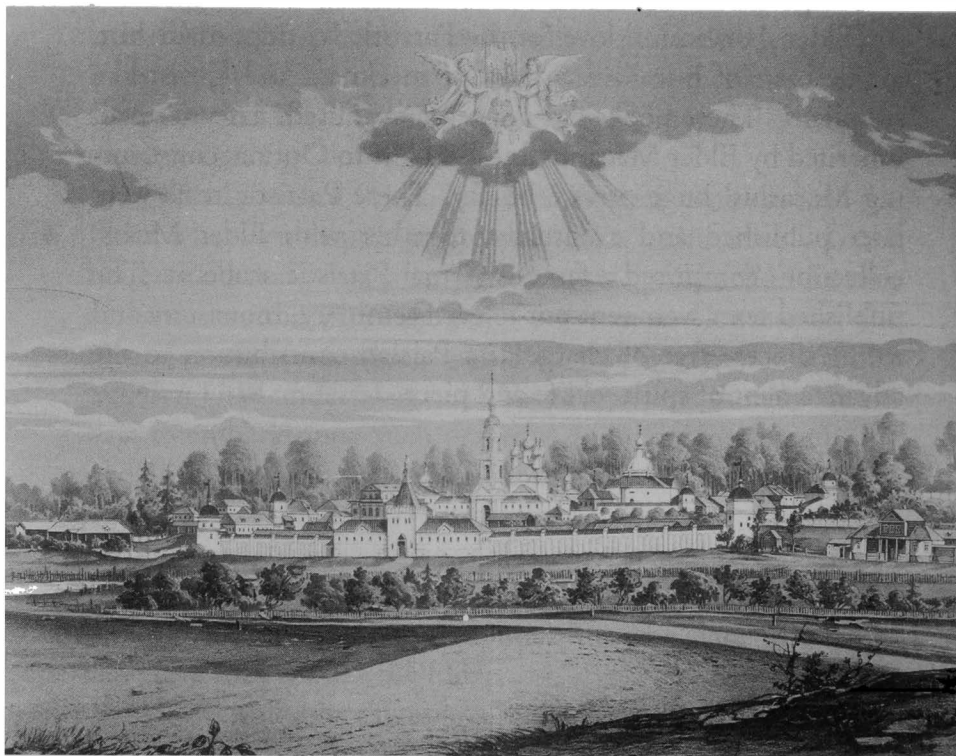
Following the instructions of Elder Athanasius, though not without difficulty, John Michailovich eventually acquired a gift of true, balanced prayer and until the last days of his life expressed gratitude to the Elder.

This is only one example of how effective the Elder was as a carrier of genuine, traditional spirituality. There were, naturally, other examples.

One must bear in mind that the Elder was a simple man and was able to transmit the Paisian experience as he saw and understood it from the time he spent with Elder Paisius. However, for Elder Macarius, who was his most devoted disciple and who was keenly intent on absorbing each reflection of Elder Paisius, this was not enough to satisfy his thirst. Therefore, in addition to the readings which Elder Athanasius had brought

from Moldavia, Elder Macarius wanted more. Macarius' interest grew when, after Athanasius' death in 1825, he met in 1828 another carrier of the Paisian tradition and adhered to him as to another Athanasius. This was Elder Leonid, who soon thereafter moved to Optina Monastery, and whom Macarius joined not long after that.

Elder Athanasius' love for the Patristic writings made him a true man of humility, a hero of meekness and Christ-like simplicity. These books did not remain unused. They were all inherited by Elder Macarius and brought to Optina, constituting Macarius' huge private library. These Patristic texts were later published and eventually, together with Elder Moses' collection, comprised a famous virtual Patristic academy. The published texts were sent out to each seminary, monastery and ruling diocese free of charge as a Paisian contribution to the advancement of spiritual life and piety.



General view of Optina Monastery.

A lithograph of 1876, showing the Zhizdra River in the foreground, and the Monastery overshadowed by the grace of God. Such was the popular view and image of the monastic haven.

# 3

## *Life at Optina Monastery*

1834-1860

### I.

THE ASCETIC LIFE OF FR. MACARIUS  
UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF ELDER LEONID

1834-1840

*He who humbles himself will be exalted.*

(Luke 18:14)

AT FORTY-SIX years of age, Fr. Macarius came to dwell in the Optina Monastery. He was placed in the Skete next to the builder of the Monastery, Fr. Moses (now\* in the rank of Archimandrite and governing the Monastery as well), and also next to Fr. Moses' brother, the Superior of the Skete, Hieromonk Anthony (now an Abbot, living in retirement in the Optina Monastery).

Fr. Macarius had many disciples and people who sought his counsel; we have already mentioned that as early as 1826 he had

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\* That is, in 1861, when this was written [trans.].

been appointed confessor of the Sevsk Convent. He, however, being humble and considering himself unworthy, fled from human glory, considering it a special honor and privilege to be "at the feet of" another Elder. Having succeeded in this, he demonstrated true obedience. In the beginning, he only helped the Elder in his extensive correspondence with people asking for spiritual counsel and edification. Beginning in 1836, the sphere of his activities expanded considerably. In October of that year, Fr. Macarius was appointed confessor of the Monastery. Then, after the Superior of the Skete, Fr. Anthony, was appointed Abbot of the St. Nicholas Monastery in Maloyaroslavets, Fr. Macarius was made Superior and placed in charge of the Skete, taking this position on December 1, 1839. The weightier duties did not at all change Fr. Macarius' relationship with his Elder; the word "Superior" was never heard on the lips of the humble monk. Full of faith and love for his Elder, he never did anything without asking him. Being humble, he secretly and openly ascribed the success of his undertakings to the prayers, instructions and blessing of his Elder. Because of this, God, Who loves the humble, blessed his labors.

Generally speaking, until the death of his Elder, Fr. Macarius remained one of his most diligent disciples, ever devoted to that yoke of obedience which is so beneficial to those who choose to bear it. It was touching to watch him humbling and abasing himself before the Elder. Here is one of many examples: The Abbot, summoning Fr. Macarius (after he had been appointed confessor of the Monastery), asked him to receive under his care one of the novices at his tonsure. Fr. Macarius, considering the request of his Superior as an order, humbly assented by making a prostration. Coming to his Elder, he found his spiritual guide surrounded, as usual, by a multitude of people who were asking his help in their spiritual needs and situations. Fr. Macarius told him in short why he had been

summoned to the Abbot. The experienced Elder used this situation (according to the instruction of St. John of the Ladder)\* in order to give the monk-ascetic an opportunity to obtain crowns of patience and to make an example of him for others. He asked Fr. Macarius with feigned sternness, "Did you consent?" "Yes, I almost did, or rather, I did not dare refuse," Fr. Macarius replied. "Yes, pride is certainly part of your nature," the Elder said, and raising his voice and pretending to be angry, he reprimanded Fr. Macarius for a rather long time. The latter stood with his head bent, from time to time bowing humbly and saying "I am guilty, forgive me, Father, for the sake of God!" All present, accustomed to respecting Fr. Macarius on the same level as the Elder, watched this scene—some in confusion, some with reverence and surprise. When the Elder stopped talking, Fr. Macarius, falling on his knees before him, asked meekly, "Forgive me, Father! Would you bless me to refuse?" "Why refuse? You thrust this upon yourself and now you want to refuse? No, now you cannot refuse; the matter is settled," said Fr. Leonid, who really had no intention of depriving of spiritual benefit those entrusted to the guidance of this experienced instructor. His purpose in reprimanding him was different: to test the humility of one progressing in that virtue, his elder-disciple, and thereby to bring benefit to others. This purpose he fully attained.

Peacefully passed the skete-dwellers' days, dedicated to prayer, to the reading of Patristic books, and to common and individual obediences and handicrafts performed in their cells, each according to his strength and ability. Elder Leonid lived in

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\* "...The director of souls does harm both to himself and to the ascetic if he does not give him frequent opportunities to obtain crowns such as the superior considers he merits at every hour by bearing insults, dishonor, contempt or mockery" (*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 4, section 27).

the Skete from 1829 to 1836. He spent the last five years of his life in the Monastery, where, as is known from his biography, he was transferred by the will of the higher authorities.

Let us quote a story told by one of Elder Leonid's close disciples, and also cited in the very short biography of the Elder, which gives a touching picture of the Elder's cell at the Skete when he was living there.

The Elder's cell, in the clearing near the Skete, was filled from morning till late at night with people coming to seek healing of their spiritual and bodily illnesses. It presented a picture worthy of a skilled artist, and called to mind the best epochs of Christianity. The Elder, clothed in a short white mantle, could be seen surrounded by his disciples who knelt before him, and the expressions on their youthful faces were animated by different feelings. Someone was confessing a sin which one who does not labor at obedience could not even imagine; another was confessing with tears and fear that he had inadvertently offended his brother; someone's face was burning with shame because he could not overcome his thoughts, from which he wished to flee to the end of the world; and someone was smiling in disbelief, showing complete indifference toward everything he saw around him—he had come with the brethren merely to appear before the Elder and to leave without being cured, according to the Prophet's words: *We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed* (Jeremiah 51:9). But he also, afraid of the Elder's piercing glance and accusing words, cast down his eyes and softened his voice as though he wanted to mollify his judge by false humility. In one place could be seen true obedience ready to kiss the Elder's feet; in another was a weak, sickly youth, rejected by the world, who like a nursling from his nurse did not want to leave the knees of Fr. Leonid. Among the others, one could see the gray hair of an Elder who professed his inexperience in monasticism, that he was beginning the spiri-



tual alphabet, while the outside world considered him to be a teacher.

Looking at the people surrounding this Elder and spiritual teacher, one could not help remembering the words of St. Isaac the Syrian: "The assembly of the humble is beloved of God like the assembly of the Seraphim."\* When they gathered together in the evening (for the reading of evening prayers, two chapters from the Epistles and one from the Gospels), they looked like one family. Those returning from the summer work (hay gathering) sat resting on the floor during the reading of the Epistles, indulging in spiritual food only after they had strengthened themselves a little with the earthly. The reader was not supposed to drawl or show false emotion, nor make a display of his voice, or the Elder would interrupt him with his remarks. Those who loved to read had to admit in front of everyone that they wished to read; and thereby they learned to be conscious of their weakness. The Elder himself read the Gospel in a high tone of voice in the Moldavian manner which, by tradition, had come from the great Lavra of Elder Paisius.

This reading was the only spare time Fr. Leonid had. Except for a short time designated for rest (and even that had no fixed hours, but was taken whenever it happened to be possible), Fr. Leonid was constantly serving his neighbors. Even after his Elder had been transferred from the Skete to the Monastery, Fr. Macarius visited him every day, either to ask advice about matters which came up in his duty as confessor, or to bring him letters which Fr. Leonid had given him to answer, on which Fr. Macarius would affix his signature next to the Elder's. After his transfer to the Monastery, Fr. Leonid continued to attend church services at the Skete every Saturday and Sunday. After

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\* *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, Homily 51, p. 245.

Liturgy he usually visited Fr. Macarius' cell. The other fathers of the Skete also gathered there for a talk with their spiritual instructor. Sometimes laymen from the nobility and merchants who had attended Liturgy came "for a cup of tea" at the call of the Superior of the Skete and, hearing a spiritual talk in progress there, stayed to listen and take part in it for the benefit of their souls.

The experienced Elder, as we have mentioned before, missed no opportunity to give Fr. Macarius, as an experienced monk, a chance to learn patience. He put him to the test by rebukes and remarks, often in the presence of other people. According to the testimony of his cell-attendant, Fr. Hilarion, Fr. Macarius accepted these remarks with patience and humility. He did not remain unconcerned, however, but blamed himself for not being able to please his beloved Elder, and also disparaged his own gifts and abilities. Through this he progressed in humility unawares. At the same time, the Elder was not only full of fatherly love for Fr. Macarius, but also respected him in his heart, considering him his spiritual friend and fellow initiate; and when he found it appropriate he would express his feelings in such measure that he would surprise the bystanders and Fr. Macarius himself. Fr. Macarius, being humble and considering himself undeserving, would ascribe them more to the Elder's humble-mindedness or to his foolishness-for-Christ, to which the Elder usually had recourse to conceal his spiritual wisdom.

Thus, the disciple continuously competed with his teacher in humility; yet everyone could clearly see that they were equal in this virtue. The seven years which Fr. Macarius spent with his Elder passed quickly. On October 11, 1841, Fr. Leonid (Leo in schema), was granted a peaceful and blessed death. Fr. Macarius mourned his loss no less than he had mourned for his first spiritual instructor, Schemamonk Athanasius; for the sec-

ond had nurtured in him the seeds of spiritual knowledge that had been planted by the first.

We cite here the short obituary for Fr. Leonid written by Fr. Macarius himself and published in the 1841 calendar.

“On October 11, 1841, at 7:20 p.m., the 72-year-old Elder, Hieromonk Leonid (Leo in schema), dearly revered by many clergy and lay people, reposed at the Optina Monastery. He had been sick for approximately five weeks before he died, and during this time he received Holy Unction and partook of Holy Communion many times, including the day of his death. He suffered for several days before his death, but died peacefully, trusting in God’s mercy. Until the very end of his life he was fully conscious. The duration of his life after his exodus from the world was 46 years. By birth he was a citizen of Karachev. He first entered the Optina Monastery, but after two years he moved to White Bluff, where he was tonsured. For some time he lived at the Cholnsk Monastery, then he was made Abbot and placed in charge of the White Bluff Monastery for four years. After resigning from this position, he went for retirement to Valaam and from there went to Svir Monastery together with the well-known Fr. Theodore, where the latter died. In 1828, leaving the Svir Monastery, he resided at the Ploschansk Hermitage for about half a year. In 1829 he moved to the Skete at Optina Monastery and in 1836 he was moved to the Monastery. He suffered much persecution, slander and false accusations, being tried like gold in a crucible. We hope that he earned a place in the Heavenly Kingdom. He was a teacher of many brethren, and we are left with a warm, loving memory of him.”\*

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\* The following was also noted: “On the 17th of the same month, in 1825, Schemamonk Athanasius died at the Ploschansk Hermitage.”

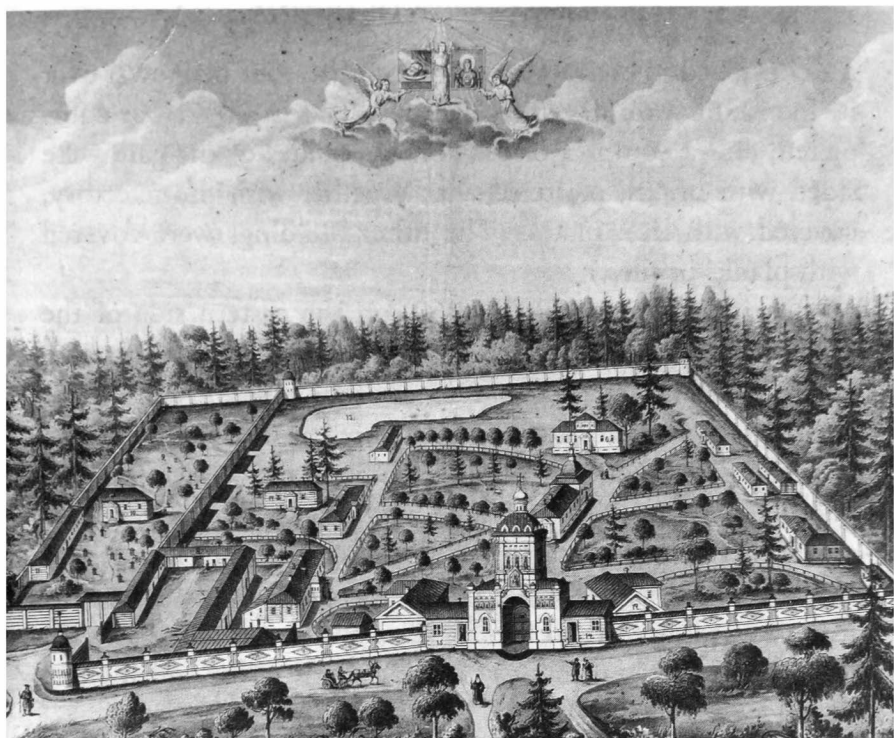
II.  
THE ASCETIC LIFE OF FR. MACARIUS  
AFTER THE REPOSE OF FR. LEONID  
1841-1860

*On the law of the Lord does he meditate day and night....  
All things whatsoever he may do shall prosper.*

(Psalm 1:2-3)

1. FR. MACARIUS' INFLUENCE ON THE EXTERNAL  
AND INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE SKETE

Fr. Macarius took over the leadership of the Skete at a time when it had already been in existence for about eighteen years. Its structure was the same as when it had been established in 1821. Through the Elder's endeavors during the next twenty years and through the help of benefactors who had received his counsel (and who, it can be stated without exaggeration, were happy to show their love and zeal towards him and the place where he resided insofar as they were able), the Skete was provided with the support it needed. Not only that, but the Skete also helped the Abbot support the Monastery, for according to a rule made when the Skete was established, anything left over from the expenditures of the Skete for the support of its brotherhood would be placed by the Superior at the Abbot's disposal. Finally, a short time before the Elder's death, he had the quite unexpected consolation of seeing something that, because of his humility and great trust in God's Providence, he had hardly dreamed of seeing: the financial security of his beloved Skete assured for the future. A man favorably disposed to the Optina Hermitage and to



St. John the Baptist Skete of the Optina Monastery, general view. A lithograph of 1881, based on an earlier engraving which was popular in the early 19th century. The Skete is here viewed from the west; the main church is behind the gate in the center.

the Elder personally, the Christ-loving I. I. Polugarsky, before his death in 1858, willed to the Optina Skete for memorial prayers a sum of money sufficient to purchase a piece of land (agricultural, meadow or forested), the annual income from which was to be used to support the Skete. The execution of this will was entrusted to Maria Pavlovna Polugarsky, the widow of the deceased.

In 1858, through the efforts of benefactors well-disposed to the Elder, a new wooden refectory with adjacent service buildings was built for the brethren in place of the old refectory. Also,

the construction of a new stone gate with a stone bell tower over it, the foundation of which had been laid in 1857, was completed, and a complex of cells on both sides of the gate were sided with bricks, plastered and, together with the refectory, covered with iron plates. (The other buildings were covered with planks or tiles.)

During the summer of 1860, on the eastern side of the Skete, the foundation of a new wooden building housing monks' cells was laid in the presence of the Elder. It was to have an attic to accommodate the Skete's library, to which the Elder was going to bequeath his private library of select spiritual books and portraits of holy men who had shone through their ascetic deeds and teaching. In the same year, the inside and outside of the new gate and bell tower were painted with holy icons according to the Elder's choice and design. This was the last fruit of his continuous care for the exterior and interior beauty of the Skete.

The Skete church, which stood in the middle of the other buildings as a symbol of the unity of the Skete's inhabitants in faith, love and prayer, was the main object of the Elder's care. One could be sure that each adornment had been set precisely in its place, and not in any other, according to the special design and personal inclination of the Elder, for it displayed a combination of beauty and simplicity.\* In the last years of the Elder's

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\* The greater part of these adornments were the fruits of zealous people's devotion to the Elder. They included: a brass chandelier with crystal ornaments and two rows of lampadas burning holy oil instead of candles (according to the Palestinian custom), which lit the church on special feast days; a moveable crystal lampada in the shape of a candle before the wonder-working icon of the Mother of God "of the Sign" above the Royal Gates; and an icon next to this, representing the severed head of St. John the Forerunner of the Lord with his crowned head placed on a charger, a beautiful work of the Italian school with a casing around the edges and an

life, the Skete Church was completely transformed by his care. The whole iconostasis, with its decorative pillars, was re-gilded, and the ceiling and walls of the altar as well as the nave were re-frescoed according to the design of the Elder. For this purpose, God, Who obviously favored all the Elder's undertakings,

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ever-burning lampada before it. There were also covers embroidered with glass beads over the burning candles on the candle-stands before the icons of the iconostasis; and on feast days garlands of artificial flowers were placed above the crowns at the top of the icons on the iconostasis. There were enamel-inlaid icons in rectangular frames. Inside one of them was a round case containing relics of various saints, donated by a retired cavalry captain temporarily residing in the Monastery, S. K. Narishkin. They were from a collection of sacred objects inherited by his family, which had formerly been related to the Royal House. In another icon case there was a cross plated with silver and gold, also containing relics. In the altar a display of similar-sized icons flanked the large altar icon of the Tikhvin Mother of God, having a lavish silver and gold riza or covering (reminiscent of the fervor that the late Elder, Hieroschemamonk Leonid, had for the Skete Church). On Sundays and feast days special candles were lit before these icons, which together with the three-branched candlestick behind the Holy Table (Altar Table) illuminating the altar, had a pleasing effect on the senses. Behind the glass frame of the altar icon there was also placed a silver chest with relics of the Athonite Monk-Martyrs Ignatius, Acacius and John. On the Holy Table, on both sides of the tabernacle, a small plated Gospel and a cross containing relics (donated to the Skete by the Abbot of the Holy Trinity Lavra, Archimandrite Anthony) were placed on stands with bevelled glass cases. In a chapel in the residence of the Skete, on the eastern wall of the main room, an iconostasis was constructed according to the Elder's design of several tiers of icons, among which were works of the brethren of the Skete and others donated by people living outside the Monastery. Here too, were portraits of the benefactors of the Monastery and of the Skete, including one of Metropolitan Platon of Moscow (who re-established Optina Monastery in 1796), and one of Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev (through whose blessing the Skete had been established in 1821). According to the Elder's desire, a very good watercolor portrait of His Eminence Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, joined the two portraits in 1859.

quite unexpectedly sent a knowledgeable and diligent person to undertake this project.

The Skete's vestry was put in perfect order by the Elder, who in former times had himself been a vestry-keeper. He passed on the skill of preserving the holy robes and vestments to one of his close disciples, Fr. F., who continued to do his work with great care and diligence, always obeying the Elder's instructions. It is known that the art of embroidering with gold has flourished up until today in monastic communities for virgins. Nuns who were in contact with him, knowing his love of beautifying the Church, and eager to express their gratitude to him for spiritual benefits received through his counsels, asked as a special favor for his permission to participate through their labors in the adorning of his favorite Church. Some who were rich simply donated things they had made: patens, vestments, trimmings for sticharia, oraria, cuffs and altar-cloths. Others, who were poor but hard-working, asked to be assigned some task. Lay people who sought the Elder's counsel were also eager to show their zeal by donating various things. Some gave materials for embroidery, others donated fabric for vestments, cloths for covering the Holy Table\* and other things that could be used to adorn the Church. Their number far exceeded the needs of the Skete. Thanks to the Elder's efforts, the Monastery vestry also had a supply of items and this gave the Monastery ample means to share at various times with the suffering churches in the Middle East and those of our western region.

As we have already seen, Fr. Macarius displayed a deep love for nature from his early youth. Among other things he loved flowers. When he became Abbot of the Skete, however, he

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\* The first cloth on the Holy Table (made of crimson velvet and embroidered with gold and silver) was also a fruit of the Elder's love for the beauty of God's House.



overcame this innocent inclination and ceased to take care of the flower gardens, even those that had been cultivated by his predecessor. He began paying attention to them only when he heard that visitors to the Skete were accusing him of neglecting something his predecessor had considered worthy of attention. First, the Elder enlarged a small flower garden beneath the windows of his cell. Just as soon as the beloved Elder showed this innocent inclination, he found followers. After several years, small flower gardens appeared under the windows of every cell. Thanks to the zeal of one the Elder's close disciples, all the paths in the Skete's garden were bordered with rows of flowers, beginning with low-growing yet fragrant mignonettes, and ending with multicolored and beautiful, yet not fragrant, dahlias.

Flower lovers could enjoy looking at them while approaching the Elder's cell, which, it could be said, was covered with flowers. It was hard to believe that it was all due to the efforts of only one man, who in this way made manifest the unfading fruits of obedience and a special love for his teacher.

The grounds around the Skete had been turned into an orchard by the founder, Fr. Moses. This orchard was not only maintained, but even grew to be in the healthiest condition through the efforts of one of the Elder's close disciples. Even in abundant years the fruits of this orchard were not sold, and continued to be a "consolation" at the brothers' modest meals, almost until the time of the new harvest. The surplus was distributed among the brethren of the Monastery and pilgrims; and if inhabitants of the city and the village came in winter to ask for fresh or dried apples for the sick, they were not refused if any were available.

The apiary located next to the Skete was also expanded through the care of one of the Elder's disciples, and improved

according to the latest methods of beekeeping developed by a certain Prokopovich.

In order to preserve the stillness around the Skete, the Elder took special care of the surrounding forests.\* A heavy storm in 1849 blew down many trees, especially in the area between the Skete and the Monastery. Regretting the loss of the "living wall," as the Elder called the forest, he made a special effort to repair the damage. Every spring the novices under the supervision of a Skete brother worked on clearing this land of useless brush, and in the fall they sowed seeds of evergreen trees, especially pines. God blessed the Elder's work and care: during the last decade the planted pine trees have taken root and there is hope that in time that side of the peaceful Skete will be protected again, thanks to the Elder's unforgettable care for it.

As we have seen, the Optina Skete owed much to the Elder for its good exterior order; it owed him just as much for the consolidation of its present number of brethren. This event, which was of such great importance for the Skete's internal life, occurred in 1857 through the favorable attention to the Elder of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow and his direct involvement. By a decree of the Holy Synod, confirmed

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\* Due to the beneficial impressions of his childhood, the Elder preserved a love for nature until the end of his life. He especially loved forests, justly considering them "living walls" and the best ornament of monasteries. He reasoned in this way: "Man finds peace of mind and benefit for his soul in forests. We see that in former times people used to withdraw into thick forests, and there, away from worldly vanity, through prayer and ascetic labor, sought salvation. Just one look at the evergreen conifers of our homeland gladdens the eyes, portraying a symbol of our hope for eternal life, which people go to the deserts to seek.... The forests which surround our monasteries should be preserved from destruction by all means, in order to prevent the word 'wilderness' from finally losing its meaning."

by an Imperial order on February 9, 1857, it was permitted to "add to the Monastery staff twelve vacancies for monks and twelve for novices, in order to supplement the shortage of brethren at the Skete of the Forerunner established at the Monastery." The importance of this decree was twofold. First, it meant that the higher ecclesiastical authorities recognized the existence of the Skete, which had originally been established with the blessing of the diocesan authorities. Secondly, brethren living at the Skete and occupying positions of monastic vocation allocated to the Monastery by restrictive ecclesiastical statutes could not be justly accused of taking places for which, due to the good order of the Monastery, there were always many candidates waiting.

After becoming Abbot of the Skete, the Elder paid special attention to reading and singing, as well as to the order of the church services in general. He was knowledgeable about the order of services because he had served as canonarch and choirmaster while still at the Ploschansk Hermitage. He also loved and knew the notated church music well. By his personal guidance, work and patience, he gradually introduced order and precision into the divine services. He taught the brethren to read smoothly, without showing false sentiment or making a display of their voices. He introduced into the Skete the obedience of canonarch and the singing of special melodies which were later also introduced at the Monastery. He drew the attention of the Skete's brethren to the study of ecclesiastical musical notation, and introduced singing according to the Obikhod, of dogmatica, doxastica and the antiphons. During the services of Great Lent, especially in the first and last week when the brethren were preparing to receive Holy Communion, the Elder introduced the reading of *The Ladder* of St. John Climacus at the Sixth Hour with the intent that the entire book would be read during Great Lent.

For this purpose he made marks designating how much of the text should be read on each day.

After introducing this order in the church, the Elder continually watched that it be observed. Not only were major errors never allowed to pass unnoticed, but even minor omissions in reading and singing were noted. If the canonarch divided a sticheron in the wrong place, distorting its meaning, or the choir or reader made a mistake in chanting, the Elder would never let it pass without correcting them. If it was necessary to correct the tone or to recall a forgotten melody, he would sing the initial verse again or would indicate to the reader where he had made the mistake and how to correct it. As for the canonarch, after finishing the sticheron, the Elder would take him to his cell with the book and indicate in what manner the sticheron was to be correctly divided. He did all this with love, explaining quietly, never raising his voice. Instead of justifying himself, the person who made the mistake would usually say, "Forgive me, Father." The Elder would answer, "God will forgive!" and finish the explanation by blessing him.

According to the rule, on the twelve major feasts the brethren of the Skete attended the All-night Vigils and Divine Liturgy at the Monastery. On the two greatest feast days of the year, those of the Nativity of Christ and the Bright Resurrection of Christ, there was also Divine Liturgy at the Skete church—as well as every day for a week after the Nativity, and for two days after Pascha. There were also special services on all days dedicated to St. John the Forerunner of the Lord, in whose name the Skete church had been consecrated, on some feasts commemorating miraculously discovered icons of the Theotokos, and on the feast days of the Holy Monk-Saints who shone forth in the monastic life in the East and in Russia. There were also celebrated namedays of several spiritual figures—for example, on the first of December, the feast of St. Philaret the Merciful

was celebrated in honor of the deeply respected Metropolitan of Moscow; and the feasts of St. Moses the Ethiopian, St. Anthony the Great and St. Macarius the Great, in honor of the three Elders of the Skete who bore these names. In preparation for these feast days, the church was cleaned and decorated. During the All-night Vigil, at the magnification, the chandelier and lampadas were lit, and lighted candles were distributed to those present.

On August 29, the patronal feast of the Skete, and on the second day of the feasts of Pascha and the Nativity of Christ, the Abbot of the Monastery, Archimandrite Moses, or his brother, Archimandrite Anthony, usually served in the Skete church. As for the Elder himself, he had stopped serving when he moved from the Ploschansk Hermitage to Optina, in part due to his physical defect of stuttering, but even more because of his extreme humility. During the first years of his life in Optina, he participated in the concelebration on Pascha, and also sometimes vested for the funeral of one of the brethren, or of people he especially honored. Thus, he was seen in vestments on the day before he contracted his terminal illness on the 25th of August, at the funeral of the mother of his disciple,\* Maria Kavelina, who in his presence was granted a blessed death.

On Passion Thursday (the last Thursday of Great Lent), Elder Macarius would stand in the middle of the church and sing: "I see Thy bridal chamber adorned, my Savior, and I have no wedding garment that I may enter there. Make the robe of my soul to shine, O Giver of Light, and save me." And how he sang! Coming from his mouth, the word "see" seemed to contain its true meaning; it appeared that his singing expressed only what his spiritual eyes were actually seeing. His old voice

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\* Fr. Leonid Kavelin, the author of this book [trans.].



Elder-Saint Moses, Abbot of Optina, later Archimandrite.  
The official portrait of him in his relatively younger days.

trembled with emotion, tears ran down his pale cheeks, and the hearts of those who heard him were deeply touched. Involuntarily, everyone was struck by the thought: "How can you, earthly angel and heavenly man, clothed in the garments of humility, cry to the Lord, 'I have no wedding garment that I may enter there'?"

The Elder's influence on the small flock gathered by God in the Skete was based primarily on the fact that all the rational sheep individually had deep faith and filial love for their spiritual shepherd and father. They demonstrated this through the sincere revelation of thoughts according to the tradition of the Holy Fathers. This consisted of the frequent and, if possible, daily confession to the Elder of not only all their actions and deeds, but even of the most subtle thoughts and mental temptations. From him they received counsels and instructions on how to withstand this inner warfare that the invisible enemies incessantly wage against the soldiers of Christ. For our warfare, according to the Scripture, is *against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness under heaven* (Eph. 6:12). Because of this relationship between the Elder and his disciples, the doors of his heart and cell were open at all times. Anyone was free to enter with no other announcement than the Jesus Prayer, with no fear of coming at the wrong time or disturbing the Elder by his visit. The cell-attendant who lived with him for twenty years bears witness that the Elder was never angry at any brother who came at an improper time, even if it were the time the Elder usually reserved for a short rest after his meal in the refectory.

Like a loving father, he only became anxious when he did not see in his cell someone who usually came to him regularly. In his capacity as the Skete Superior, he strictly supervised and likewise maintained a strong influence over the brethren entrusted to him in the observance of the Skete's rules. He always

attended the church services and was present at meals. Skillfully, through the experience he had acquired over a long period of time, he assigned individual obediences and appointed the brothers' occupations in the cells according to the strength, ability and disposition of each. He examined the circumstances of every case and resolved any misunderstandings which arose during the fulfillment of an obedience, any perplexities, unpleasant encounters and confusion. In short, he explained, instructed and encouraged, helping by word and deed. Each novice knew and felt that his loving father and wise teacher was compassionately helping him carry his burden; because of this, even the hardest obedience seemed easy.

As a spiritual instructor, the Elder imposed on everyone under him an important obligation: in confirmation of the Elder's spiritual instructions, they were to occupy themselves in their cells in their spare time with reading the books of the Holy Fathers according to the spiritual level of each. For beginners he usually recommended the book of Abba Dorotheus, calling it the "ABC's of the monastic life" without which it is impossible to lay a firm foundation for monasticism. He taught that no one should ever be idle. To this end he instituted that everyone, in addition to his personal obedience, should also occupy himself with some kind of manual work (to ward off despondency), which the Holy Fathers usually termed *podeliye* ["handiwork"]. According to Patristic teachings, the monk occupied with manual work fights with only one demon, while an idle monk fights with many. He introduced some handicrafts into the Skete, and supported their practice by his personal participation. These included lathe work, bookbinding, the construction of boxes and cases, and the carving of spoons. (The first three the Elder knew himself.) Those skilled in calligraphy kept busy with the copying of Patristic books in uncial script, which the Elder also knew. The Elder supplied materials to those who wished to



work. The brethren brought the products of their labor to the Elder, and received encouragement, called in monastic language consolation: an eighth or a quarter pound of tea, one or two pounds of sugar, sometimes a handkerchief, a prayer rope, a book or something similar. In order to understand the real meaning of the term "consolation" when applied to such apparently unimportant things, one would have to see how much these gifts were appreciated, even by the gray-haired children of Christ, as signs of the fatherly love and gracious attention of their beloved and loving Elder. The Elder presented the brethren's crafts to certain benefactors of the Monastery, and also to respected visitors to the Skete, both clergy and lay people.

With regard to morality, the Elder strove in every way to preserve among the brethren entrusted to him peace, love and oneness of soul, reminding them at every opportunity of the words of our Savior: *By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another* (John 13:35). Teaching them all of the commandments of the Lord, he especially advised them to maintain humility and self-reproach, to bear the infirmities of one's neighbor, and to lay down one's life for one's brother. One must also courageously endure all temptations such as insults, slander, reproaches and vexations. He encouraged the brethren to bear patiently and with gratitude all bodily temptations—infirmity, sickness, and hard and bitter temporal suffering of evil for the eternal salvation of their souls.

But where can I find words to aptly express the Elder's influence on each individual person, his ability to guide him all along different paths to the same goal according to his varying characteristics, talents and spiritual dispositions; his pastoral and fatherly love to all in general and to each one individually; his indulgence to the weak and penitent; strictness with the insubordinate and contradictory; his ability to console with one word, to cheer with one glance or blessing, to encourage with a small

but precious sign of attention (precious, because it was shown at the right time); his ability to incite a laborer to work harder and at the same time cut away harmful vainglory, and to bring a lazy one back to work without resorting to reproaches or anger; his ability to encourage the downcast and preserve the fiery-tempered from zeal not according to knowledge, or from searching for spiritual gifts before being purified of the passions—from vision before activity, from mental prayer before active prayer against passions and thoughts? Who of his spiritual children did not himself experience that the Elder, according to the words of the Apostle, *knew how to rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep* (Romans 12:15), and knew how to *become all things to all men, that he might by all means save some* (I Cor. 9:22), bringing them to Christ, the Chief Shepherd? The same could unhesitatingly be said of him as of his namesake, the ascetic Abba Macarius of Egypt: “Like God, he covers everyone with his love.” The power of this love attracted all hearts to him, to such an extent that we would not want to leave him, that we might always delight in his radiant countenance and in the sweet discourses of his mouth preaching the word of God.

The Elder, as a spiritual leader, did not like to see people who had entrusted themselves to his spiritual guidance acting contrarily and according to their own will. He left such disciples to walk according to the will of their own heart, that they might be punished by their own digression. In answer to a novice who would cunningly ask about something while wishing to act according to his own will, the Elder used to say, “As you wish.” Patiently he would repeat these words in answer to all the subsequent self-justification, until the person, seeing that he had been detected, would sincerely acknowledge his guilt and repent, asking frankly, “What do you advise, Father? I leave it to your will; however God will inform you to speak, so will I strive to fulfill, through the aid of your holy prayers.”

Being humble, the Elder tried to conceal his clairvoyance. Everyone close to him, however, knew of it from his own experience and did not doubt it. "Do as you want," the Elder said to some people, "but watch that this or that doesn't happen to you." Later events would prove to the heedless one that the Elder had not warned him without reason.

The Elder was patient with those who, through the action of the enemy, had temporarily forsaken the path of revelation of thoughts. He would wisely wait until some external or inner temptation befell that person. Then, when the person came to him he would instruct and console him, adding a gentle reproach: "This happened to you because you deviated from the right path. O brother, brother! Think—is it I who need your confession? The enemy does not like this path because it is the surest and shortest path to salvation. According to the testimony of the Holy Fathers (Abba Dorotheus, Theodore of Edessa, and many others), he not only does not like the revelation of thoughts, but he cannot even stand the sound of the voice revealing them. This is the reason he tries to distract you from it in every way. Although I am sinful, foolish and mentally and physically weak, I will not refrain from telling those who with faith seek consolation and benefit for their souls what God grants my dull mind for their profit, so that I may become the instrument of His merciful, paternal Providence, unworthy as I am. If you ask with faith and accept my advice, you will receive profit even through a sinner. But if you ask without faith, doubting or to test my word and actions, then even if I were righteous, you would receive no benefit. This is known from the Patristic writings and proven by experience. I am not saying this to reproach you, but only to confirm what was mentioned before."\*

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\* These are the Elder's own precise words.

By these or similar words, the Elder would console and encourage to such an extent that the guilty one, leaving his cell, out of joy would forget himself, giving thanks to God for turning him back to the right path. At the same time he would reproach himself and repent that he had strayed from that path and served the wiles of the enemy. The Elder himself sometimes visited the cells of his disciples, and they noticed that he came at the right time, and with a spiritual aim: to console one, to encourage another, to support one or make another to understand. Because of this, these visits filled the heart of the brother with peace and joy. It seemed that, after such a welcome guest, the very cell was filled with the fragrance of humility which adorned all the deeds and words of this truly wonderful man.

### 2. THE LABORS OF THE ELDER AS CONFESSOR

The relationship of the late Elder, Fr. Macarius, to the Monastery consisted chiefly of his very difficult duty as confessor and teacher. He had been assigned this duty in 1836, during the lifetime of Elder Leonid, a man ever-memorable for his spiritual gifts, experience and wisdom. In spite of his own spiritual wealth, Fr. Macarius constantly profited from the counsel of that wise Elder, and was the worthy heir of his wisdom. If he did not surpass his teacher, then neither did he fall short of him, having acquired the mother of spiritual gifts—humility. The Abbot of the Monastery, Fr. Moses (later Archimandrite), knowing the Elder's experience in the spiritual life, entrusted to him as to a spiritual instructor those about to be tonsured, as well as the new novices. From 1839 to 1860, the Elder received sixty men to be tonsured; eleven had died by 1860. Of those who survived, twenty-seven lived at Optina Monastery, eleven at Optina Skete, and eleven at other monasteries. Gifted with spiritual discrimination and a strong mem-

## LIFE AT OPTINA MONASTERY

ory, Fr. Macarius instructed his disciples according to the words of Holy Scripture and Patristic teachings, which had been deeply imprinted in his pure mind and heart. As long as his strength allowed him, he strove before all else to maintain among the Monastery and Skete brethren the practice, introduced by his predecessor, Fr. Leonid, of the revelation of thoughts from which proceeds the guarding of the conscience, justly considering this the foundation of the Monastery's inner order and consequently the source of its vigor.\*

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\* The sincere revelation of thoughts to elders is the pillar and foundation of the Athonite coenobia and sketes. When I visited holy Mount Athos in 1859, I asked one of the lamps of Athonite monasticism: "What must I do to be saved?" In return, he asked me: "In what monastery do you live? Do you have elders there, and do you practice revelation of thoughts?" I answered that I was living in a coenobitic monastery, where, by the grace of God, there were elders experienced in the spiritual life, and that those leading an attentive life would go to them to confess their thoughts. He said, "Then go in peace, and continue on this right path and saving activity. Remember that the elders will be responsible to God for those under obedience to them, and that to a novice there is no greater fall, as one under obedience to an elder, than to act according to his own will. Those who labor for salvation," he added, "do so only through elders, since there is no shorter path than this. For from obedience is born humility, and this makes us sons of God."

Today's ascetics of Mount Athos consider obedience to elders to be in agreement with the teaching of the Holy Fathers. No monastery would accept a monk who, of his own will, left his elder without permission. Not long ago the following event occurred which proves the unanimous judgment of eldership of all of Mount Athos. The governing body of the Holy Mountain appointed a certain monk as abbot to one of the monasteries without first asking his elder's permission. The elder protested against this nomination on the basis of his right as his spiritual father, saying: "I do not think him capable of occupying this post." The governing body immediately rescinded his appointment, not demanding of the elder any further explanation.

### 3. THE ELDER'S RELATIONS WITH VISITORS TO THE MONASTERY

When Elder Leonid was still alive, everyone who knew him considered Fr. Macarius his spiritual friend and co-ascetic, even though the latter, because of his humility, ranked himself among his disciples. People were accustomed to receiving letters written by Fr. Macarius, and signed by both Elders as a sign of their complete unanimity and oneness of mind. All who had Fr. Leonid as their Elder were at the same time the spiritual children of Fr. Macarius, as he was the Monastery's confessor. Finally, during his terminal illness which lasted more than five months, Fr. Leonid recommended to all the monks and laymen who sought counsel of him Fr. Macarius as his successor, spiritual friend, and co-ascetic. Therefore, everyone who had a spiritual relationship with Fr. Leonid freely and unhesitatingly approached Fr. Macarius after the former's death. They saw in him the same spiritual gifts, and, most important, the same paternal love and merciful compassion to their spiritual needs: his ability to rejoice with those who rejoiced and weep with those who wept, and to speedily solve their perplexities, and his skill in healing the wounds of their souls. They joyfully told their acquaintances about him, and their acquaintances told theirs, and thus the number of people seeking the Elder's spiritual advice, either directly or through letters, not only did not decrease, but on the contrary grew larger every year.

Many times, especially during the last years of his life, the Elder expressed to his close disciples his sorrow that he knew not how or where to escape from the multitudes of people. More than once, experiencing extreme exhaustion and lack of physical strength, did he decide to discontinue his spiritual correspondence which increased with every year. Like his teacher, however—and of course not without secret inspiration

from above—he was filled with power and burning love for people suffering from various afflictions of soul. Because he saw around him the increase of social ills, and even more because of his humility, he did not dare descend from the cross, upon which his love for Christ kept him crucified until his last breath.\*

In order to fully understand the hardship of this ascetic labor, one must carefully study the details of its organization. Fr. Macarius' service to the spiritual needs of visitors in his capacity as the Monastery's confessor and Elder, adorned with gray hair and spiritual wisdom, was twofold: through personal conversations and through correspondence. He had to answer a continuous stream of letters. Some wrote him after having met him at the Monastery, while others addressed him asking for advice after only having heard rumors of his spiritual wisdom.

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\* Because of the ever-increasing number of visitors, the Elder became more aware every year of his lack of solitude. He felt it even more when favorable circumstances allowed the publication of the works of blessed Elder Paisius. Elder Macarius expressed this more than once to his close disciples and acquaintances. Once in 1847, while visiting the Kireyevsky family at their estate of Dolbino, the Elder mentioned it to them also. This gave Ivan V. Kireyevsky the idea of building a separate little house on his property for the Elder. He talked about it with his wife, and she immediately wrote a letter to the Elder asking his consent. The Elder was so touched by this offer that he immediately came to thank the kind owners of Dolbino. At the same time he chose the site for the little house—in the midst of a birch grove, a half of a mile from the owners' house. The little house was finished in the spring of 1848, and the owners invited the Elder to bless it. Entering it for the first time with his cell-attendant, Fr. Hilarion, the Elder sang "Meet it is ..." and again thanked the owners for their thoughtfulness. Thereafter the Elder, having asked the permission of the ecclesiastical authorities, from time to time visited the little house in Dolbino. He would spend several days there with one of his disciples. In Dolbino he could work unhindered on the preparation of Patristic books for publication.



The Borovsk landscape surrounding the Optina Monastery, frequented by Elder Macarius in his travels.



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The Elder received men in his cell at any time of day, from early morning till the closing of the Skete's gate. He received women outside the gate, or in an exterior cell built beside it. In addition to this, after his meal and a short half-hour rest on his bed (which was as narrow as his path in life), he walked or was driven to the Monastery's guesthouse almost every day, except when he was very ill. On the road, at the gate, and at the guesthouse, hundreds of people of all social groups and ages, male and female, and from different towns and villages, would be waiting for him. Anyone who even once happened to walk with the Elder from the Skete's gate to the wooden guesthouse would certainly never forget the grace-filled impressions of these minutes. Let us look more closely at this picture, which, having often appeared before our eyes, was imprinted in our memory. The Elder, of medium height, his hair gray, wore in summer a worn white cassock and shoes. In winter he wore an ancient fur coat covered with dark green wool felt. In one hand he held a cane, and in the other a prayer rope. His face was not striking at first sight, not beautiful according to the usual standards of physical beauty. It was even a little irregular because of some defect in his eyes, but it showed evidence of continuous inner concentration. This made it look rather more strict than kind; yet the power of grace made his face a mirror of his pure, loving and humble soul, and therefore it shone with an unearthly beauty, reflecting the various inner virtues and spiritual fruits enumerated by the Apostle. In general, it displayed a very rare combination of childlike simplicity, stillness and humility which made him accessible to all.

An old village woman approached me on my way back from the Monastery to the Skete. She had come three hundred versts [180 miles] with her sick married daughter, only to ask a question, as it turned out. "Holy Father! How can I see Fr.

Makar\*? For Heaven's sake, tell him, my dear! I have been waiting for him impatiently since Matins."

"What do you want to see him for, Mother?" I asked, so I could inform the Elder.

"My daughter is sick, Father. Three years ago I gave her in marriage to a suitor. God seemed to bless it—her husband appeared good, he loved and cared for her. I couldn't complain. But she is fading and wasting away, who knows why! We tried taking her to doctors, went on pilgrimages, but God doesn't grant help.... Wouldn't Fr. Makar, our benefactor, help us? Our people went to see him last summer, and all who took to him their misfortunes came back happy, and sick people were healed.... They told me: 'Go there, Stepanida, he is so merciful, he receives everyone and is eager to help them.' So here I am, my benefactor, with my daughter. Tell him about us, be so kind!"

"Would you wait for us in the guesthouse?"

"O Father, there has been a crowd waiting for him since early morning. I am afraid I won't be able to get to him. Some have been here for three days, and are still waiting...."

And truly, some people stayed in the guesthouse for weeks, waiting for an opportunity to talk with the Elder for a few hours.

Many times we saw similar touching scenes among the crowds of people surrounding the Elder when he came out through the Skete's gate, or in the guesthouse. "Father, my dear," a sick woman cried out, "I have been sick so many years, I can't use my hands, and there is so much work in our village! Help me for Christ's sake!" And clutching the Elder's legs, she melted into tears, like the woman of Canaan, refus-

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\* A familiar form in Russian for Macarius.

ing to give up. And how did the humble Elder reply, with hundreds of eyes watching him? "What are you doing, Mother? The Lord be with you, get up, get up, for God's sake! I am a sinner, I don't know anything, I can't do anything. There are doctors for that; who am I?" "My father," cried the sick woman, not letting him go, "I won't go away from you! Pray for me, a sinner! God will hear you. Tell someone to bring some oil or holy water. You have helped many people.... Don't reject me, a sinner." The Elder took her aside, gave her spiritual instruction and a blessing, sent her some blessed oil or water ... and the results are known only to the One Who inspired her to address His humble servant with such deep faith.

In explanation, it should be mentioned that the Elder gave those who were suffering from various illnesses, sometimes incomprehensible ones, both spiritual advice, which served to heal their sick souls and bodies, and holy oil from the ever-burning lampada before the icon of the Vladimir Mother of God in his cell. This icon, the sole witness of his ascetic labors, was especially revered by him. There are many stories of healing resulting from these simple actions. It is appropriate to repeat here what was said about this in the biography of Elder Leonid: "Who knows when and to what extent the late Elder was granted the gift of beneficial healing? Had it been conferred on him as on Sts. Cosmas and Damian, and the other healers? This remains a mystery. But the results of this gift were often manifest and spread among the people, and this increased the number of the Elder's visitors."\*

Many of us remember a possessed woman who, sitting on the road between the Monastery and the Skete, was cursing the

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\* *A Historical Description of Optina Monastery*, Part II, Description of the Skete, p. 58.

Elder, saying among other things: "Won't this Macarius die soon? He has disturbed the whole world.... Oh, woe is me!" etc. Through her husband's faith, this woman, who had been suffering from demonic possession for several years, was brought to the Elder. After being anointed by him with holy oil, she was completely healed. Later she gave birth to a baby who cried constantly. The baby was brought to the Elder, and after he blessed it, its continual crying, which had lasted day and night and frightened its parents, was stopped by the Lord's grace.

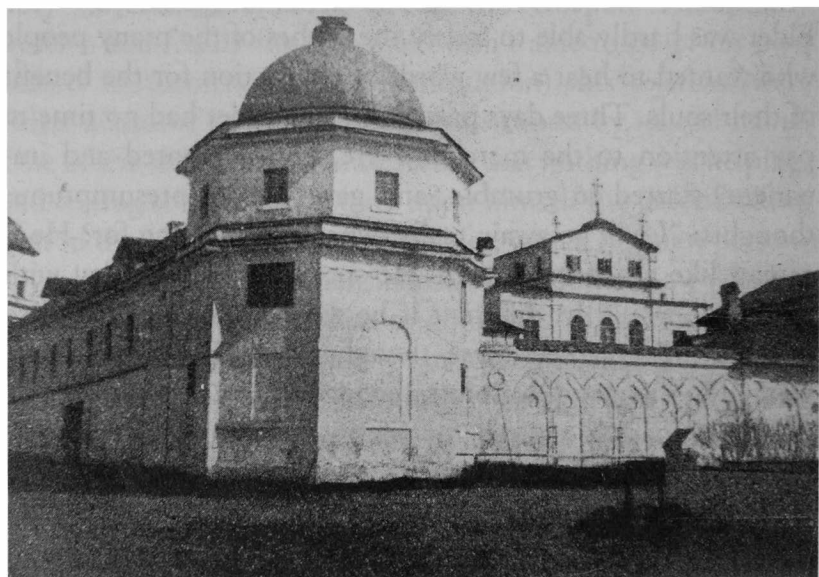
There was also another remarkable case. An educated man from the intelligentsia had the misfortune to become a victim of demonic possession. His relatives took him to the best doctors; they treated him for a long time at home, and finally sent him abroad to spas—but there was no relief. In spite of obvious signs of possession (his attacks coincided with the feasts of the Church, and the convulsions increased at the touch of holy objects—the Holy Cross, the Gospel, Theophany water—and finally the sick man wasn't able to go of his own accord to Confession and Communion), his relatives were either afraid or unwilling to call his sickness by its real name. One of the sick man's friends, seeing that nothing was helping, and feeling sorry for him, took upon himself the task of taking him to the Monastery to ask the Elder, whom he knew personally, about the incomprehensible disease. I don't know whether he managed to persuade him to go or tricked him into it, but as soon as they arrived at the guesthouse he sent for the Elder, saying nothing about the friend who was with him, nor telling his friend about the Elder. Nevertheless, the sick man at once began to show great anxiety—a sign of an approaching attack—and said: "Macarius is coming! Macarius is coming!" As soon as the Elder entered the room, the sick man attacked him furiously, uttering savage words, and before anyone could stop him he slapped his face. The brave warrior of Christ, knowing who

had been directing the poor man's hand, used the most powerful weapon of all against him. According to Christ's commandment, he quickly turned his other cheek, pronouncing the words of the Gospel: *If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also* (Matt. 5:39). Stricken by his humility, the demon left the sufferer. The sick man fainted, and lay for a long time at the Elder's feet, completely senseless. When he arose he was healed. He remembered nothing of his action, by which he had served as a mere instrument, as allowed by God.

Let us cite one more case which all the inhabitants of the Skete remember. A certain merchant, who used to come to the Elder for advice about his business affairs, did not follow the Elder's instructions about reconciling his conscience with God. Seeing his finances falling into disarray, he came again to the Elder to discuss what he should do. He arrived at the Monastery before one of the twelve annual great feasts, when the number of visitors usually increased considerably. The Elder was hardly able to satisfy the wishes of the many people who wanted to hear a few words of instruction for the benefit of their souls. Three days passed, but the Elder had no time to pay attention to the merchant. He, growing bored and impatient, started to grumble, and gave way to presumptuous thoughts: "I will go away; really, what am I waiting for? He is a man like all of us sinners. He spends the whole day with people; it would be different if he were a hermit ..." and so on. Having accepted these thoughts, by which the enemy wanted to distract him from receiving salutary advice, he came to the Monastery church for Matins. The struggle with the thoughts continued there as well. Suddenly (as he himself said later), he became dizzy. Thinking that he was too warmly dressed, he took off his fur coat. But it seemed that the whole church was swinging and that the arches were threatening to fall on him and crush him to death. Leaving his fur coat



Optina Monastery gate and guesthouse, 19th century.



The northwest tower of Optina Monastery,  
as it looked before 1917.

behind, and bare-headed despite the sharp frost, the merchant rushed out of the church and ran to the Skete, not looking back. It seemed to him that the centuries-old trees growing on both sides of the road were falling on him as well, and he ran and screamed like a man chased by a beast. It was early in the morning.... I remember reading psalms in the church and hearing strange cries that grew ever more frequent. I decided it was probably a possessed man, one of those sometimes brought to the Elder by sympathetic relatives, as I have mentioned above. Later I learned what had happened from the Elder's cell-attendant. Running onto the porch of the Elder's cell, the merchant fell to his knees before the door, which was locked from the inside. At that time the Elder was reading his prayer rule. Hearing the incessant cries, one of his cell-attendants, Hieromonk Hilarion, went outside. Seeing the pale man, his whole body trembling, he reassured him and asked him what he wanted. "Fr. Macarius, for God's sake!" he cried, still out of breath from running and frightened. Fr. Hilarion, wondering what had happened to the man, reported it to the Elder. The Elder came out to see him. As soon as the merchant saw him, he burst into tears and fell at his feet, saying: "Forgive me, Father, forgive me for God's sake! I thought you were a sinful man like the rest of us." "Yes, your opinion is correct," said the humble Elder, trying to calm him. "I am not only a sinful man, I am even worse than every one else, according to the words: [*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*], of whom I am the chief (I Tim. 1:15)." The Elder calmed him with his love, blessed him, and solved his problems, and the merchant left his cell consoled and completely healthy. After that, he stayed at the Monastery, received Communion, and went away praising God and His humble servant. He learned from this obvious punishment not to depreciate the humble one whom God favors, according to

the words: *The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to the voice of their supplication* (Ps. 33:15).

I have cited these examples because they are known by many people, both inside and outside the Monastery. There were many more known only to the Elder's close disciples and those directly concerned. Every day many souls were healed. Some went away consoled in their grief, others were awakened from sinful insensibility and freed from the bonds of despondency. The words said to the prophet, *If thou extract the precious from what is worthless, thou shalt be as my mouth* (Jer. 15:19), were applicable to the Elder. His word was extremely humble yet always very effective and powerful. It made unbelievers obey and believe, it caused the hopeless to arise little by little, it made a carnal man spiritual. Although he could not be called eloquent, his precepts were effective, and his words were very meek, reflecting his vast spiritual experience. It is known for certain that all those who faithfully followed the counsel of the Elder—as of one possessing the grace-filled gift of spiritual discrimination—received help not only for their souls, but also in their worldly affairs. There were so many examples of this that it would be pointless to list them all separately. Of course, there were people who, stumbling on the rock of disbelief, left without taking advantage of his advice. Some who came to the Elder had built up very lofty but peculiar ideas about him. Philosophizing in an earthly manner, they thought he was a man of great erudition, and that they only needed to appear before him to hear a torrent of words from his mouth. Of course, such people were completely disappointed, seeing a simple and humble Elder, who not only did not ply his visitors with words, but sometimes became short of breath from talking the whole day long with people who really were in need and trouble. In the last years of his life especially, he could hardly keep up even a short talk. There were also some people who



visited the Elder out of curiosity, and who seemed more to want to instruct him than to hear something beneficial for themselves. The Elder, who was completely devoted to serving his neighbors, did not want to hurt their feelings. He would receive them, although at times he complained to his close disciples that such visitors only took his precious time, which was not his own. "Father," someone said to him one day after such a man had left, "he seemed to instruct you more than you did him." "So what?" answered the humble Elder, "I should thank him. He understood me better than you. What good could he learn from me, a sinner? But he knows a lot; he knows everything."

Many people who thought their souls were healthy were not able to profit from the spiritual wisdom of the Elder, according to the words: *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick* (Matt. 9:12). Some of them, however, admitted later that they had profited by merely seeing him, because, as we have said, he attracted everyone with his love like a magnet attracts iron; for he was full of goodness and radiated mercy. When people—especially the needy—came to ask the Elder's blessing before going home after a short stay in the Monastery, he would give them signs of his paternal love: a few pieces of the Skete's bread for their trip, small belts, icons, crosses and the like. Sometimes, if the Elder blessed me to do so, I would carry these things to the gate, and I would come back with tears in my eyes, seeing the people's faith at receiving these visible signs of paternal love and attention.

The meek Elder did not like people spiritually connected with him to contradict or intellectualize. Neither did he like to argue with anyone about anything, according to the words of the Apostle: *But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom* (I Cor. 11:16), and the Patristic words: "There is no humility of wisdom in argument." This especially applied to

educated and scholarly people who used their knowledge to contradict the teaching of the Church. Sometimes some of those people, who could not understand why believers visit elders, would start to contradict the Elder's answer to their question. Then, unless a question of the Faith was involved, the Elder would discontinue or shorten the conversation, saying: "You know best; of course, you know better than I. I am an uneducated man!" Then he would stop talking or change the subject, directing the conversation to some unimportant matter which, in speech and writing, he jokingly called "fluff." But one should hear with what inspiration, with what cordial warmth and compassion, he talked with those who asked his advice about their heartaches and sorrows. Seeing their sincerity and true need for his advice, the Elder forgot everything: his weakness, his need for rest and food, and even the letters piled up on his desk. Although he would sometimes be completely exhausted and out of breath after such conversations,\* he would still be in good spirits. In response to his disciple's remark that he was not sparing his own health, he said: "What can I do? I feel sorry for the poor man. If you only knew how many sorrows he has, and how his soul is softened by them. And he has a sincere wish to get onto the right path."

People close to the Elder could really see how God's Providence directed those who truly needed spiritual help, showing them the best means of receiving help from him. Others, on the contrary, did not know how to get spiritual benefit from him even after visiting many times. Nevertheless, it was very simple; they only needed to abandon all thoughts inappropriate to the needs of their troubled souls, such as: "I am afraid to disturb him," or "I do not know how to start talking to him," and so

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\* His terminal illness was preceded by one of these conversations.

on, and plainly tell the Elder that they wanted to talk to him about their problems and needs. Knowing that the Elder did not have much free time, they needed to ask him to set the hour when he could receive them and talk to them. It should be mentioned that such difficulties happened much less with people of the middle and lower classes, but more often with members of so-called "high society." The former, inspired by their faith, always reached the Elder when they needed him. They would wait for him with remarkable patience among the huge crowds of people, sometimes for hours: on the porch of his cell, on the path from the Skete to the guesthouse, or inside the guesthouse. Seeing him, they would prostrate themselves before the humble servant of God. Feeling his paternal tenderheartedness, love and compassion, they would directly and unreservedly open to him, as to a spiritual healer, the sorrows and wounds of their hearts, asking for his advice and instruction. After receiving help through the grace of God given to the Elder, they left consoled and healed, praising God and His good and faithful servant.

The number of visitors to the Monastery was especially great during the fasts and especially during the fast before the Dormition of the Mother of God, when the confessors were hardly able to hear all the confessions. Every day there were hundreds of people receiving Communion. Crowds of people from Bolkhov and Mtsensk, known for their piety, would visit Optina Monastery during the Dormition fast. They had a special love for Optina Monastery, as well as for the Elder personally. In fact, his namesake in Bolkhov, Archimandrite Macarius, had designated him as his successor in his monastery. After the repose of the ever-memorable Archimandrite Macarius\* a dele-

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\* Archimandrite Macarius reposed in 1847.

gation of the residents of Bolkhov came to Optina Monastery to request the Elder to become the Abbot of the Monastery at Bolkhov, and also to ask the Abbot, Fr. Moses to let him go. But the humble Elder firmly declined this honor. Learning that his nomination had already been presented to the higher ecclesiastical authorities without his knowledge, with the help of a high clerical person he hastened to decline it through some benefactors of the Monastery.

Out of all other convents, the Convent in Sevsk was the closest to him. As we mentioned before, he was the confessor there for several years. Several of his closest disciples, including two nieces and one cousin, still live there. The Elder always took a most paternal and compassionate interest in the affairs of that Convent and, with the permission of diocesan authorities,\* several years later visited it again to give spiritual support and consolation to the sisters there who were spiritually connected with him.

In his last decade, the Elder also paid special attention to the neighboring Belev Convent, ever since the nun Paulina, one of the most devoted disciples of Elder Leonid, and then of Fr. Macarius, was made Abbess there, and her sister in spirit, Mother Magdalena, became its treasurer. Abbess Paulina\*\* not only followed the Elders' counsel in everything related to the external and internal order of the Convent, but also encouraged the sisters entrusted to her care to do the same. In this she had the blessing of her bishops, Demetrius and his successor Alexis. As a result, the Convent quickly flourished. The number of sisters increased, attracted by the motherly love of the Abbess

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\* The former Archbishop of Orel, Smaragdus, who personally knew the Elder, asked him to visit the Convent entrusted to his diocese in order to give spiritual instruction.

\*\* During her abbacy, the number of sisters increased to two hundred.

and the possibility of guidance by the Elder, who was experienced in the spiritual life. Many cells were constructed for the poor and needy sisters through the donations of those who had more means.

This Convent can justly be considered the best, in both its internal and external order. This was due to the guidance of experienced spiritual men, which has always been the surest way of establishing good order, and which some convents lacked.

In other convents as well, some sisters who led attentive lives were under the Elder's guidance and instruction. These convents included: 1) the Velik Luki Convent, whose Abbess, Mother Palladia, was one of the most devoted disciples of the Elder; 2) the Tikhvin Hermitage in Borisov; 3) the St. Arcadius Convent in Viazma (in which one of the disciples of the Elder, Mother A., was appointed Abbess); 4) the Abbess, Mother D. of the Kazan Convent, earlier a disciple of Elder Leonid; 5) the Abbess, Mother A. and some of the sisters of the Kursk Convent; 6) the Serpukhov Convent; 7) the Kaluga Convent; 8) the Eletsk Convent; 9) the Bryansk Convent; 10) the Ostashkov Convent; 11) the Zolotonosh Convent; 12) the Smolensk Convent; and others. The nuns would come especially to see the Elder and be strengthened by his spiritual advice, and later they would continue to be supported by his written instructions.

Monks from coenobitic monasteries and hermitages, and also members of the clergy, knowing of the Elder's spiritual gifts, came from distant places seeking spiritual instruction and advice. Others who were not able or had no time to travel asked for his counsel in writing. Sometimes the Elder visited monastic communities in the same diocese: Maloyaroslavets, for example, which for many years had abbots from the Optina Monastery. During the Elder's life, Frs. Anthony and Nicodemus (the latter now Archimandrite) were in charge there by right of

succession. He also visited the Meschevsk—St. George Monastery when the above-mentioned Fr. Nicodemus was Abbot there. But most of all the Elder liked the desert Monastery of St. Tikhon, which owed the foundation of its current good order to the paternal care of Elder Leonid—and in the last period of Fr. Macarius' life, to Hieromonk Moses, one of his devoted disciples, who was placed in charge of it. With his whole heart, the Elder rejoiced in the external and internal good order of the Monastery, in Abbot Moses' simple and paternal attitude towards the brethren, in his attentiveness to their common and individual needs, and in the industriousness of the brethren, inspired by the example of the Abbot. After staying in that quiet Monastery for a few days, the Elder would say: "Here my soul finds rest."

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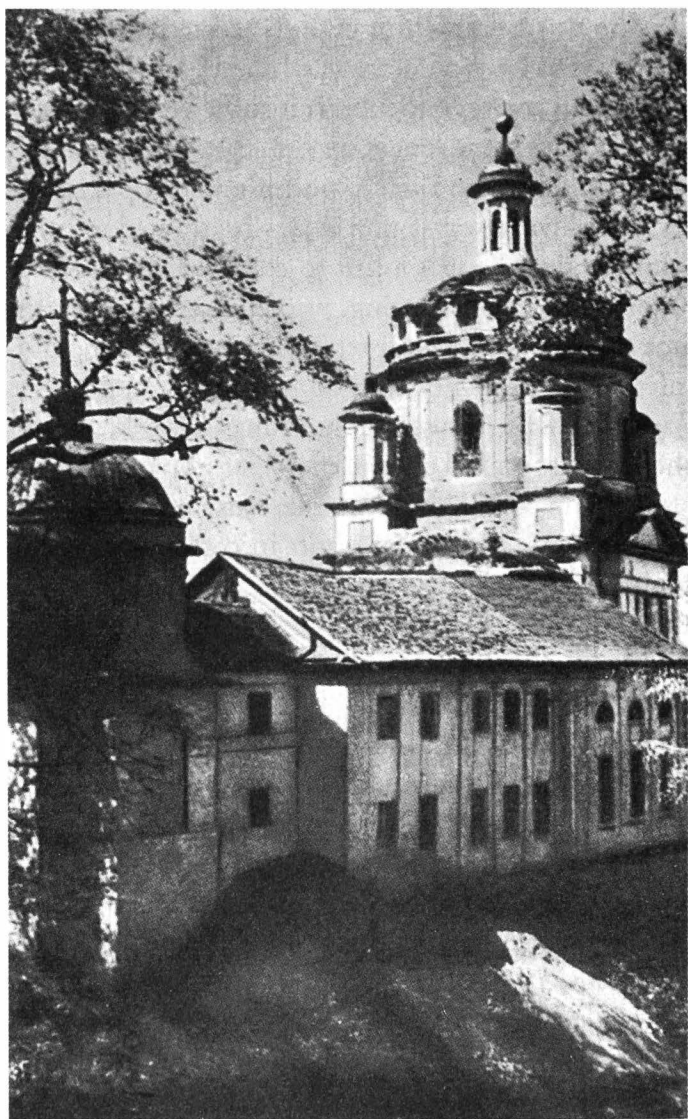
Besides his labor as the Monastery's confessor and Elder, every mail delivery brought Fr. Macarius many letters from people seeking spiritual counsel and solutions to their difficulties.\* Out of love for his neighbor, from 1834 to 1841 he answered them on behalf of his spiritual father and companion, the late Elder Leonid. After Fr. Leonid's blessed repose in 1841, for the next nineteen years he continued to write or dictate the answers himself, answering people needing support and consolation in their troubles. The Elder himself wrote answers requiring spiritual understanding; his disciples helped him only with letters needing simple and short answers, and with letters about non-spiritual matters such as letters of congratulations, or with letters to those who had no questions but simply expressed love and zeal. It was done in this way: first the Elder read all the

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\* By his wish, all these letters were burned in his presence during his terminal illness [because they contained personal information—ed.].

letters, laying aside those which required his personal answers because of their important content. The rest he gave to a disciple who was helping him with the correspondence, telling him briefly what he should answer. The Elder had no set time for handling his correspondence. It is sufficient to mention that there were always some letters on his table. He would begin to write after finishing the Skete's morning rule of prayer; but the door of his cell was always open to all who wanted to come, and from time to time he was asked to come out to the gate. The Elder would go, and returning, would resume his writing. At the same time he would be listening to the brethren who came to confess their thoughts, and administering appropriate answers and counsels. Only two mornings a week, on the very days the mail was picked up, did the Elder stop receiving visitors for a few hours. Until the time the outgoing mail was taken away, he intensified his usual labors in correspondence—writing the letters himself, checking those written by his helpers, dictating addresses, and sealing them himself....

During his last nineteen years (after Fr. Leonid's repose) several brethren of the Skete took turns helping him with the correspondence: Hieromonks Anatole and Gabriel, Ryassaphore Monks John Polovtsev (Fr. Juvenal) and Leonid Kavelin (now hieromonks [1861]) and finally Ambrose Grenkov [the future elder and saint—ed.]. The Elder's letters contained directions on how to step onto the path of salvation; they gave consolation in distress, and answers to various spiritual questions addressed to him by monastics and laymen of all classes and ages, both men and women. These letters constitute a precious treasury of spiritual instruction, clearly manifesting the spiritual gifts of the Elder reposed in God, and describing his interior life. One can say with certainty that, even if the Elder had done nothing but write letters, he would have left for himself an eternal memory!



St. Nicholas Maloyaroslavets Monastery  
as it looks today.



#### 4. THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ELDER

Having acquired the mother of all gifts, humility (in the words of St. John of the Ladder), the Elder set it as a guard over his other gifts, which, as we will see below, were granted him for the common benefit of all.

Having completed his education in the parish school, he had started working at the age of fourteen. Thus, Elder Macarius probably never received a complete secular education. By following Christ's teaching, however, and by the diligent reading of sacred and Patristic books and the Lives of the Saints, he reached a high degree of intellectual formation. In him one could see the fulfillment of St. Isaac the Syrian's words: "Mysteries are revealed to the humble" (Homily 4). After hard work on his part, God enlightened his mind, granting him correct understanding of all the Sacred Scriptures. He then adorned him with all divine gifts, of which we only bear witness to what we ourselves saw and know. He correctly understood the dogmas of Orthodoxy enunciated in the Creed and the Holy Scriptures, as well as the commandments, admonitions and promises, the canons of the Holy Apostles and all the Holy Ecumenical Councils, the teachings, instructions, and interpretations of all the Holy Fathers and Saints. Thus he could firmly defend and intelligibly explain the truth about faith and salvation, instructing all who knew him to pay attention to all the above.

The most important gift granted to the Elder, as to a man chosen to serve for the common benefit of people with different needs and weaknesses, was undoubtedly *the gift of spiritual discernment*. To explain how essential and indispensable dis-

cernment is for those seeking the path of salvation, the Elder would tell the story of this gift cited by Abba Moses of Scetis [in Egypt], which he took from the works of St. Anthony the Great.\*

To help the reader understand clearly the importance of this gift, we include below this citation, which is taken from the *Conferences* of St. John Cassian.\*\* Abba Moses said: "This is no minor virtue, it is not one that can be seized anywhere merely by human effort. It is ours only as a gift from God, and we read in the Apostle that it is to be numbered among the most outstanding gifts of the Holy Spirit. *For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit* (I Cor. 12:8-9). Further on he says: *to another discerning of spirits* (I Cor. 12:10), and following the full list of the spiritual gifts he adds that *all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will* (I Cor. 12:11). You see, then, that the gift of discernment is neither earthly nor of little account, but is rather a very great boon of divine grace. And if a monk does not do his utmost to acquire it, and if he does not have a clear knowledge of the spirits rising up against him, he will surely stray like someone in a dark night amid gruesome shadows, and not only will he

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\* This story is cited in the *Conferences* of St. John Cassian; in Conference Two he addresses Abbot Leontius about the Fathers of Scetis and spiritual discernment. It is said there that these words bring great benefit. The Elder especially liked this citation. During his final illness he drew spiritual strength from it, asking one of his disciples to read it to him. It was the last reading he heard from the Patristic books, in which, in the words of St. Nilus of Sora, he placed his life and breath.

\*\* *The Conferences of John Cassian*, trans. by Colm Liubheid (Paulist Press, 1985), pp. 60-64.

stumble into dangerous pits and down steep slopes, but he will often fall even in the level, straightforward places.

"I remember," continues Abba Moses, "the years when I was still a youth in that section of the Thebaid where the blessed Anthony used to live. Some older men came to visit him and to talk to him about perfection. Their talk lasted from the evening hours until dawn, and the problem we are now discussing took up the greatest part of the night.

"There was a most searching inquiry into which of the virtues and which observances could always preserve a monk from the snares and deceptions of the devil and could lead him with firm tread on a sure path to the summit of perfection. Each one offered an opinion in accordance with the understanding he had of the matter. Some declared that by means of zealous fasting and the keeping of vigil the mind would be enlarged and would produce purity of heart and body so as to enable one to come all the more easily into union with God. Others cited detachment from everything in order that the mind, shorn of everything, freed from all the snares which were holding it back, would come more speedily to God.... Some opted for the virtue of charity, that is to say, the works of hospitality, since it was to people of this kind that the Lord in the Gospel promised especially that he would give the kingdom of Heaven: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink, and so on* (Matt. 25:34-35).

"Thus it was that the different virtues were said to give a more certain access to God. And most of the night was spent in this inquiry.

"Finally, the blessed Anthony spoke: 'All the things that you have spoken about are necessary and helpful to those thirsting for God and longing to reach Him. But the countless disasters

and experiences of many people do not permit that any one of these virtues should be said to be the prime influence for good. For very often we have seen people who have been most zealous in their fasts and vigils, who have lived wondrously solitary lives, who have endured such total privation of everything that they would not allow themselves to hold on to even a day's food or even a single coin of the lowest value, who have hastened to do all that is required in charity—and who have suddenly fallen prey to delusion, with the result that not only could they not give a fitting end to the work they had undertaken, but they brought to an abominable conclusion that high zeal of theirs and that praiseworthy mode of life. Hence, if we probe the exact reason for their delusion and fall we will be able to recognize what it is that, above all else, leads us to God. The virtuous activities, of which you were talking, flourished among them. But the lack of discernment prevented them from reaching the end. No other cause can be found for their downfall. Lacking the training provided by the Elders or by an experienced spiritual instructor, they could in no way acquire this virtue of discernment which, avoiding extremes, teaches the monk to walk always on the royal path. It keeps him from veering to the right, that is, from going with stupid presumption and excessive fervor beyond the boundary of reasonable restraint. It keeps him from going to the left, that is, to carelessness and sin, to sluggishness of spirit....

“It is discernment which in Scripture is described as the eye and the lamp of the soul. This is what the Savior says: *The Light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness* (Matt. 6:22-23). The eye sees through all the thoughts and actions of a man, examining and illuminating everything that we must do. And if it is not

sound in a man, that is, if it is not fortified by good judgment and by well-founded knowledge, it becomes deluded by error and by presumption, and this makes for darkness in our entire body. The clear thrust of the mind as well as everything we do will be shadowed and we will be wrapped in the blindness of sin and the blackness of passion. *If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness*, says the Savior, *how great is that darkness!* (Matt. 6:23). For let no one doubt that our thoughts and our works, which originate from the deliberative processes of discernment, will be caught up in the shadows of sin if ever the good judgment of our heart goes astray or is taken over by the night of ignorance.

“This is how it was with Saul, who, by a decision of God, was first to obtain the kingship of the people of Israel. He lacked this discerning eye and, as it were, he became darkened in his entire body. He was cast down from the throne (cf. 1 Kings 15:19-23).<sup>\*</sup> His was the glow of shadow and error. He thought that his sacrifices would be more pleasing to God than any obedience to the commandment of the Prophet Samuel (cf. 1 Kings 10:1). Hence his disgrace, even as he was hoping to make himself agreeable to God....

“Such, then, is discernment, and not only is it called the lamp of the body, but it is even described as ‘the sun’ by the Apostle when he says: *Let not the sun go down upon your wrath* (Eph. 4:26).

“It is called the “guide” of our life, in accordance with the words: *They that have no guidance fall like leaves* (Prov. 11:14).

“Very rightly it is called “good sense,” and the full weight of Scripture forbids us to do anything without it, even to the extent that we are told not to drink the wine of the soul without

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\* Old Testament citations are taken from the Septuagint [trans.].

being guided by it, that *wine which makes glad the heart of man* (Ps. 103:15). These are the words: *Do all things with counsel. Drink wine with counsel* (Prov. 24:3). Or again: *As a city whose walls are broken down and with no defense, so is a man who does anything without counsel* (Prov. 25:23)....

“Wisdom, intelligence, and sound judgment lie hereabout, and without these the house of our interior life cannot be built nor can the riches of the soul be amassed. This is what Scripture says: *A house is built by wisdom and is set up by understanding. By discretion the chambers are filled with all precious and excellent wealth* (Prov. 24:3-4). This, I say, is the solid food which can be taken only by the mature and strong. As Scripture says: *Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil* (Heb. 5:14)....’

“Hence it is very clear that no virtue can come to full term or can endure without the grace of discernment. And thus it was the agreed opinion of the blessed Anthony and of all those with him that it is discernment which with firm step leads the enduring monk to God and which holds utterly intact all the virtues referred to above....”

God granted this great gift to the blessed Elder for the common benefit of all. Thanks to this gift, the Elder could give to all the monastics and laymen who came to him for confession the appropriate remedies for their infirmities. To all who sought his spiritual counsel he could offer true and right instruction, according to the teachings of our holy and God-bearing Fathers.

The Elder’s other distinguishing characteristics were humility and love. His humility was manifested in his words and deeds, as well as in his appearance, looks, clothing and in every movement. We will not exaggerate if we say that the blessed Elder was a living example of humility. It was the alpha and

omega of his teaching, as was even more clearly shown by his letters.

According to the words of St. Isaac the Syrian, "Not every quiet man is humble, but every humble man is quiet."\* Therefore the Elder was always quiet in his dealings with people. He was not annoyed by anyone, and even when upset by someone he did not despise him. Who of the inhabitants of the Monastery does not remember the fatherly love with which he received and consoled until the end of his life a certain brother who, at the instigation of the devil, for some time had been upsetting and slandering the Elder? Who does not know with what joy the Elder would greet the news that someone had been slandering him? "Thanks be to God!" he would say to his disciples. "He is the only one who knows me right. God taught him that about me. You are wrong in thinking that I am some kind of special man. Don't you remember?—It is bad for you if people speak well of you, and woe to the one whose glory is greater than his deeds. These are spiritual scrub brushes which scrub off the impurity from our souls!" In other words, the Elder, prospering in humility, not only did not become upset when hearing of reproaches, slander and defamation cast against his name, but according to Christ's commandment, he avoided judging anyone as he would avoid a poisonous snake.

The Elder's *love* of God, which he had possessed with all his heart from his youth, was truly sincere, ardent and active. It contained those characteristics of true love mentioned by St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians: *Charity [love] suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not*

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\* *Ascetical Homilies*, Homily 71, p. 349.

*in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things* (I Cor. 13:4-7).

Filled with this love, the Elder poured forth a multitude of gifts upon his spiritual children. He embraced them with his whole soul, giving each ample space in his heart. Following the example of our merciful Creator and Redeemer, he did not turn away from anyone who came to him needing mercy for his soul. He never let anyone leave without helping him in his distress as much as he was able.

The Elder was also adorned with great patience and meekness. No one ever saw him angry or upset about anything, except when someone broke a commandment of the Lord. On the contrary, everyone clearly saw his meekness and patience. When reprimanding anyone, he enjoined the sinner gently, instructing and teaching him with love, showing mercy and patience as well as hope for his improvement. His lack of malice and simplicity were truly childlike. To conclude my enumeration of the Elder's gifts and characteristics, I hope that any I have missed will be made manifest even more clearly through his letters, which reflect his pure heart and wise mind.

We have already briefly described the Elder's appearance; but the enclosed picture gives a better idea of him than any description. We only wish to point out that the Elder, in 1842, long before his death, wrote and told many people who had asked for his picture that they would not receive it until a year before his death. This came true; not until 1858 did he allow himself to be photographed. Once a photograph was made, lithographic copies quickly spread among his devoted disciples as a remembrance of him. His face was white and bright like an angel of God. His eyes were peaceful, his speech humble, without audacity. As he continually repeated the Jesus Prayer, his mind was always directed to God, and therefore his face was



brightened by spiritual joy and shone with love for his neighbor.

While receiving Communion in the altar every month, he was filled with deep and moving emotion.

Elder Macarius' clothes were extremely modest and simple. In his cell he usually wore a loose white linen or cotton podrasnik which he seldom changed, and a black knitted cap on his head. When reading his cell rule of prayer he wore a short mantle, and when writing or reading he wore glasses with old-fashioned steel frames.

When going out in summertime, he wore a black cotton ryassa (the standard hermitage habit) over a black cotton podrasnik. In winter he wore over everything a worn light fur coat covered with "drape-de-dame." Leaning on an old man's staff or crutch, he would go out with a prayer rope in his hand, his favorite being one made of mother-of-pearl beads. This was given to him by the revered Elder-Metropolitan (Philaret) when Fr. Macarius visited Moscow in 1852.

Until his very death, the Elder kept his natural lively character, which made him extremely mobile and ready for any good deed. This liveliness was manifested in all his actions and movements. When he moved to the Optina Skete, he refused to serve because of his stuttering, and also because he suffered from shortness of breath and could not pronounce the exclamations clearly, much less say whole litanies and the appropriate commemorations at the Great Entrance.

Because of his vivacious character, the Elder did not like unnecessary lingering and slackness, or long preparations. For example, if someone was to go with him on a trip, he had to pack quickly (or do it ahead of time), for as soon as the coach was ready, the Elder was also ready, and went to get in. In performing obediences, the Elder wanted everything done quickly (a sign of zeal), but not negligently. For instance, if

someone took a book and carelessly put it back upside down, the Elder would not let it pass without a remark: "You put the book back negligently—that's not good!" And he would replace it correctly. His memory was remarkable; it was obviously a gift of Providence to help him serve his neighbors better. If someone came to him once to confess his thoughts, he would remember the most important points concerning that person. Imagine the joy of some poor old woman who, coming to the Elder for the second time in her life, was greeted by words like these: "Good day, Darya! How are the youngsters? How is your Irene doing? It seems to me that she has been married for about three years now!" The old woman, surprised that the holy man remembered her and showed her such attention, would immediately forget half her sorrow (which had brought her to the Monastery in the first place) and all her fear, and all her thoughts of, "How can I, a sinner, appear before him and tell him what I feel in my heart?" She would then easily and freely open her soul to him, drawing consolation from the godly words of his mouth.

In all bodily activities and works of virtue, the Elder kept to the moderate, safe path called by the Holy Fathers the "royal path," avoiding as far as possible all extremes, which the same Holy Fathers call the paths of the devil. About food, for instance, he followed the advice of St. John of the Ladder, eating at the proper time a little of everything allowed to monks in such a measure that he never fully satiated his hunger before leaving the table. Covering his temperance with humility, the Elder tasted all the different kinds of food served at the meal. If someone noticed how much food he actually consumed, however—looking, for instance, at the piece of bread left on his plate—he would realize that the Elder had not eaten even a third of the normal portion allowed everyone, which included a medium-sized piece of bread. The same held true for any

other food he ate, whether in the refectory, someone's home, or in his own cell. When receiving the brethren of the Skete or the Monastery for revelation of thoughts, the Elder could not always come on time to the refectory for the evening meal. At these times the food was brought to his cell, usually in two small clay pots which were put in the oven. After the confessions, which lasted an hour or longer, the weary Elder strengthened himself with warmed food from the same little pots.

It is worth mentioning that Fr. Macarius, like his first Elder, Fr. Athanasius, showed great sympathy for dumb animals. Thus, in winter the Elder, feeling sorry for the birds which remained in that climate at that time of year, every day put hempseed on the shelf outside his window; and many titmice, linnets and small gray woodpeckers gathered to enjoy the benefits of the Elder's kindness. Noticing that the jays were taking advantage of the little birds, eating up at once the whole day's supply of seeds, the Elder would get up from his chair where he was writing to chase away the robbers. However, seeing that that did not help, he ordered that the seeds be poured into a jar, where the titmice could easily fly inside to get them, but which was inconvenient for the offending jays. The Elder protected all the animals in this way. One day he heard the Monastery's steward complaining about a brother who overworked the horses. He reprimanded that brother, explaining that a monk should not abuse dumb animals to satisfy his fancy or vainglory, because the Scriptures say that those who are merciful to animals are blessed.

In his capacity as Superior of the Skete, the Elder lived in the cell located on the left side of the gate. This building, like the others, was a small wooden house, sided in 1858, with iron-covered bricks. It was separated by a warm hallway into two quarters; the Elder occupied one, and two of his cell-attendants the other.

The quarters occupied by the Elder consisted of two rooms and an antechamber, which also had two partitions, each with exits into the same corridor. The first of these led to the reception room. All the walls of that room, except the eastern corner which was covered with icons, were hung with pictures of Russian monasteries and portraits of our best-known hierarchs and renowned righteous men. On the western wall, over the sofa, hung paintings of the following hierarchs: Nicephorus Theotokis of Astrakhan, Innocent of Penza and Lazarus Baranovich of Chernigov; lithographs of Hierotheus, Patriarch of Alexandria, and Nikon, Patriarch of All Russia; of the Most Eminent Metropolitans Philaret of Moscow\* and Philaret of Kiev; of Nicanor, Gregory, and Isidore of Novgorod and St. Petersburg; Archbishops Anthony and Ignatius of Voronezh; Bishops Ioasaph Gorlenko of Belgorod and Gregory of Kaluga. There were also portraits of the following Elders: Hilarion Nefedyevich, who labored in fasting and prayer for over thirty years in the village of Troekurovo at the Church of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica (he ended his ascetic life on November 5, 1855, at ninety-five years of age); John the Recluse of Sezenovo; Seraphim, the Elder of Sarov;\*\* Hieroschemamonk Parthenius of the Kiev Caves Lavra,\*\*\* the confessor of His Eminence, Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev; Archimandrite Macarius (†1847), who had been a missionary in Altai, and who was later Abbot of the Bolkhov Optina Monastery; Schemamonk Simeon, founder of White Bluff Hermitage; Nazarius, Abbot of Valaam Monastery; Hieromonk Hilarion of Sarov [and Valaam]; George Mashurin, the Recluse of

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\* He had two portraits of him: one a watercolor painting and the other a miniature oil painting which was always on his writing desk.

\*\* Canonized in 1901 [trans.].

\*\*\* Canonized in 1993 [trans.].

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Zadonsk; Optina Elder Hieroschemamonk John, known for his writings against schismatics; Optina Elder Hieroschemamonk Leonid (Leo); Schemamonk Mark of Sarov; Schemamonk Mitrophan of Zadonsk; and also portraits of the righteous laymen Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky (lying in his coffin) and Ivan Akimovich Maltsov.

Next to this reception room, in which he received only guests of honor, was the Elder's cell, in which he spent twenty years of his life, hidden with Christ in God. This was a small rectangular room about fourteen feet long and nine feet wide, with one window facing south, looking out on the path leading from the gate to the Church. Under the window, which was covered with a green blind, stood a simple wooden table painted with white oil paint. It had drawers in which were kept letters, writing materials, and little icons, crosses, prayer ropes and belts for distributing to visitors. On the table, which was covered with an old oil cloth, was a set of writing implements—a simple glass inkstand and a wooden sandbox made by the Elder himself that stood on a wooden support. In front of this set, in the middle of the table on top of other papers, there always lay a partially written letter. On either side of it were letters separated into piles: some required an immediate answer, some could wait, some had already been read, and some, owing to lack of time, had not yet been looked at. Closer to the window lay new editions of religious periodicals,\* or a newly received book, which he usually could only look through during his rest after lunch. Finally, there were one or two books by the Holy Fathers, from which the

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\* The Elder received all the religious magazines and periodicals: *Patristic Works*, *Christian and Sunday Readings*, *Orthodox Converser*, *Orthodox Review*, *Spiritual Discourse*, *The Wanderer [Strannik]*, and *Domestic Conversations*. Out of these he preferred *Spiritual Discourse* and *Domestic Conversations*.

Elder drew his "life and breath." At the desk stood an arm-chair with an oblong back, covered with green fabric, and on this chair lay a small embroidered cushion. Below the table stood a copper candle-stand with a green tin shade.

The southeast corner and most of the southern wall were adorned with holy icons. One icon the Elder especially revered was the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God, in front of which was an ever-burning lampada. Around it were various icons of the Theotokos and the Saints of God which the Elder had received from monasteries and holy places in the East and in Russia—icons of various sizes, trimmed and untrimmed, painted on wood and glass, and icons of enamel and mother-of-pearl, as well as crosses of different sizes (some containing holy relics) painted on wood or carved from cypress, mother-of-pearl or ivory. In the same corner, under the icons, stood a wooden corner table for reading his daily private prayers. In the middle, on a special lectern, lay the Psalter with supplements. On either side lay the Gospel, Epistles, a book of Canons to the Mother of God in all eight tones for each day of the week (the Kiev edition), a confession book, etc. Along the western wall stood a narrow bed, its head facing the window. Over the window hung a cross, and above that, an icon of the Savior carrying the lost sheep on His shoulder. The western wall over the bed was covered with portraits; in the middle were two paintings, one of Archimandrite Moses, and one of Moses' brother in flesh and spirit, Abbot Anthony. Around these were photographs of some of the Elder's disciples, and a painting of F. A. Golubinsky. Over the door, on the northern wall, hung several oil paintings of memorable men dear to the late Elder: St. Tikhon, Bishop of Voronezh; Schemamonk Simeon, founder of the White Bluff Hermitage; Hieromonk Philaret of Novospassky Monastery in Moscow; Schemamonk Athanasius of Ploschansk Hermitage (a disciple

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of Elder Paisius); Hieroschemamonk Joseph of Ploschansk Hermitage; Schemamonk Theodore (a disciple of Elder Paisius); Optina Elder Leonid (Leo in Schema, co-struggler of Elder Theodore); and Monk Hilarion, a centenarian elder of the Optina Skete.

This was the narrow cell in which the Elder offered up his prayers to God, and where, over the course of twenty years, he wrote so many works for the benefit of our souls, and resolved so many spiritual problems, questions and perplexities. Here every day, from morning till evening, thoughts of the heart were revealed; every week the Sacrament of Confession was performed and salutary tears of emotion and repentance were shed. Here people vowed to improve their lives, doubts were resolved and questions answered. Here people entering sad went out joyful; those entering grieving went out consoled; those in despair were encouraged to repent and continue their work in hope; and the self-confident went out humble. Who could enumerate, besides all the benefits received by others, all the pains and labors endured there by the Elder in zealously caring for his own spiritual progress: his sadness, sighing, doubts, bitter tears and humble prostrations before God? Day and night the Elder studied the Divine Scriptures and Patristic writings, clinging to God through the faith, hope and love burning in his heart. At all times he sought and knocked with humility, fasting, and continuous tearful prayer; and by God's grace, according to His promise, he found in his heart the source of the waters of life (cf. Rev. 21:6). With it, he both satisfied his own thirst and gave it freely to all who searched for it, as his oral and written conversations prove.

## 5. THE SCHEDULE OF THE ELDER'S DAILY LABOR

The Elder arose every day to read his morning rule of prayer at the sound of the Monastery bell, which rang at 2:00 a.m. If, however, he had been engaged in letter writing for longer than usual the previous evening, or if he was not feeling well (he had suffered from insomnia since his childhood), he arose a little later—but no later than 3:00 a.m. Coming into the hallway, he awakened his cell-attendants himself. His morning rule of prayer consisted of the usual morning prayers, the Twelve Psalms, the First Hour, the daily Canon to the Theotokos in the tone of the week (he sang the irmoi himself) and the Akathist to the Most Holy Mother of God. Then the cell-attendants left and the Elder remained alone with God.

At 6:00 a.m., the Elder called his cell-attendants in again to read the Hours and Typica. After that he drank a cup or two of tea (never more than three) and sat down to read a letter or a book. From that time on, his cell was open to all who came to him with material or spiritual needs. The door leading from the corridor to the anteroom would constantly squeak on its rusty hinges, notifying the Elder that someone was coming.\* As soon as the early Liturgy in the Monastery was finished, the little private bell at the door would start ringing from time to time, and the cell-attendant would announce: "There are some women from Bolkhov at the gate. They are going back and want your blessing, and they gave

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\* One day his cell-attendants, tired of the squeaking door, decided to oil the hinges in the Elder's absence. The next day, not hearing the usual squeak, the Elder grew worried. "Who ruined my door?" he asked the cell-attendants. They confessed they had done it on purpose. "Fix it right away; let it be as before!" There was nothing else to be done! The door had to be taken down and wiped off. It started squeaking again, announcing everyone coming to the Elder and thus replacing an announcer.



me some vials: one of them wants blessed oil, and the other holy water." The Elder leaves the letter he had just begun, goes to the gate, blesses the departing women and gives them tokens of his fatherly care: crosses, little icons, and belts. He has scarcely come back to his cell when the bell rings again. "The nun from N. N. Convent is ready to leave; she is only waiting for the letter with answers which you wanted her to take along." The letters are prepared and sealed, and the Elder himself goes to the gate to give the letters and a piece of prosphora to the departing woman. He also gives her several portions of the Monastery bread. Coming back, he resumes writing letters or reading a Patristic book, interrupting his work many times to converse with brethren who come in. Then he is called again to the porch: a sick man is begging him to come out just for a minute, he has been "dragging himself along several hundreds of miles for a blessing," etc. At 11:00 a.m., after the late Liturgy in the Monastery, the bell rings for a meal. The Elder joins the others going to the refectory. After the meal he locks himself away for half an hour, or at most an hour. This is his only time in the day for rest, uninterrupted reading, letter-writing and thinking. But as soon as the door to the anteroom squeaks, the Elder comes out and asks, "Who is there?" and begins his activity again. After an hour or two he goes to the guesthouse, where dozens of people (hundreds on the major feast days and during the fasts), each with his own spiritual and bodily needs, are waiting for him. The loving Elder receives them all with equal love and sympathy and listens to each of them with truly remarkable patience and meekness. Some he teaches, some he strengthens, some he raises from the verge of despair or the mire of sins. And he did this every day, not just for one year, but for more than twenty years, "doing and teaching," showing to all the right path to salvation. In such a man, the



A recent photograph of the Elder's cell as viewed from inside the Skete.



The Skete's main chapel, dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

promise of the Gospel is fulfilled: *Whosoever shall do and teach them [the commandments] shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 5:19).

Worn, exhausted, hardly able to breathe,\* too weak not only to converse, but even to say one word, the Elder came back to his cell after his daily labor. We were sad to see him so exhausted and often tried to persuade him to spare himself for the sake of us sinners, and for the sake of the many people who valued his life. We asked him to at least reduce his correspondence, which obviously drained his strength more than oral conversation.

"What can I do?" the Elder would answer. "I can't stop writing altogether, and if I only answer some, I will hurt the others by my silence. I can't do that." It sometimes seemed that the Elder was breaking down under the load of his labors. But this would only *seem* to be so. One who attentively watched the Elder doing his work every day, taking into consideration his naturally poor health, sickness and age, would realize that only the power of God, which is made perfect in weakness, could strengthen the Elder, making the feeble vessel of his body capable of performing so difficult a labor.

Returning from the guesthouse, the Elder, instead of resting, listened to the short rule of prayer, which consisted of Ninth Hour and Kathismata, with prayers and a Canon to the Guardian Angel. Then after the evening meal, and sometimes during it, he received brethren from the Monastery and Skete who could not come during the day, and who used to come to him every day for confession of thoughts. When he finished receiving them he strengthened himself with food, and then

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\* For a long time, especially in the last years of his life, the Elder, who suffered from shortness of breath, took medicine prescribed to him by K. K. Pfel, the chief doctor of the army hospital in Moscow.

listened to the evening rule of prayer, which his cell-attendants and one or two close disciples also attended. The evening rule consisted of Compline, evening prayers, two chapters from the Epistles and one from the Gospel. At the end of the evening rule there were read the prayers: "O Lord, Lover of men, is this bed to be my coffin?... O Lord, Lover of men, forgive those who hate and wrong us.... I confess to Thee, my Lord, God and Creator ... (the short confession)" and the dismissal. Then the disciples took the Elder's blessing and went to their cells, leaving the Elder alone. He, after saying his own prayers, had a short rest. Long after the lights in all the cells had gone out, the candles in his cell, on his desk and at his bedside, were still burning. Finally those lights also went out, and only the faint gleam of the ever-burning lampada, before the icon of the One Who never sleeps and ever prays for us, lit the window of the prayerful cell.

The Elder received Communion every month. On the days he was preparing for it he fasted more strictly, eating no oil, observing xerophagy. He never stopped praying, and often exclaimed, "O gracious Lord!..." "O Mother of God!..." "My Lord Jesus!..." He would utter prayerful sighs while reciting his prayer rule, and also while speaking, sitting at his desk, walking, resting, and—according to the testimony of his cell-attendants—even while sleeping, as Scripture says: *I sleep, but my heart waketh* (Song of Solomon 5:2). The Elder suffered from insomnia; he sometimes spent sleepless nights, and often awoke several times during the night. It was observed that as soon as he awoke he began to praise and thank God until he fell asleep again.

Sometimes the Elder fell into a spiritual ecstasy, especially during meditation and conversation about the ineffable judgments of God's Providence, and about His great and eternal power and Divinity. Then he would start singing one of his

favorite church hymns, such as: *Thou Who coverest Thy high places with the waters, and settest the sand as a bound to the sea...* (irmos for the Nativity of the Theotokos, tone 8), or a hymn which expresses with profound power the mystery of the Holy Trinity: *Come, O ye people, let us worship the Trihypostatic Divinity ...* (stichera to the All Holy Spirit). Or he would sing one of the dogmatic Theotokia praising the ineffable and wondrous mystery of the Incarnation and its implement, the pure Mother of Emmanuel, such as: *Who would not glorify Thee, Most Holy Virgin ...* or *O Heavenly King ...*, etc. Sometimes he would leave his cell, crutch in hand, and walk along the paths of the Skete, going from one flower to another. Then, studying creation, he would silently become absorbed in contemplation of the Creator's wisdom.

Also, during times when clouds of sadness enveloped his soul and languor oppressed his spirit—for, as is known, even the perfect cannot be in the same spiritual state at all times—the Elder loved to console himself in this spiritual struggle by singing church hymns.

## 6. THE LAST YEARS OF THE ELDER'S LIFE

Some people, long devoted to the Elder, tried to persuade him to go to Moscow to consult doctors about his health. The Elder, however, would answer to their numerous requests: "Leave it to the will of God!" Or, more often, he kept silent. But a letter from His Eminence Philaret, the Elder-Metropolitan of Moscow,\* in 1852 made him yield to the common wish.

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\* Metropolitan Philaret was answering a letter of Fr. Macarius, who had written to greet him with the Bright Resurrection of the Lord.

Reverend Fr. Macarius!  
Christ is Risen!

Accept from me a congratulatory kiss as a mutual consolation in our common faith. May the Resurrected Lord grant us the perfect and full joy promised by Him; may we not be deprived of it.

Our mutual acquaintances, in giving me news of you, awoke in me concern over your health. Because of this, a thought has come to my mind which I want to share with you. You have travelled far to venerate the wonderworkers of Kiev. Won't you make a shorter pilgrimage to venerate the wonderworkers of Moscow and St. Sergius? They will not refuse to bless your travels. At the same time you could consult the doctors here, and we also would have the benefit of your visit. If I invited you to come here to visit me, you could refuse with no fear; but since I am calling you to visit the wonderworkers of Moscow and St. Sergius, I hope you will pay more attention to this. May the Lord's will be done!

Asking your prayers,  
Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow  
April 3, 1852

To this gracious, loving and humble letter from the Elder and holy man of Moscow, whom Fr. Macarius highly revered, the latter responded with the following letter:

CHRIST IS RISEN!

Your Eminence! Most gracious Father and Archpastor!

You have poured over me so much of your Archpastoral and fatherly kindness, honoring me, the unworthy one, with your personally written letter, that I cannot express all my feelings of reverence and deep filial gratefulness to Your Eminence. Receiving this token of your benevolence, so dear

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to me, I kissed the words written by your holy hand, falling at your feet in spirit.

How should I dare refuse such a gracious offer and blessing to me, the unworthy one, to come and venerate the great wonderworkers of Moscow and St. Sergius, our great defenders and intercessors for our salvation? This will be a great consolation for me. Also, out of reverence for Your Eminence, I have long wished to personally receive your Archpastoral blessing, which I have not yet had the honor to receive. Now I will count myself happy, with the blessing of my Archpastor and Abbot, to personally fall at the feet of Your Eminence as soon as the roads dry.

I dare to ask your paternal blessing and holy prayers. With my greatest esteem and filial devotion I fall at your feet; and I remain the most humble servant of Your Eminence, most gracious Father and Archpastor.

Your sinful servant,  
Hieromonk Macarius  
April 8, 1852

As the Archpastor had predicted, the wonderworkers of Moscow truly did not fail to bless the ailing Elder for his labors in travelling. Making use of the advice of the doctors, he kept his health, so precious to many people, for several more years.

Trying to free himself from the administrative worries connected with his position as Abbot (which he had already held for fourteen years), and to obtain more time for spiritual labor, the Elder had handed in his resignation to the Archimandrite many times. At the request of the Archimandrite and the brethren, however, he kept postponing his intention to resign. This continued until 1853, when with the Archimandrite's blessing he turned over his position as Abbot of the Skete to the Skete's senior hieromonk, Fr. Paphnutius. This occurred on

November 30, exactly the same day that he had assumed the office fourteen years before. Assembling the brethren of the Skete in Church, the Elder announced that, by the order of Archimandrite Moses, he was resigning from the Abbacy of the Skete. After that, a Moleben to the Mother of God and St. John the Forerunner of Christ was served, with petitions for the health and salvation of all the Skete's brethren, mentioning each by name. Then the Elder made a prostration and asked everyone's forgiveness. The brethren also took leave of him and received the blessing of the new Abbot.

The Elder's spiritual activity increased every year; more people came to see him, and he also received more letters. For this reason his health deteriorated and his strength failed: *The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak* (Matt. 26:41). The Elder suffered from shortness of breath, as well as from sudden loss of strength from hemorrhoidal attacks.

The next year (on December 19, 1853), at the recommendation of the Abbot, supported by Bishop Gregory of Kaluga and Borov, the Holy Synod awarded Fr. Macarius a gold pectoral cross for his pastoral work as Monastery confessor. Bishop Gregory, after receiving the cross, summoned Fr. Macarius to Kaluga and invited him to concelebrate a service, during which he bestowed upon the 66-year-old Elder, who was already adorned with the gray hair of spiritual wisdom, the gold pectoral cross. This happened in 1854, at the same time that the Elder was allowed to retire, according to his own wish.

Such a visible sign of appreciation from the high clerical authorities to the Elder, who was loved and esteemed by everyone, greatly consoled the Monastery brethren as well as the Elder's many admirers, who came from all ranks of society. One of them (I. V. Kireyevsky) wrote to the Elder: "We have always seen how you bear within your heart the Cross of the Lord and co-suffer with Him in His love for sinners. Now this sanctity



which is within your loving heart will be visible for all on your breast. May God grant you many, many successful years! And may God grant many years because of this to our pious Archpastor!"

In 1857, another cross was added to this one, in commemoration of the recent war, events in which the Elder, having a patriotic heart, took part through his great compassion. Although he never had enough time for his own spiritual needs, such as reading Patristic books, the Elder still found time in the course of his daily work to have the news about the siege of Sebastopol read to him from the Moscow Gazette. He rejoiced like a child and praised the Lord at every piece of good or hopeful news; and at the bad news he grieved and prayed sorrowfully. When the fatal news of the surrender of Sebastopol arrived, the Elder sobbed. Falling on his knees before the icon of the Most Holy Mother of God, he prayed long and wordlessly, like a father who has lost his only son. The unexpected news of the blessed repose of Emperor Nicholas Pavlovich also afflicted his sensitive heart. It should be mentioned that the Elder, possessing spiritual discernment, and being closely in touch with sore spots of social conscience through daily contact with people of all classes, clearly understood their real needs. He was deeply and compassionately involved in solving contemporary problems, which had to do with the improvement of the people's everyday life—education, the raising of children, etc. The Elder's spiritual and practical views on these matters can be seen partly in his letters, which will be published in a separate collection now being prepared for publication.\*

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\* These letters were published by Optina Monastery in 1862, but so far only a small portion of them have been translated into English [trans. ].



St. Paisius Velichkovsky († November 15, 1794), whose books Elder Macarius published with much zeal. This portrait is preserved in St. Elias Skete on Mt. Athos.

## 4

### *Publication of Patristic Books*

*Concerning the publication in print of the Patristic books both in Greek and Slavonic, I am seized ... with joy ..., because they will not be given over to final oblivion, and zealots may the more easily acquire them. —From a letter of Elder Paisius Velichkovsky to Elder Theodosius.*

From what we have written about Elder Macarius—a man who was an Elder both in name and deeds—we have seen that the One Who creates instruments for all good works gradually prepared him for the completion of Elder Paisius’ “work of love,” adorning and providing him with all the necessary virtues. His life together with Schemamonk Athanasius gave him the opportunity to turn his attention to the most important subjects: the reading and studying of the Patristic writings. According to the words of St. Isaac the Syrian, “Mysteries are revealed to the humble” (Homily 4), and “for those who are pure in heart, God Himself will instruct them.” Therefore, the Lord, seeing Fr. Macarius’ zeal for the salutary life and the purity of his heart, “exalted him whom He had chosen” on the height of divine wisdom and, after great labors, enlightened his mind with understanding of the divine and Patristic works.

In the possession of his Elder, Fr. Athanasius, Fr. Macarius found faithful copies of all the Patristic books newly translated

by Elder Paisius, together with those corrected by him. Copying them had long been a favorite occupation of the spirit-bearing monk.

Then, after his transfer from the Ploschansk Hermitage to Optina—where he continued his labors under the guidance of Elder Leonid, a disciple of Fr. Theodore, who himself was Fr. Paisius' close disciple—Fr. Macarius progressed even more so in the understanding of the Patristic writings. We should also mention that the restorer and Abbot of the Monastery, Fr. Moses, and the Abbot of the Skete, Hieromonk Anthony, also highly appreciated and promoted the reading and study of Patristic books. Being good branches of a good root, even long before they entered Optina Monastery in 1821, they had become acquainted with elders of spiritual life, and not only by hearsay. This was especially true of Fr. Moses (Timothy in the world). A member of the Moscow merchant class, he had since his youth been spiritually attached to Archimandrite Alexander of Arzamas, a man filled with spiritual gifts, who was then living in retirement in the Moscow Novospassky Monastery, and who was Timothy's spiritual counsellor. After entering the Sarov Hermitage, Timothy went to Moscow to ask for a release. There he met the treasurer of the Bryansk Svensk Monastery, Hieromonk Seraphim, who was in Moscow on a business trip for his Monastery, and his spiritual teacher, Fr. Basil Kishkin, an Elder of spiritual life. Quite unexpectedly (but providentially, as was later shown), having encountered some obstacles to obtaining his release, Timothy accepted Fr. Seraphim's and Fr. Basil's invitation and, with Fr. Alexander's blessing, followed them to the Svensk Monastery. He stayed there until 1809, remaining in close spiritual contact with the Elders. From the time it had begun to give these Elders shelter, the Svensk Monastery had begun to flourish like a fragrant lily. Elder Basil's disciple, Fr. Seraphim the treasurer, who was in



The holy Archimandrite Moses in his last year.  
He is shown holding a book as a symbol of his publishing  
work of spiritual enlightenment.

charge of the Monastery, felt a fatherly love for the meek and gifted novice Timothy, and sincerely wished to keep him permanently in the Svensk Monastery. God's Providence, however, called Timothy to a different path. His transfer to the monastic rank fell through because of unexpected obstacles, and when he learned about it he had to go to Moscow to present another petition. He asked his spiritual father, Hieromonk Adrian of Simonov Monastery (Alexis in Schema) for a blessing to settle in the Roslavl forest hermitage, where there was a community of pious hermits, among whom Schemamonk Theophan, Schemamonk Athanasius, and his spiritual co-laborer, Hieroschemamonk Dositheus—all disciples of Elder Paisius—shone like stars.\* Timothy settled down with them and even lived in the same cell as Fr. Athanasius, entrusting himself to his enlightened spiritual guidance. Soon after Moscow was liberated from the foreign invasion [of Napoleon's army], his brother Alexander (later Abbot Anthony) joined him.

Living in the dense woods of Roslavl, both brothers, when not praying, occupied themselves with the study of the Patristic books. For that purpose, they copied translations by Elder Paisius belonging to Fr. Athanasius.

In this way, when the Lord's Providence, for the general benefit of all, willed to grant the means and indicate a favorable time for the publication of the treasure of Blessed Elder Paisius' writings which had been hidden for so long, Optina Monastery was found to be in possession of the most exact copies of these writings. Among them there were even found several first-edition manuscripts which had belonged to Elder Paisius himself,

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\* Timothy learned about them through his former acquaintance, Fr. Adrian, who was summoned from there to take charge of the Konevits Monastery, and later lived in the Simonov Monastery in Moscow, where he died at the beginning of 1812.

and which had been copied from his drafts by his closest disciples with his blessing, and had been corrected and signed by his own hand. For example, there was the manuscript of the Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian, the great instructor of the inner life.\*

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\* The story of this manuscript is especially remarkable. Elder Paisius had sent it to His Eminence Metropolitan Gabriel, writing with his own hand in the introduction (after the dedication): "Translated by Archimandrite Paisius Velichkovsky of the Niamets, Forerunner-Sekoul, and Moldo-Vlachian Monasteries, a native of Poltava." It was written in semi-uncial script on white glossy paper. More than half was handwritten by the Elder's close disciple, Schemamonk Theodore, and finished by Schemamonk Nicholas, his friend and co-dweller in the Russian and Moldavian Monasteries. This manuscript, after being sent to His Eminence Metropolitan Gabriel, as was mentioned before, for some unknown reason fell into private hands after the Metropolitan's death in 1801. Finally it was brought to Valaam Monastery and put up for sale there, because its owner had heard rumors that Elders of spiritual life were living there, who would probably appreciate such a precious thing. One can imagine the joy and surprise of Schemamonk Theodore when he found the manuscript, which he had never hoped to see, much less own. The Lord, Who had arranged the miraculous discovery of the manuscript, also granted the humble and poor Elder the means to obtain it from the hands of the dealer. This happened between 1811 and 1817. Fr. Theodore greatly valued this unexpectedly recovered treasure. We must mention that he loved St. Isaac's writings in general so much that, when certain deep sorrows came upon him and he was often compelled to move from one monastery to another, pursued by wickedness and envy, he took with him only this book of St. Isaac. After the blessed repose of Fr. Theodore in 1821, this book came into the hands of his dearest disciple and the companion of his whole sorrowful life, Hieroschemamonk Leonid (Leo in Schema). Fr. Leonid gave it during his lifetime to his disciple, Schemamonk Antiochus. After the latter's death, it was passed on to another disciple of Fr. Leonid, Fr. Ioannicius (Leonid in Schema), who was living at that time in the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra. This monk presented it to a benefactress of that Monastery, where he had lived for a rather long time, a spiritual daughter of Elder Leonid, the elderly woman, E.T.L. From her, the manuscript passed

In addition to this manuscript, Elder Macarius' private library contained, at the beginning of his publishing endeavors (in 1845), the following authentic copies: (a) copies of ancient Slavonic translations of St. Macarius the Great, St. John of the Ladder, and Sts. Barsanuphius and John, corrected by Elder Paisius; (b) a Homily with questions and answers by St. Maximus the Confessor, a text by St. Theodore the Studite (translated from modern Greek), the Life of St. Gregory of Sinai, Homilies by St. Gregory Palamas, and other writings of the holy ascetic Fathers, translated by Elder Paisius himself. The Elder profited from these treasures of spiritual wisdom; also, on his own initiative he lent them to those thirsting for spiritual edification and salvation. At that point, according to his own words, he did not even presume to think of publishing them, being satisfied and grateful to God that He had deigned to allow him to acquire such treasures. Some he had acquired by his own labors in copying, and other he had received as gifts in reward for his filial love toward his Elder, Fr. Athanasius.

In 1845, the editor of a magazine of science and art called *The Muscovite*, Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky, whose wife, Natalia Petrovna, had been the Elder's spiritual daughter since 1838, proposed through her to Fr. Macarius that he publish a spiritual article in his magazine. The Elder thanked him for this offer, and asked if it would be possible and convenient for him to submit for publication a biography of Elder Paisius. If,

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over to a hieromonk of the same Monastery, Fr. Ephraim, in 1849, and he presented it to his spiritual son, the monk Abraham. The latter, going to Holy Mount Athos to live in 1858, gave the manuscript as a present to the late Elder, Hieroschemamonk Macarius. And he, during his terminal illness, blessed me, a great sinner, with an icon of St. Isaac the Syrian, and passed on to me [the author] the manuscript as well.



however, it would be inconvenient for some reason, the Elder would send it to another magazine, *The Lighthouse*.

Ivan Vasilievich, who shared Elder Macarius' opinion about the service rendered by Blessed Elder Paisius to all Orthodox monks, as well as to Slavic literature in general, gladly accepted this offer to adorn the pages of his magazine with this article.

This article was published in the twelfth volume of *The Muscovite* for 1845 and was adorned by a portrait of Elder Paisius.

The next year, 1846, while visiting the Kireyevsky family at their Dolbino estate, the Elder conversed cordially and sincerely with his hospitable hosts on various spiritual matters. It was then that he mentioned the lack of spiritual books that offer instruction in active Christian life. In conclusion, he mentioned that he had several manuscripts of the writings of the holy ascetic Fathers, full of spiritual wisdom and benefit, which had been translated by Elder Paisius. It turned out that Natalia Petrovna, who had formerly been a spiritual daughter of Elder Philaret of Novospassky Monastery, had also preserved several similar manuscripts inherited from that blessed Elder. (For information about Elder Philaret, see the introduction to *The Life and Writings of Elder Paisius*.) The same question occurred to both Ivan Vasilievich and his wife: "What prevents us from offering these spiritual treasures to the world?" The Elder, with his accustomed humility, replied that he did not consider himself qualified, as he had never done such a thing before, that he would not dare ask to publish them, that it was probably not yet the will of God, and so on. To this, Ivan Vasilievich and Natalia Petrovna replied that they would try to ask His Eminence the Metropolitan about it, and, if they were unsuccessful, they would be prepared to agree that it was not the will of God for this good work to come about. In order to make a beginning, they decided

together that, first of all, a short introduction should be written. Paper and other necessary things were brought, a prayer was said, and the hosts left the Elder alone in the room. An hour later, he called them in. The first page was written, and the Elder read it aloud. Natalia Petrovna and Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky, since they had personally known the late Elder Philaret of Novospassky well, added information about his life. Fr. Macarius took this page with him to show to Abbot Moses, who added the story about Archimandrite Alexander. Then they began to copy the manuscripts preserved by the Elder and Mrs. Kireyevsky, starting with Elder Paisius' own writings, in order to prepare them for publication. The Kireyevskys wrote to Moscow, asking a professor at the Moscow University, S. P. Sheviryev, to obtain for them the blessing of His Eminence the Metropolitan for the publication of the translations of Elder Paisius. The Metropolitan was so much in favor that he not only blessed it, but even promised his patronage for this good work. Fair copies were sent to the censor, T.A. Golubinsky, before the Kireyevskys arrived in Moscow in September of 1846. Sheviryev published eight publisher's signatures about the life and works of Elder Paisius, which came out in the beginning of 1847 under the title *The Life and Writings of the Moldavian Elder Paisius Velichkovsky*.\*

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\* The first English translation of this Optina version was published by the St. Herman Brotherhood in a translation by Fr. Seraphim Rose in 1976. Previously serialized in the *The Orthodox Word*, it was recently reprinted by the Monastery in California dedicated to Paisius Velichkovsky. On the cover of the new edition is a color portrait of St. Paisius preserved in St. Elias Skete on Mt. Athos—the skete founded by St. Paisius.

On Mt. Athos, just as later in the Moldavian Monasteries, St. Paisius conducted church services simultaneously in two languages: Slavonic and Moldavian, because the composition of brothers was of Moldavian and

Thus, a humble beginning was laid to this grace-filled activity, which continued until Elder Macarius' death—an activity which the Elder beheld through the eyes of faith, always calling it “the work of God” and honoring it as such in his soul. As a proof of this, we will cite one of his responses to the many expressions of gratitude and praise which he received from educated people for publishing the Patristic writings. In his letter of January 5, 1857, to a clerical scholar\* with whom he always maintained spiritual correspondence despite the distance dividing them, the Elder wrote: “You approve of our publishing Patristic books, especially in Russian translation. But in this there is nothing that should be credited to us—everything happens through God's will, for the benefit of the souls of those who desire and seek it! How could we begin such an important work, so unusual for us? But the Lord inspired well-intentioned people to cooperate with us; and, most of all, the benevolence and blessing of our kind Archpastor aided the publication of the manuscripts of

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Russian extraction. In Platina, California, at the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, where the Life of Paisius Velichkovsky was translated, the church services are also conducted in two languages: Slavonic and English, because of the composition of brothers—Russian and American. Fr. Seraphim, the translator of this Life of St. Paisius, lived in a tiny hut called Optina, where he was surrounded by many dictionaries and piles of books. The atmosphere there was similar to that of the cell of St. Paisius, to whom he composed a service that was used in the Saint's canonization on Mt. Athos in 1983.

The English edition of the Optina version of St. Paisius' Life, entitled *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky*, includes a short account of the lives and monastic labors of Elder Paisius' disciples and of certain elders of spiritual life who were his contemporaries and with whom he was in complete agreement. The St. Herman Brotherhood, through the Monastery of St. Paisius in California, has also published (in English) all the known spiritual counsels of St. Paisius, as Volume IV of the *Little Russian Philokalia* series [trans.].

\* A. P., later a Bishop.

Elder Paisius of Moldavia which lay hidden under a bushel. Also, the book by St. Abba Dorotheus was hidden at the end of St. Ephraim the Syrian's book, and was inaccessible to many because it was written in the ancient Slavonic language. But, thanks be to God, it has also now been placed on the candle-stand. God grant that those who read or hear it may obtain benefit for their souls!..."

We have already mentioned the patronage of the highly placed patron of spiritual education in Russia, Metropolitan Philaret. The "well-intentioned people," whom, according to the Elder's remark, the Lord Himself inspired to assist this beneficial enterprise, were, first of all, the late T. A. Golubinsky, censor and professor of the Moscow Theological Academy, who, out of his love for spiritual education and his personal inexhaustible goodness of heart, rendered unforgettable services to this holy enterprise, which the Elder always sincerely appreciated. He was temporarily assisted by the former dean of the Moscow Seminary, Archimandrite Sergius (later Bishop of Kursk), who, like T. A. Golubinsky, was formerly an inspector of the Moscow Theological Academy, and also gave great support to the successful publishing endeavors, along with his justly esteemed successor. The Kireyevskys, especially Natalia Petrovna, covered the financial side of the publishing. For the service they both rendered in this enterprise, only One is able to reward them—He Who promised to reward even a glass of water given to one's neighbor in His Name. Even more will He not forget the work, love, zeal and patience shown by this worthy couple in this universally beneficial enterprise.

One might ask—where did they find the money necessary to publish this number of books (all together fifteen separate editions)? We do not hesitate to answer in the Elder's words: "The Lord sent it for this good purpose through good peo-

ple.” For if it were not for Him, who else would have inspired those well-to-do people who, after benefiting by one book, wanted to help as much as they could to publish another? During the work of publishing and translating Elder Paisius’ writings, many people who sympathized with this work would ask: “When will the current book you are working on be finished?” As soon as Elder Macarius would reply that, thanks be to God, it was almost finished, enough people would volunteer their help—for that may the Lord be praised. It is sufficient to mention that the Elder himself, after checking the list of all the expenses at the end of the enterprise, would be surprised at how they had obtained this rather large sum of money. All he could do was express tearful gratitude to the bountiful God, exclaiming: “How wonderful are Thy works!...”

The Elder himself directed the preparation of Elder Paisius’ Slavonic translations, adding annotations, footnotes, and explanations of unintelligible words and expressions, as well as helping to translate some of them into Russian. He was assisted by the Skete’s brethren: Hieromonk Ambrose,\* Monk Juvenal,\*\* and Ryassaphore Monks Leonid\*\*\* and Palladius.\*\*\*\* The above-mentioned men assembled every day in the Elder’s cell (the reception room). The Elder, while not interrupting his normal work with the brethren and visitors, and also going to the guesthouse at the usual time, still took the most active part in this work. One can be sure that no expression or word entered the manuscript being prepared for

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\* The future great elder and saint [trans.].

\*\* Later a hieromonk, a member of the Jerusalem Mission and Archbishop of Vilnius, Lithuania.

\*\*\* Later a hieromonk of the Optina Skete and author of this book.

\*\*\*\* Later a hierodeacon of the Optina Skete.

the censor without his personal approval. His participation was truly astonishing. The Elder, who was by nature lively and energetic, seemed to forget about himself during this work, often sacrificing even the short time reserved for rest, which was obviously necessary for his weary and ailing body. Although no one participating in this work was lacking in zeal, it must be admitted that, if any felt exhausted by the hard labor, it certainly was not the Elder—he was tireless. But how generously we were rewarded for our small labor! Who among those who are attentive to themselves would not give away several years of their lives to hear what our ears heard! The Elder gave explanations of portions of the Patristic writings which we would never have dared to ask about had it not been for this work. Even if anyone would have ventured to ask him, he would surely have received the humble answer: “I don’t know. Maybe you have attained that measure, but all I know is—Lord, make me see my sins! Purify your heart, and you will understand!” Who of us could forget with what indulgence he, being himself generously endowed with spiritual discernment, listened to our childish lisping and made allowances when we tried to express our thoughts more gracefully and clearly (unless he felt we were changing the spiritual meaning). He would cover it with a convenient fatherly joke, such as: “Let it be so. I don’t know modern literature, but you, of course, are educated people!” If a disagreement about the meaning arose, the Elder settled it right away, either by explaining it, or by humbling himself and us by leaving that part of the text without any explanation, saying: “This is beyond us. He who does it will understand it. Otherwise we will be substituting our inferior understanding for his (Elder Paisius’) exalted spiritual understanding.” At the end of 1847, the second edition of 1) the *Life and Writings of Blessed Elder Paisius Velichkovsky* was published with a supplement to the

first edition, consisting of: a) a text about abstinence from food forbidden to monks, with an introduction and a section on the research by Elder Basil of Merlopolanyi Monastery, and b) the Life of the late Archimandrite Alexander of Arzamas, with his spiritual letter. The new edition also included a lithographic portrait of Elder Paisius Velichkovsky.

Together with the first edition, a separate brochure was published containing a letter of Elder Paisius to Maria Petrovna Protasieva, the late Superior of a coenobitic women's monastery in Arzamas, to which fifty copies of the book were sent as a donation.

At the end of 1848 was published: 2) *Four Catechetical Homilies for Nuns*, the composition and sermon of Hieromonk Nicephorus Theotokis (later Archbishop of Astrakhan), 1766, which Elder Paisius had translated from the Greek. In the beginning of 1849 the second edition of this book was published. In the same year were published separate articles by Elder Paisius which had appeared while he was yet alive: *The Scroll*, about mental prayer, and a commentary on "Lord, Have Mercy" (translated from the Greek).

In the same year,\* was published 3) *Our Holy Father Nilus of Sora—Written Tradition Given to his Disciples on Skete Life*, annotated with footnotes explaining the obscure passages. This edition was later adorned with a lithographic picture of St. Nilus. It was a copy of a picture sent to Optina by the Skete bearing his name, in gratitude for copies of the newly published book that had been sent to that Skete.

At the end of 1849 a collection of Patristic writings was published under the title : 4) *Selected Ears of Grain as Food for the Soul*, consisting of Elder Paisius Velichkovsky's translations

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\* Beginning on May 18 and finished on June 15.

of various Patristic works, with footnotes explaining the obscure passages.

In 1852 there was published a book, very beneficial for the soul, bearing the title 5) *Guidance Toward Spiritual Life: Answers to the Questions of Disciples by Sts. Barsanuphius and John*.\*. It was one of the Slavonic translations of spiritual texts corrected by Elder Paisius. This book, compared again with the Greek original, was published in the Slavonic language but in Russian orthography. It was annotated with footnotes explaining the obscure passages, was supplemented by a special alphabetical index, and was adorned with lithographs of Sts. Barsanuphius and John.

The end of 1858 saw the publication of 6) *Very Beneficial Homilies by Our Holy Father Symeon the New Theologian, Abbot of St. Mamas' Monastery* (containing twelve homilies).

In October of 1852, work was started on the composition of explanatory notes for Elder Paisius' Slavonic translation of St. Isaac the Syrian's book, comparing it with the Greek text. With God's help, this work was finished on November 29. It was copied together with the footnotes and sent to the censor.

Afterwards, at the persuasive request of many people who did not understand Slavonic, work was begun on the translation of the book by Sts. Barsanuphius and John into Russian. It was completed in April of the next year, 1853. Meanwhile, 7) the *Catechesis* of St. Theodore the Studite, which Elder Paisius had translated from modern Greek into Slavonic, was printed. Only six hundred copies were published, which were intended for the benefit of coenobitic monasteries.

At the end of the same year, 1853, was published: 8) *Interpretation of the Prayer "Our Father" by Our Holy Father*

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\* Partial translation into English by Fr. Seraphim Rose (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1990).



*Maximus the Confessor, together with his Homilies on Fasting, in Questions and Answers.*

In March of 1854 the most precious of all the Optina Monastery publications was released: 9) *Ascetical Homilies by Our Holy Father Isaac the Syrian, Bishop of Nineveh*, translated from the Greek by Elder Paisius Velichkovsky. This work was in the Slavonic language but printed in the modern Russian alphabet, and annotated as described above—with footnotes and an alphabetical index at the end, which was diligently composed by Elder Macarius himself. The first printed copy came to the Monastery from the publishers on the feast of Pascha, April 13. The Elder received it as a most precious gift for the day. Not only the God-loving Elder, but all lovers of the Patristic writings were overjoyed by the publication of this book.\* And praising the Lord, they at the same time blessed the high patron of this enterprise,\*\* who, along with the wise counsel he had given during the book's translation, had also expressed the wish to contribute materially to its publication.

It would not be superfluous to note that, in gratitude for publishing the book by St. Isaac the Syrian, the Abbot of Niamets Monastery in Moldavia sent to Elder Macarius a Greek-style camlet ryassa.

In 1855, two books were published in Russian translation: 10) *Guidance toward Spiritual Life: Answers to the Questions of*

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\* There was a time when the lover of monasticism and Christian philosophy would pay a hundred rubles or more in banknotes for a handwritten copy of this book. Even though Elder Paisius' translation had already been published at the Niamets Monastery by 1812, the book was hard to obtain because of an embargo on all Slavonic publications, regardless of content. This book reached Russia only occasionally, and therefore was not inexpensive, costing fifteen silver rubles or more.

\*\* Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow.

*Disciples by Sts. Barsanuphius and John*, and 11) *Chapters on Love, Abstinence, and the Spiritual Life by Our Holy Father Thalassius*. These were rendered into Russian from Elder Paisius' Slavonic translation. They were printed in both Slavonic and Russian, using the modern Russian alphabet. Through some private circumstances, the Elder preserved the original of this translation, together with the corrections, and bequeathed it to the Skete library as a precious treasure.

In 1856 there was published in Russian: 12) *Soul-profitting Instructions and Epistles by Our Holy Father Abba Dorotheus*, with the addition of his questions and answers given by Sts. Barsanuphius the Great and John. Two sources were used: the first edition of the Slavonic translation published by the Kiev Caves Lavra in 1617, and a literal translation from the Greek, done at the Elder's instruction by one of his spiritual children, Constantine Karlovich Sederholm, an expert in the Greek language.\*

In the same year, 13) the *Life of Our Holy Father Symeon the New Theologian* was published in Slavonic.

In 1858, 14) *On the Spiritual Law, by Our Holy Father Mark the Ascetic* was published in Russian (excerpts from *Selected Ears of Grain as Food for the Soul* and the *Philokalia*).

In 1859 was published 15) the *Instructions on the Establishment of Monastic Life by Our Holy Father Orsiesius, Abbot of Tabenna*. A literal translation from the Latin of this book was made by the same Constantine Karlovich Sederholm mentioned above.

In 1860, 16) the *Spiritual and Moral Instructions by Our Holy Father Abbot Isaiah*, solitary ascetic of Egypt, was published in Russian. Three sources were used: a Slavonic transla-

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\* Later tonsured at Optina Monastery with the name Clement, he is the author of the first two biographies in the Optina Elder Series [ed.].

tion attributed to Elder Paisius, a Russian translation from the Slavonic made several years earlier by a clergyman who loved the Patristic writings, and finally a Latin text from the Library of the Holy Fathers in Holland, used to explain certain obscure passages.

Thus between the years 1845 and 1860, inclusive, sixteen books were published under the Elder's supervision. Of that number, five were published in Russian, one in both Slavonic and Russian, and the rest in Slavonic. All were printed in the contemporary official alphabet, with explanatory footnotes. Among these editions, the first place undoubtedly belongs to the works of the great teacher of monasticism, St. Isaac the Syrian, followed by the book of Abba Dorotheus. This latter book, the Elder with good reason called the "monastic ABC's," especially recommending it to all novices who wish to lay a stable foundation for the active life, which consists, according to St. John of the Ladder, of obedience and humility.

The Elder also worked hard on the writings of that other great teacher of monastic life, St. John of the Ladder, who led an ascetic life on Mount Sinai, where in ancient times God's chosen people received the Commandments through Moses the God-seer, and where the spiritual commandments for monks and ordinary people were laid out by St. John the Seer of Mysteries. The Elder, who valued the works of St. John of the Ladder as much as those of any of the holy ascetic Fathers, studied and compared all the printed and handwritten translations of this immortal work which were known at that time. He took as a basis the translation of Elder Paisius, a man full of spiritual wisdom, who through experience had verified the spiritual admonitions of that holy Father (which cannot be comprehended by mere book learning), and who was himself a worthy follower of the teacher's monastic virtues. Therefore, Elder Macarius made a special effort to explain Elder Paisius'

translation by comparing it with later translations (for example, the translation by the former missionary to the Altai, Archimandrite Macarius), printed editions, and the Greek text, in order to make it more accessible, not only for reading, but especially for use as a manual in practicing its spiritual counsels. With this consideration, *The Ladder* was rendered in a semi-Slavonic dialect, which the Elder diligently studied with the help of his close disciple, Hieromonk Ambrose. When the translation was finished, the Elder himself composed an alphabetical index of the subjects contained in it. He copied it out with his own hand, forgetting the infirmity of his body and the restrictions on his time, sacrificing even the short time assigned for his rest.

Later, from this translation, an explanation of *The Ladder* in Russian was written by his other disciple, Fr. John Polovstev (later Hieromonk Juvenal). This was done with the Elder's blessing and under his personal supervision.

Handwritten transcripts of both these translations were distributed among the brethren of the Skete and the Monastery, and the reading of the half-Slavonic translation was recommended to all the brethren at church services during Great Lent. At the same time, during the common rule of prayer at the Skete the *Catechesis* of St. Theodore the Studite was always read.

Consoled by publishing, for the benefit of all, these treasures of spiritual wisdom which had been hidden for more than half a century, the Optina Elders always remembered that these books would never have appeared to the world if the Lord, Who clearly favored this enterprise, had not granted its successful accomplishment by His protection, help, and means, spiritual as well as financial. With these thoughts, Archimandrite Moses, the Abbot of the Monastery, and his brother Abbot Anthony met with Elder Macarius, and together they decided that there would be no better way of expressing their gratitude to their

scholarly helpers than by making the books generally known in institutions for the spiritual education of youths—the schools for future priests and teachers of the Church. For this purpose, one copy of each publication was at the proper time sent as a gift to the following places: the libraries of all academies and seminaries; almost all diocesan bishops, and the rectors and inspectors of the academies and seminaries; the Lavras and all Russian coenobitic monasteries, and also certain monasteries of Mount Athos—the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon, the Bulgarian Monastery of Zographou, the Skete of the Holy Prophet Elias, the Skete of St. Andrew the First-called, and the Bulgarian Skete of the Most Holy Theotokos (Xylurgou). Many bishops, rectors and inspectors wrote to express their gratitude for these gifts. In addition, in 1857, on the recommendation of the seminary authorities, Fr. Moses was awarded the “blessing of the Holy Synod.”



St. Philaret (Drozdov),  
Metropolitan of Moscow

## 5

# *Correspondence on Patristic Books*

### LETTER ONE

*A letter of His Eminence Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, in  
response to a letter from Elder Macarius.*

Very Reverend Macarius, Rejoice in Christ!

Pray for us, who are struggling with waves of people and so much work, that we may not sink completely, but may at least temporarily reach the shore of peace and freedom. Several months passed before I could find time to free myself from my obligations in order to do something I wished to do—to read the manuscript of St. Isaac the Syrian which you have prepared for publication. But now, even before I could finish it, I am compelled to get back to the many pressing duties waiting for me.

I read half of the book, paying continuous attention to the words of the teacher and your interpretation of them. For the rest I only looked at some of the texts, but since I could not

continue and was afraid to hold up your work any longer, I have decided to send the manuscript to the censors tomorrow.

Forgive me for touching some of your remarks with my daring hand before I could explain to you why I did so.

Some places in the text are unintelligible in the Greek text as well as in the Slavonic. By the way, it is probably the fault of the Greek who translated it from the Syriac language. Some of the remarks on these parts seemed to me more conjectural and not quite suited to the Greek text. In such cases it appeared to me better to leave the unintelligible text unclear than to risk giving the reader our idea rather than St. Isaac the Syrian's.

In some cases it seemed to me that the interpretation does not agree with the spirit of the teaching. An example is the following text from Homily 44 [In English, Homily 67]: "Simple stillness, if judged aright, is blameworthy."

Remarks: simple, without grace-filled effects.

Does that mean that stillness is always blameworthy or deserving of condemnation when it does not produce grace-filled effects? Do good ascetics feel the grace-filled effects right away? And would not those who receive them conceal them because of their imperfection or caution?

Therefore I have changed the interpretation to the following: "Without other ascetic deeds or virtues." This is the interpretation given in the Greek book also.

There was one interpretation I did not dare to change myself, and I have enclosed a note [see below] to you about it. If you agree to the change I suggest, please return to me the interpretation that I offered, so that I can hand it over to the censors for insertion in the manuscript.

About the less important changes that I allowed myself to make, it is not necessary to speak, and it is also difficult because of their multitude. Invoking God's blessing and peace upon you and your brethren, I ask for your prayers.



## CORRESPONDENCE ON PATRISTIC BOOKS

Convey my special regards to the Father Abbot, and also my apology for not writing to him personally, and for my long delay in correspondence, for which I ask you both to forgive me.

Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow  
March 9, 1853

NOTE: Homily 21 [In English, Homily 37] of St. Isaac the Syrian:

Text: Purity is the forgetting of the contranatural modes of knowledge which in the world are invented by human nature.

Remark: By "knowledge" one must understand the contranatural use of things which exist in nature, and so on.

Objection to the remark: Kinds of knowledge are one thing, and the use of things is another. Not all kinds of knowledge imply the contranatural use of things. There is a kind of knowledge of things through their attributes, and there is a kind of knowledge of things through their essence. The latter kind of knowledge pertains to the state of purity, while the former pertains to the state of passion. The thought of the remark is correct, but the expression is wrong.

Wouldn't you like to render the remark this way: St. Isaac is making a distinction between knowledge by essence and knowledge by attributes. The former is not opposed to purity, but the other should be forgotten for the sake of attaining purity. Knowledge of things through their attributes does not simply mean according to their nature, but involves implicating thoughts, which are the result of using the things not according to their nature, but according to one's passions. Thus, thinking of gold as a creation of God is to know it by its essence, while thinking of gold in connection with profit is to know it through its attributes.

## LETTER TWO

### *Elder Macarius' Reply*

Your Eminence, gracious Father and Archpastor!

The deep humility Your Eminence revealed in the personal letter of March 9 of this year, with which you have honored me, the unworthy one, touched me profoundly and made me see my unworthiness even more—and also made me fear that such indulgence might serve for my condemnation. Silently restraining my mind, and mentally throwing myself at your holy feet, I humbly thank you.

Despite Your Eminence's difficult and complex work in caring for the enormous flock of the vast Russian land, you deigned to sacrifice some of your time to read the manuscript of St. Isaac the Syrian which we, with your benevolence and blessing, have prepared for publication, along with interpretations and explanations of the unintelligible places in the Slavonic text. You have honored our poor work with the attention you paid in examining it. This well befits a person of your rank, as well as one who loves propagating the teachings of the Holy Fathers, which provide spiritual food for the members of our Orthodox Church. In presenting this manuscript to Your Eminence, we didn't dare consider our explanation precise and correct, but we consoled ourselves with the hope that Your Eminence would turn your gracious attention to them. We were happy that you made some changes, which we consider correct and holy. Knowing Your Eminence's enlightened mind and experience, with love and ineffable gratitude we mentally kiss the holy hand with which you corrected our mistakes. We dared to proffer interpretations of some of the unintelligible

places, because we did not wish to leave them unexplained; but if Your Eminence thinks it would be better to leave them than to conjecture, and as we believe that the Lord inspired you to say so, no doubt it would be more safe and beneficial to do so.

About the two places which you deigned to remark on and change, we shall make so bold as to inform Your Eminence of how we arrived at our understanding of them, although not considering our thoughts correct.

In Homily 44, in regard to the words, "Simple stillness, if judged aright, is blameworthy," we offered the explanation, "without feeling grace-filled effects." Your Eminence deigned to remark correctly that an ascetic cannot feel these effects until he has attained to them, or maybe he cannot feel them for some other reason. In our mind we were thinking of many effects of progress in stillness. We were applying the words "Simple stillness, if judged aright, is blameworthy" only to those people who have already reached that high level (i.e., those who can discern the effects), not to those who are on such a level that simple stillness would be completely blameworthy or deserving of criticism (i.e. those who do not possess other ascetic deeds or virtues). This state of mind, of course, increases or decreases with the degree of a person's spiritual maturity. We understood this, but were unable to articulate our idea fully. Your correction, "without other ascetic deeds and virtues," is more precise, and clearer to the understanding of most people, for progress in grace-filled effects depends on the accomplishment of ascetic deeds.

In Homily 21, our explanation of the text, "Purity is the forgetting of the knowledge that in the world is discovered through nature," does not express the true meaning with precision. Your Eminence's remark is very clear and correct, however, so we humbly ask you to substitute it for our incorrect remark, if you wish to do so.

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

All of my assistants and I throw ourselves at the feet of Your Eminence, asking your paternal and pastoral forgiveness and indulgence for our imperfection and our mistakes, which we made through our presumptuous thinking and lack of understanding.

Our Abbot [Moses] received your blessing with ineffable gratitude and self-reproach at your high humility, and considers himself fortunate to have been honored with your blessing.

Through the blessing and prayers of Your Eminence, the Lord has granted us His help in finishing the translation of the book of Sts. Barsanuphius and John into Russian. We hope to present it to Your Eminence soon, humbly asking your permission and blessing to present it to the censors for examination and approval to publish it.

With faith, love and grateful hearts, we accept the pastoral blessing which Your Eminence sent us in your letter, and we take the liberty of asking for your blessing and holy prayers for the future strengthening of our weak souls and bodies.

Again throwing ourselves at your feet and kissing your blessing hand, with my deep esteem and inexpressible filial devotion, I am happy to remain the most humble servant of Your Eminence, our gracious Archpastor and Father,

Hieromonk Macarius  
March 17, 1853

## LETTER THREE

*Letter of T. A. Golubinsky to Natalia Petrovna Kireyevsky*

The most esteemed zealot of pious works, Natalia Petrovna!

I am ashamed to write to you, and I am also ashamed to re-read what your hand has written, moved by eagerness for spiritual instruction....

Just as I was beginning to write, Fr. Ioasaph came in with a precious gift from the holy Optina Monastery—twenty copies of the book of St. Nilus. How am I to thank those God-loving Elders, especially the most esteemed Fr. Macarius, and also you? I am praying to God, the Giver of reason, to enlighten my feeble vision and give me the sense to understand the holy truths of the discourse of St. Mark, which I am studying now. I have to admit my weakness—I have unexpectedly come across many places that I still can't completely understand, and therefore the translation has not yet been finished. However, what I have today I will copy, and tomorrow I will ask Fr. Ioasaph to send it to you, since he anticipates having an opportunity to do so, and the rest of it should come with the next mail.

I thank you and Fr. Macarius from the bottom of my heart. His gift is very precious to me and to all my friends, to whom I wish salvation and to whom I have already promised to send this treasure.

I send my best regards to the most esteemed Ivan Vasilievich and to all your family, wishing them with all my heart the constant protection of God.

Sincerely, your devoted servant,  
T. A. Golubinsky  
August 7, 1849

## LETTER FOUR

### *Letter of Archpriest T. I. to Elder Macarius*

Very Reverend and deeply esteemed Fr. Macarius, faithful guide of God's servants laboring in silence for the Lord!

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your visit last year, which was dear to me, and for your humble and wise words. I also thank you for the precious gift of the book of St. Symeon the New Theologian, and for your letter of March 24th of this year, which was full of Christian love.

Forgive me for my delayed answer, which was caused by my desire to hear the opinion of our enlightened Archpastor about some translations of Blessed Elder Paisius, mentioned in your letter. In the past month, at the beginning of St. Thomas week, I presented the following texts to him in Moscow: the Life of St. Symeon the New Theologian, the Life of St. Gregory of Sinai, the writings of St. Gregory Palamas to the nun Xenia, the Decalogue of the New Testament, and some other epistles. I compared the writings of St. Gregory with their originals first, because I soon had to return the Greek manuscript to the library of the Patriarchate, from which I had borrowed it. His Eminence kept these translations to read, and this month (May) he sent them here, because the Life of St. Symeon and the writings of St. Gregory had been checked by the Censorship Committee. The first book should be presented to the Holy Synod for final approval, minus some expressions in which St. Symeon's instructor was referred to as a saint before actually having been numbered among the saints by the Church. The writings of St. Gregory of Thessalonica have been checked and approved for publication by the censors here. Along with the manuscripts,

## CORRESPONDENCE ON PATRISTIC BOOKS

His Eminence the Metropolitan sent us your Russian translation of the writings of St. Barsanuphius. He wrote that he is awaiting your response to his remarks on this book. As for the *Hymns*, and the Life of St. Gregory of Sinai, His Eminence the Metropolitan did not consider their publication to be appropriate at this time.

Remember me, a sinner, in your prayers to the Lord. With this wish, and with great esteem and gratitude, I remain the obedient servant of Your Reverence,

Archpriest T. I.  
May 19, 1853



Elders Macarius and Leonid.  
From contemporary frescos in the trapeza  
of Optina Monastery today.



## 6

### *The Last Days of the Elder's Life*

*August 23, 1860\**

THE ELDER was present at the death of one of his spiritually devoted, God-loving daughters, Maria, a woman from the nobility and mother of one of his disciples [the author of the present book].\*\* The Elder, with tears in his eyes, called this peaceful death “holy,” and added: “I count myself fortunate that God has allowed me to see a righteous death.”\*\*\*

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\* The following dated entries, written by Fr. Leonid Kavelin, were published as a brochure and distributed among the faithful immediately after Elder Macarius’ repose [trans.].

\*\* She passed away sitting in an armchair, fifteen minutes after receiving Communion, saying to the confessor: “I can’t express in words the joy and sweetness I now feel!”

\*\*\* The same old woman had been on the verge of death the year before (in 1859). She asked the Elder, in whose prayers she believed, to ask God to prolong her life, as she wished to see her son once again. (He was then absent from the Monastery.) The Elder answered her positively: “You will recover, and we will both die at the same time.” After her recovery she said to her

*August 25*

On this day, the day before the commemoration of the appearance of the wonderworking icon of the Vladimir Mother of God, the Elder, who especially revered this icon, celebrated an All Night Vigil in Her honor in his cell with a few of his devoted disciples, as he and his spiritual friend and co-worker, Hieroschemamonk Leonid, used to do every year. After receiving the Elder's blessing, his disciples went peacefully to their cells. They had no reason to expect the grief which the following day would bring them, for the Elder had retired in an apparently good state of mind and body.

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friends: "Beware of my death, for it is connected with the Elder's death; that is what he told me." One can be almost certain that the Elder was secretly informed of the time of his departure from this world. He often talked about it with his disciples, saying: "It is time, it is time to go home!" They paid no attention to his words, however, since the thought of death, a part of his spiritual labors, was never absent from his mind. Some people, however, paid attention to the following event, which will be easily understood by those familiar with the situation of Optina Skete. In the southeast corner of the Skete were three century-old pine trees; the Elder had insisted on saving them when the other trees had been cut down to make room for the Skete's garden. The brethren used to say among themselves: "These three pine trees (two of them were growing out of the same root) symbolize the unity of our Elders. The two from the same root remind one of the two blood brothers, Archimandrite Moses and Abbot Anthony, and the one standing apart—our Father Macarius." In the summer, the latter pine tree suddenly withered for no reason. The sight of it provoked some sadness, the source of which everyone guessed, but no one wished to express, lest they become prophets of grief. When the Elder became sick, however, they openly told each other the thoughts that had crossed their minds while looking at the tree which had suddenly withered. It had been saved by the Elder from being cut down by human hands, and later it withered at the will of its Creator, becoming the herald of the death of its benefactor.

## THE LAST DAYS OF THE ELDER'S LIFE

*August 26*

On Friday, preparing to attend Liturgy, the Elder suddenly felt an attack of a sickness called in medical terms "ischuria," and felt its consequences, of which he in fact had at times complained before. It so happened that a doctor from the city of Belev, Vasiliev, was then visiting the Monastery. He was called to the sick Elder and treated him immediately, but unfortunately he could not stay to observe the results of the drugs he had administered to the Elder. Toward evening, when the sick Elder started feeling worse, he blessed me when I offered to go to Count D. A. O.'s estate to ask the Count's private doctor for help. But, to our extreme regret, I did not find the doctor there; he had returned to his hometown several days before. On my way back, passing by Kozelsk, I went to see Doctor B. and got some advice which I immediately put into practice.

*August 27*

No special relief from the drug was noticed on Saturday. After the early Liturgy, the Elder, who had confessed his sins the previous evening, received Holy Communion and committed himself into the hands of God. However, his illness lasted ten more days.

*August 30*

On Tuesday, the Elder received Communion for the second time at 6:00 a.m., during the early Liturgy. After that, at his request he received Holy Unction, which was administered to him by Abbot Anthony and six hieromonks. Despite his weakness, which prevented him from standing or even sitting, so that he had to receive the Sacrament lying in bed, he bade the choir sing all the hymns in Lenten tone, and himself twice reminded them how to sing these melodies. After Holy Unction

began the parting, which was very touching in its significance. The Elder forgave everyone, at the same time humbly asking forgiveness for himself. Although he had been strong in spirit during the whole time of his sickness, after the Sacrament of Holy Unction he apparently gained even more strength of body and spirit. He was surprisingly peaceful, and with a clear mind and firm will he gave the necessary orders in preparation for his coming death, down to the smallest details. He blessed everyone who came to him. He consoled his grieving disciples, giving them little icons, prayer ropes, books, etc., as visible signs of his paternal benevolence.

The next day was for us a day of hope. Father was completely peaceful in spirit. He talked to visitors and gave them brief spiritual counsel, but he expressed himself in such a way that everyone, despite the Elder's calmness and the hope of those around him, involuntarily felt that his counsel was *the last*, and that the day and hour was close when this mouth preaching the word of God would be closed forever. Thinking upon this, everyone wept bitterly upon leaving the cell where he had always taught them. His closest disciples, having no illusions about the condition of the sick Elder, hastened to take advantage of his apparent strength by asking for answers to what could be called "life questions" by those who are heedful of themselves. For instance: who should they ask for spiritual guidance after his death, and how should they act in certain cases which might occur in their monastic life? The Elder freely answered all the questions, clearly and quietly, being inwardly aware that his days were already numbered before God. To his disciples' question: "What shall we do without you, Father?" the Elder indicated the Alphabetical Patericon, in which Abba Isaac of Scetis answers that identical question. It reads: "It has been told about Abba Isaac, that when he was close to death, the Elders gathered around him and asked: 'What shall we do

## THE LAST DAYS OF THE ELDER'S LIFE

without you, Father?’ He said: ‘You have seen the way I have acted in your presence. If you desire to imitate me, follow God’s commandments, and God will send you His grace and will preserve this place. If you do not fulfill His commandments, you will not stay in this place. We also grieved when our fathers were leaving us and departing to the Lord; but observing the Lord’s commandments and the teachings of the Elders, we lived as though they were still with us. Do likewise and you will be saved!’”\*

### *September 1*

On this day, the sick Elder was consoled by the visit of the God-loving Elders: the Monastery’s Abbot, Archimandrite Moses, and his brother in flesh and spirit, Abbot Anthony. He spoke with them for a fairly long time, especially with the former. They forgave and blessed each other, and the Archimandrite, grieving over the impending loss, expressed his feelings to many visitors in humble words: “It seems that the Lord is punishing me for my sins by taking an experienced Elder away from the Monastery and depriving me of my spiritual friend and wise counselor.” And Abbot Anthony, who later visited the Elder many times, only wept and prayed, as did many other people.

In the Monastery’s churches were multitudes of men and women of all classes of society who had hurriedly gathered from various places. They were people who had been receiving spiritual instructions from the Elder. They served continuous Molebens, shedding bitter tears and praying fervently to God for the Elder’s recovery. Between the church services they stood at the Monastery gates, hoping to hear good news about the Elder from the people going out, ready to believe any word of

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\* *Memorable Stories about the Ascetic Labors of the Holy Fathers*, p. 115.

hope. During that whole day, the brethren of the Skete and the Monastery were free to enter the Elder's cell to receive his blessing and last counsel.

*September 2*

Two of the Elder's nieces arrived, nuns of the Sevsk Convent who had been expected. In the afternoon one of his most devoted spiritual daughters came who had set out as soon as the news of his sickness had reached Moscow. She brought a precious gift from the Elder-Metropolitan, an enamel icon of the Vladimir Mother of God, and his no less precious promise to pray to the Almighty God for the health of Fr. Macarius. Another God-loving person sent the Elder a family treasure, a cross in which a piece of the true Cross of Christ was embedded. It was touching to see with what emotion and spiritual joy the Elder received these gifts. He delighted in showing his visitors the gift which he wore on his breast from his deeply esteemed and beloved Archpastor, and the above-mentioned cross.

*September 3 and 4*

After Liturgy in the Skete, the Elder was brought Holy Communion.

The next day the Elder felt weak, and received only a few visitors. The Secretary of State, Count D. A. O., came with his family and Countess P. to inquire about his health. Fr. Macarius ordered me to give him as a blessing an icon from his icon corner, which the pious Count received with reverence, as the last blessing of the ascetic who was leaving this world. After Vespers, at about 8:00 p.m., the sick Elder wished to receive Communion again. He received it sitting in an armchair. In spite of his suffering, the Elder, like a spiritual warrior of Christ, never abandoned his monastic weapon, prayer. Muffled excla-

## THE LAST DAYS OF THE ELDER'S LIFE

mations of "O Mother of God!" or "O my Savior!" accompanied every painful breath. The brethren who cared for him during the whole time of his illness read to him, at the proper time, the daily rule of prayer, and the Elder listened to their reading with great attention and emotion. He also asked them to read certain texts from the writings of the Holy Fathers,\* whose holy words were his daily spiritual food—or, in the words of St. Nilus of Sora, to which he had committed his life and breath. Incidentally, the Elder declared that he was tired of taking medicine and would not take any more.

### *September 5*

At the doctor's advice, the sick Elder was moved from his small bedroom into the adjacent reception room and placed, by his own wish, on the floor. In this way, besides giving his attendants more room and having fresher air to breathe, the Elder gave consolation to the brethren and visitors. Now they could at least look through the window and see for the last time their loving father and experienced teacher, the one who resolved their questions and comforted them in tribulations and sickness and who was now departing from this world. During the night between Monday and Tuesday, Schemamonk Hilarion, who was ninety years old, died in the Monastery. After Matins, according to the Monastery custom, the church bell rang three times, announcing to the brethren that one of their number had departed to eternity. This mournful and prolonged death knell, suddenly reverberating in the silence of the night, resounded painfully in the hearts of the Elder's many disciples

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\* The last texts read to him were the Homily addressed to Abba Leontius by St. John Cassian and chapters by St. John of Karpathos (from Volume I of the *Philokalia*).

and visitors who were crowding all the Monastery's guest-houses. Thinking it was announcing the death of their father and teacher, they became alarmed and ran in disorder to the gate of the Skete, which they found locked as usual. The confusion lasted only a few minutes, however, and was calmed by news from the Monastery that it was another Elder who had passed away.

*September 6*

Early on Tuesday morning, the Elder's chronic trouble, shortness of breath, reappeared. This, by itself, was a bad symptom. After the late Liturgy the Elder received Holy Communion. Later the same morning two more doctors arrived, called in on the initiative of Archimandrite Nicodemus, the Abbot of the Black Island Monastery in Maloyaroslavets. But it was too late. After they had been informed about the course of the illness, all they could do was admire the valiant patience of the warrior of Christ who, remembering the martyrs, strengthened himself with the sign of the Cross, took the most bitter medicine and suffered in silence, only gently moaning and praying....

Towards the evening, the sick Elder felt much worse, and therefore wished to receive Holy Communion a second time. He received it at 8:00 p.m., sitting in an armchair. After that his sufferings were slightly alleviated. Around midnight he summoned his confessor and talked to him for half an hour. After receiving from him remission of sins and absolution, he asked that the prayer for the dying be read, to which he listened sitting. At his request, the Canon and Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos were read, and during Matins, the Canon to Sweetest Lord Jesus Christ. It could be seen that during these readings the Elder's suffering not only decreased, but was completely alleviated. The sick Elder often gazed with tears and



## THE LAST DAYS OF THE ELDER'S LIFE

reverence at the icon of our Savior wearing the crown of thorns, exclaiming: "Glory to Thee, my King and my God!" or he would look at the icon of the Vladimir Mother of God, which he especially revered, saying, "O Mother of God! Help me!" Finally, stretching out his arms toward the Queen of Heaven and Earth, he prayed to be delivered from the bondage of his body. He suffered from shortness of breath throughout the night, and he often got up and lay down again with the help of the brethren who were nursing him. Sometimes he asked them to put him in the armchair. Yet his spirit was completely peaceful and quiet, like a child, and sometimes by a fatherly look, sometimes by squeezing their hands and weeping, he thanked the brethren surrounding him for their care.

### *September 7*

The morning on which the Lord deigned to take to Himself the soul of His faithful servant was Wednesday, the 7th of September, the day before the Nativity of His Holy Mother. It was a day on which the Elder, like all Orthodox ascetics, felt in his heart a deep and sincere faith. He expressed this faith throughout his life, calling on Her holy Name and celebrating all Her feast days with an All-night Vigil in his cell before her icon. Also, during all his fifty years of monastic life, he never missed a day in honoring Her with Canons and, on certain days, the Akathist. At 6:00 a.m. the Elder was permitted to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion for the last time. Because of his physical exhaustion he received it lying in bed, but was fully conscious and felt deep, tender emotion. After receiving Communion he raised his hands and exclaimed three times: "Glory to Thee, our God! Glory to Thee, our God! Glory to Thee, our God!" These were the last words that came from his God-praising mouth.

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

Almost exactly an hour afterwards, at 7:00 a.m., at the ninth ode of the Canon of the Departure of the Soul from the Body, the Elder peacefully and painlessly surrendered his righteous soul into the hands of God. He was surrounded by a crowd of his close disciples and other people devoted to him. I will not mention their names; they are well known to those people for whose consolation these lines are written. Their compassionate attention and sleepless nights spent at the bedside of the Elder, their inexhaustible tears and countless sighs are surely counted and measured for future reward by the God Who is Love, and Who has promised a reward even for a glass of cold water given to our neighbor for the sake of love.

The death of the Elder was peaceful and silent. Although it was simple, yet it was as majestic as his entire life, which was extinguished like the sunset of a bright day, leaving in the hearts of his devoted disciples the soundless night of sorrow.

After a regular Litia was served, the Elder's body was reverently washed and dressed by the hands of his close disciples. In fulfillment of his last wish, a schema blessed on the Lord's Sepulchre, which I had brought from the Holy Land as a gift in 1859, was put on him.\* When the news of the ascetic Elder's death was announced, his cell filled with people. At their insistent request Pannikhidas for his repose began immediately. They were sung continuously until his body was borne to the church, and once in the church they were sung from early morning to late night. The Skete church, which during the Elder's lifetime had been the subject of his special attention and care, and was therefore also much beloved by everyone connected with him, was decorated with the greatest care, as is done

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\* The Elder had been secretly tonsured into the great schema two years before his death. He first spoke of this when he received the news of the death of Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev (Theodosius in schema).

## THE LAST DAYS OF THE ELDER'S LIFE

on major feast days. There were multitudes of brightly burning candles lit by zealous visitors. Through the clouds of incense one could see his coffin, which a disciple had upholstered with velvet, and which his devoted spiritual children had covered with expensive brocade. Immediately after his body was moved to the church, a Pannikhida for his repose was served by Abbot Anthony together with six hieromonks. Then many Pannikhidas were served, one after another, until late night. People were crowding around the coffin to venerate the holy man lying inside. The sobbing over the coffin blended with the funeral songs, and tears of sincere love were shed on the cloths covering it. This was a feast of faith and the fulfillment of God's promise to *reward every man according to his own labor!* (I Cor. 3:8).

### *September 8*

On Thursday, the feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, the late Liturgy was served at the Monastery and the early Liturgy at the Skete, after which Pannikhidas were served continuously until the end of the day.

### *September 9*

On Friday, the feast day of Sts. Joachim and Anna, Vespers was served at the Monastery, and in the Skete Church, only the early Liturgy, which several priests concelebrated.

With Friday's mail arrived a great consolation for all those afflicted by the Elder's death: a letter from the Metropolitan of Moscow written in response to news about the Elder's sickness—which news had been sent to him by one of the Elder's disciples. This letter will for ever remain a great consolation for all the people who revered the Elder, as well as an unforgettable remembrance of the Elder-Metropolitan's benevolence toward Fr. Macarius.

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

The Peace of God be with you!

What should one who is weak in spirit say when watching an ascetic suffering in body without losing strength of spirit?—Be patient in the Lord, Father; persevere in your spirit and heart.

But Thou, O Lord, Who art merciful even to those who have not labored for Thee, who deserve to be threatened, grant relief to the one who has been laboring for Thee. Though he deserves to be delivered and be with Thee, is it not yet necessary that he remain in his body for the good of many people? Be merciful and let him live longer for their sake.

But Thou alone knowest what is best; therefore, grant that which is the most beneficial. May Thy will be done. Glory be to Thee forever! Amen.

September 7, 1860

With the same mail came a letter to one of the fathers of the Skete from the doctor who had treated the Elder. It is most remarkable in its content, as the one who wrote it was not a member of the Orthodox Church.

Only now can I say that I actually saw the man and talked with him. I don't know why I didn't see him before. It seems that being acquainted with him for eighteen years should have opened my eyes. It shows how difficult it is to see perfection; I had thought that man is not capable of attaining perfection, for it is not in human nature.... Imagine now my amazement at seeing how man should be. I do not feel well now for it was such a shock to suddenly see a living example of such a man. Now I suffer. Why didn't you open my eyes before? O Lord, preserve the life of Fr. Macarius! But my

## THE LAST DAYS OF THE ELDER'S LIFE

heart feels, and so does my mind, that a man like that does not belong to this world, and we are not worthy to have him.

Tuesday, September 6, 1860

At 2:00 p.m., the body of the Elder, reposed in God, was transferred from the Skete church to the Monastery. At the order of the Monastery's Abbot, a place was prepared for him on the right hand of his spiritual friend and teacher, Hieroschemamonk Leonid.\*

Before the coffin was carried out of the church, a Pannikhida was served by one of the Elder's disciples, Fr. Moses, the Abbot of St. Tikhon's Hermitage, together with all the hieromonks of the Skete. The whole church, as well as the area between it and the gate, was filled with people. They were attracted to the Monastery not only by idle curiosity, as is usually the case in cities, but they came—most of them from great distances—because of their love and zeal for the memory of their father, teacher and spiritual benefactor. Silently and mournfully, the crowd, which was distributed on both sides of the path, waited for the funeral procession with uncovered heads. Many wept silently, yet all felt their natural sadness and regret involuntarily mingled with a feeling of hope. All the people present knew that within that dead body had lived a pure, holy soul filled with love, and that the dead man was an "earthly angel and heavenly man," who possessed in abundance the spiritual gifts and fruits mentioned by the Apostle: *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and*

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\* Besides the similarity in the spirit of their teaching, it is also remarkable that they both finished the course of their lives at about 72 years of age, and after carrying the beneficial yoke of Christ in the monastic life for almost the same number of years (46 and 45). Elder Paisius Velichkovsky was also almost 72 years old when he ended his much-laboring life.

*temperance* (Gal. 5:22-23). As a faithful servant of his Master, he had not buried the talent given him, but had diligently worked until his death for the spiritual benefit of all who sought it.

On the way from the Skete to the Monastery, the procession stopped six times to sing Pannikhidas. At the southern gate, the venerable Elder Moses, Abbot of the Monastery, in vestments, met the procession together with all the hieromonks and brethren. Looking with emotion at the coming funeral procession, formed by a crowd of more than 1,500 people, Archimandrite Moses said to those around him: "This is something unusual! I have lived eighty years on this earth, and I have never seen such a serene funeral. It is more like the translation of relics than a burial."

After the last Pannikhida was sung, the coffin was put into the church dedicated to the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God. The walls of that church had recently been frescoed and gilded out of the people's zeal and devotion to the Elder, who had personally supervised the work. While the All-night Vigil was being served in the Catholicon (in honor of the Konevits Icon of the Mother of God), Pannikhidas were being sung one after another in the Kazan Church, where the coffin containing the Elder's body lay. Burning incense and a multitude of bright candles surrounded the coffin. In the words of a well-known religious poet, the hearts of those praying burned brighter than the candles. Their flames reached the heavens, and the air around the coffin trembled with the sound of continual prayers and sighs and was washed by a rain of tears shed from pure love and zeal.

September 10th arrived, the day of the Elder's burial. At 4:00 a.m. the early Liturgy was served in the Kazan Church by Abbot Anthony, with other priests concelebrating. At 8:30 the coffin was moved, also by the Abbot, to the Catholicon. De-

spite the fact that the weather had been warm as in summer, and the coffin was surrounded by people until it was put into the grave, no one present noticed any odor of death.

At 9:00, the late Liturgy was served in the Catholicon by Archimandrite Moses and six hieromonks. It was immediately followed by the funeral service, which was also served by Archimandrite Moses, together with fourteen hieromonks of the Skete and Monastery (among them the Abbot of the St. Tikhon of Kaluga Hermitage), two archpriests (of Kozelsk and of Belev) and four village priests. The parting with the beloved, reposed Elder lasted a long time; everyone wanted to pay their last respects to the one who in his life had been *all things to all men, that he might by all means save some* (I Cor. 9:22), thus leading them to the Chief Shepherd, Christ. On the way to the grave they took the coffin around the Kazan Church. Pannikhidas were served before the doors of the Catholicon, before the doors and altar of the Kazan Church, and finally at the grave, just before lowering the body into the earth. Finally they lowered the coffin into a grave prepared opposite the altar of the St. Nicholas Chapel in the Catholicon, on the right hand of the crypt containing the body of Hieroschemamonk Leonid (Leo), the Elder's spiritual friend and co-ascetic. When the choir began to sing, "Seeing my coffin, remember my love!" everyone shed tears, and many sobbed, remembering the Elder's love which had been so abundantly poured out on everyone who had ever asked him for advice, the solution of a problem, or consolation in affliction. Many of the people present were losing in him the spiritual support of their lives, for according to the words of the Apostle, *though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers* (I Cor. 4:15). Besides, are all fathers so full of love as he, our unforgettable father and teacher? In memory of the Elder, a large sum of money was donated by people who honored him and who wished to remain any-

mous. This money was used to prepare a meal for the brethren of the Monastery and the Skete, as well as for all the people present at the funeral, who numbered more than a thousand. The beggars\* were not forgotten, since the Elder had never failed to point out their needs to those wishing to fulfill the beatitude of mercy or expiate their sins. The funeral meal in memory of the Elder was a true *agape meal*, for it brought together people of all classes: monks and laymen, nobles and commoners, rich and poor. All came to the Monastery without any summons or invitation, from cities and villages, united only by love for the servant of Christ who had departed to a better world. Was it not thus that people had seen him for more than twenty years—now at the guesthouse, now at the Skete gate, surrounded by men and women from all classes and ages, all eager to hear the word of salvation coming from his pious lips? His word was not just a beautiful word, but an active word that was simple and humble, yet powerful. It was, according to the Gospel, a *word with power* (Lk. 4:32), which is granted to the true followers of Christ for the common benefit of all, and as a reward for their labors and ascetic deeds. It is granted, most of all, for their Christian humility which prevents people from ascribing to themselves the gifts of God, but rather makes them render to God what belongs to Him alone.

As soon as the new grave was covered with earth, the funeral singing rose around it, ending in *Memory Eternal!* Let us repeat in our hearts: *Memory Eternal!* to you, our loving father, experienced teacher, wise leader and benefactor of our souls! We do not possess sufficient tears to mourn your loss.

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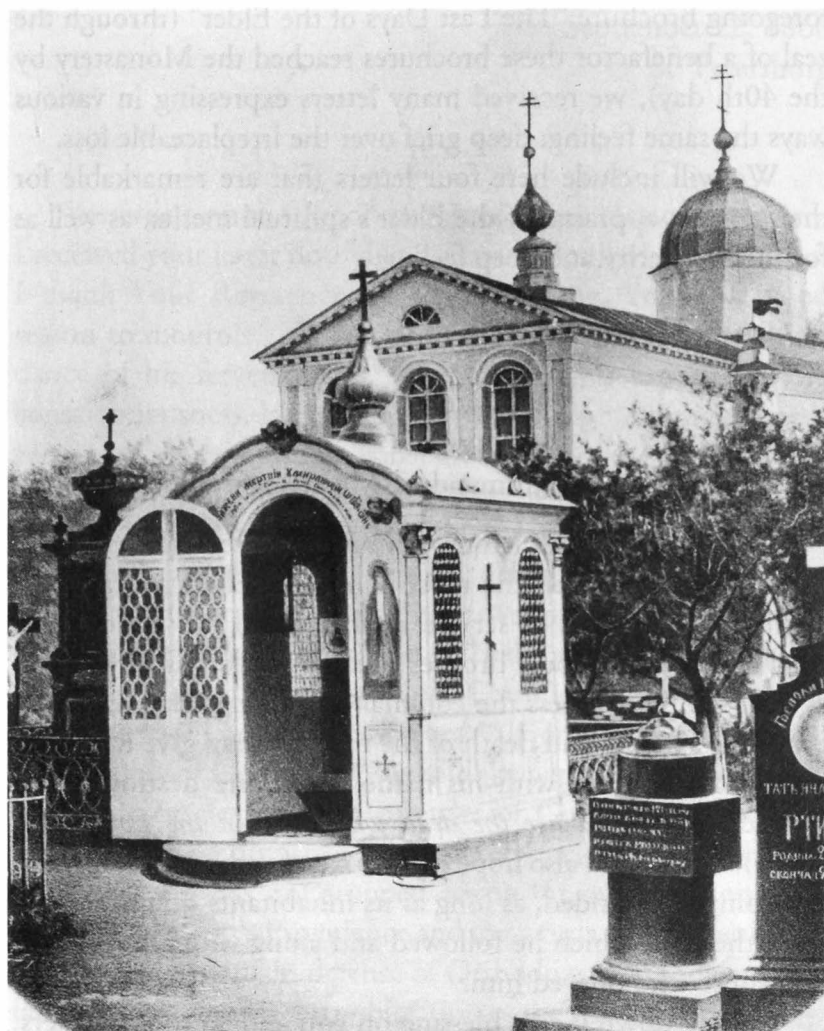
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\* There were 700 beggars in addition to the number of visitors.





Memorial shrine over Elder Macarius' grave.  
Photographed August 29, 1862.

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

The news of the blessed repose of the Elder spread like a flash of lightning, reaching the most distant corners of Russia. Soon after his death, as well as after the publication of the foregoing brochure "The Last Days of the Elder" (through the zeal of a benefactor these brochures reached the Monastery by the 40th day), we received many letters expressing in various ways the same feeling: deep grief over the irreplaceable loss.

We will include here four letters that are remarkable for their correct appraisal of the Elder's spiritual merits, as well as for their sincerity and deep feeling.

### I.

Right Reverend Archimandrite Moses, beloved in Christ!

God has tried your Monastery and its devoted followers by taking away from you the most honorable Elder Macarius. It seems that his term of service in this world has ended. The recalling of your good brother and co-worker is a very sad event—yet, let us bless the command of God which has given him rest. The life and death of the reposed man give us a good hope that, together with his name, his future destiny is also blessed, for *blessed are the dead which die in the Lord* (Rev. 14:13). We should also hope that his care for the Monastery has not completely ended, as long as its inhabitants do not deviate from the path which he followed and along which he tried to lead those who obeyed him.

Calling down God's blessing on you and your co-workers, the inhabitants of the Skete and Monastery, I wish for you, with all my heart, that the power of God may preserve you in complete well-being, and may grant a salutary end to your labors for salvation.

## THE LAST DAYS OF THE ELDER'S LIFE

With sincere esteem and brotherly devotion, I remain the devoted servant of Your Reverence,

+Gregory, Bishop of Kaluga  
September 22, 1860  
St. Petersburg

### II.

Yesterday, on the day of the repose of our blessed Elder Leo, I received your letter notifying me of the death of Fr. Macarius. I thank Your Reverence for informing me. You have good reason to mourn!... Fr. Macarius could speak from the abundance of his fervent heart, relying upon his experience and conscientiousness. He was a man truly born unto righteousness. He was an unhypocritical, constant servant of the Abbot and of the whole brotherhood, and also of all who asked for his help, compassion and assistance. His illness was, of course, the result of his indefatigable labors for his neighbors; his ardent soul seemed to rush out of his body, answering every call from his grieving spiritual children. The ear of his soul vigilantly caught every word concerning the Holy Church and his homeland, which he loved dearly. He rejoiced in everything which served for the glory of God, and with childlike happiness he hurried to announce to everyone the miracles of God's mercy. He was ready to pass on his warm faith to everyone, saying that God is alive, that He has not stopped acting for our salvation. Any doubt about God's Providence and the words of Holy Scripture called him to battle in defense of Orthodoxy. His indefatigable labors and cares over the publication of the writings of the Holy Fathers amazed me, and in some ways even perplexed me. Father was, as it were, drawing a map of the sky and teaching us how to navigate safely on the sea of life. But the Elder seemed to forget that our boats were fragile and overloaded with our

sins. My laziness was whispering to me that, maybe, he also relied on his liveliness and on the future generation, because he believed that God is powerful and able to move a mountain into the sea and to create out of stones children unto Abraham. He believed in it all the more in that he was as light as a bird, having exhausted his body by continuous fasting and prayer. It was as though his life did not require earthly food anymore, confirming the words spoken by Christ during His temptation: *Man shall not live by bread alone* (Matt. 4:4).

But why should I tell you all of this? You were yourself a witness of his wonderful deeds, many of which I have already forgotten. But I still clearly remember how he used to fly, not walk, when he was called somewhere, distributing heavenly gifts, consolation, and instructions to his visitors. Since he was good in his heart and never judged anyone, he did not want to know that he might have had enemies or hypocritical friends. This is enough. I don't want to embitter the cup of blessings which is now being offered for him ... I thank you again, honorable Fr. Leonid, for your reply. If it were not for you, I still would not know about Fr. Macarius' death, for although I later received two notifications, they both were only by hearsay.

Hieromonk Anthony (Bochkov)

T.

October 12, 1860

### III.

With all my heart I thank you for sending me the brochure, "The Last Days of Elder Macarius, Reposed in God." I read it with deep, heartfelt emotion, not once but several times. Immediately after I received the news about the Elder's death, and after reading the brochure, I offered up warm, tearful prayers to him, asking him to kindly intercede for me before the throne of



Optina's main Cathedral of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, as it looked during Elder Macarius' time.  
He was buried behind the altar.

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

the Most High God, with Whom he now lives, together with multitudes of angels and saints! From this booklet one can see (though we already knew of it from other sources) that even while still alive, the blessed Elder manifested one of the highest gifts of God's grace—clairvoyance. Involuntarily this makes me remember and apply to him the words of the prayer to St. Sergius: "If thou wert so great a Saint of God in this world, how great art thou now in Heaven!" So, let this thought be a consolation for us all who esteemed and revered the Elder—that we, thanks to his mercy and benevolence to our human weaknesses, have now acquired in him a new warm intercessor and protector before the Lord, Whom he so diligently and carefully served by caring for his spiritual children and devoted followers until the end of his much-laboring life.

P. K.

St. Petersburg

November 3, 1860

### IV.

Your letter of October 10-12 affected me deeply. Thank you for your immediate notification to me, the unworthy one. However, I still cannot recover from my grief over the unexpected and sudden death of our holy Father. He wrote a letter to me on August 23, and on September 7 he died! ... I can't imagine the Skete without Father! What a deep, inconsolable grief you all must feel now! Who can replace that irreplaceable one, who was full of such universal love and had such a "burning heart" for all creation!

O Lord, grant his soul rest in the Kingdom of Thy glory! He indeed earned heavenly glory by disdaining the earthly.

Hieromonk Juvenal

Jerusalem

October 30, 1860

# APPENDICES



Archimandrite Leonid Kavelin.  
Original portrait of the St. Sergius–Holy Trinity Lavra,  
painted during his abbacy, 1887-1891.



# I

## *Fr. Leonid Kavelin: Author of This Biography*

ONE OF THE MOST prolific Church writers of the 19th century in Russia, possessing great literary merit and having authored over 270 titles, was Elder Macarius' beloved disciple Leonid Kavelin. It was he who, after the Elder's death, immediately gathered biographical information from the Optina brothers and published a monograph, which was revised in several subsequent editions before the collapse of Holy Russia in 1917.

Leo Alexandrovich Kavelin was born on the 22nd of February, 1822, to a high society family. One of his mother's relatives, Zhukovsky, was the famous contemporary poet and defender of Pushkin. At thirteen years of age, having received a home education of the highest quality, he entered military service, displaying great talent in many areas. He was recognized as possessing great literary potential while still in the military corps; his poetry received highest the praise.

Even before his honorable discharge from the military, he participated in the editorial activity of a major magazine. It was herein that he first encountered the realm of spiritual literature, and, since his estate was not far from Optina Monastery, he soon met some of the young writers and translators in the group of Elders Leonid and Macarius. With Kireyevsky's publication of

the biography of Paisius Velichkovsky, the future archimandrite and bearer of Elder Leonid's spiritual name was engulfed into the Optina literary group, among whom was Peter Grigoreff, who was active in the conversion of Nicholai Gogol. The literary giant Ignatius Brianchaninov, who saw in the young officer Kavelin a future monk, also influenced his entry into Optina. Kavelin, however, intended to get married, but then a strange incident occurred to him one day. He fell into a lethargic sleep, and while lying in a near-death state, he heard near his grave the father of his fiancée nudging her to show at least some sorrow that her fiancée was dead. Having awakened, he left the girl and abandoned the world. It is possible that Elder Macarius in his letter of 1846 wrote to him concerning this incident:

"Having read your letter I clearly see the Fatherly Providence of God over you, which saved you as a bird from the nets of a hunter. The most merciful Lord did not allow you to be ensnared by the charms of Delilah, which would have blinded both your physical and spiritual eyes. Simply to say, you would have been entangled, bound hand and foot, prohibiting you from fulfilling the will of God and walking on the path of His commandments. The world, the flesh and the devil were ready to entangle you in these nets. Offer glory and thanksgiving to the most merciful Lord who preserved you. And strive, not by words alone but by deeds, to fulfill His Holy Will with humility."

From this time on, the correspondence of Kavelin with Elder Macarius became regular and more intimate. Leo informed the Elder about his desire to go to a monastery and asked him to be his spiritual instructor. In answer Fr. Macarius wrote to him in 1847:

"You are expecting a word from me and then you will drop everything, and that will be your first step in the realm of obedience. Yet methinks the time has not yet come for that."

Giving time for his decision to ripen, he gave him an opportunity to make his own decision yet forewarned him at the same time about the enemy's warfare, which is unavoidable in the beginning of any good work. A question, therefore, arose regarding which monastery it would be best to enter. Kavelin felt that the farther away the least known monastery, the better, so that no one would know of his whereabouts. As time went on, however, he realized that in the realm of the salvation of the soul, it is not important in which monastery one labors, but what monastery one seeks to erect in one's heart. One incident confirmed his conviction. Later on he remembered the following:

"I was still an officer when I visited Valaam. During Liturgy a young, handsome monk came out to give a sermon. He spoke in a lively manner, smoothly and eloquently, so that I thought to myself: 'What outstanding monks we still have!' After the service I stepped out to the shore to admire the beautiful islands. I saw that on a high cliff this very preacher was sitting in a pensive state. I came close to him and said, 'Greetings, Father, I see you're admiring the beauty of nature.' He answered me:

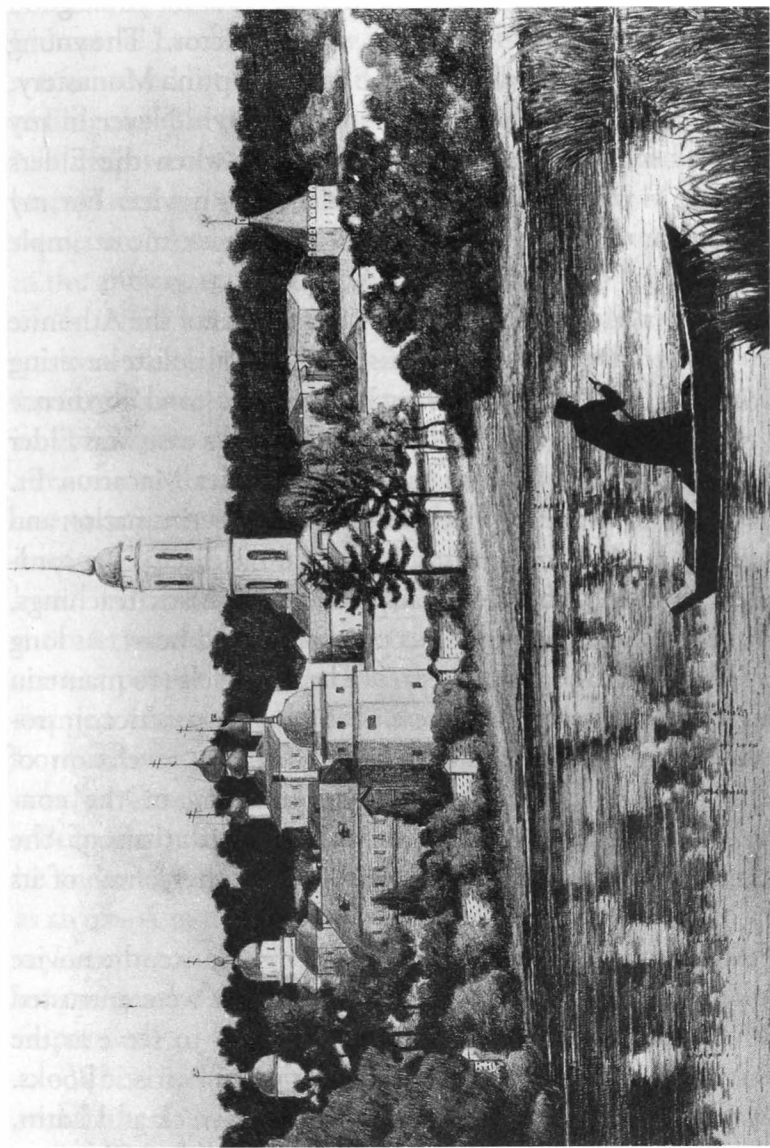
Here I sit at a loss:  
At right is the moss,  
Before me the sea,  
Behind—misery,  
On my left—a sigh!  
Oh, God, I want to die.

"'Oh, Lord, protect you!' I said, and sat next to him and talked with him. It turned out that this learned monk was a graduate from an academy and the Inspector in a seminary, sent here as a penance for some weakness. So he reached a state of despondency in his misery, blaming the administration that had sent him to Valaam. I returned to the monastery and saw a different picture: an elder-hieromonk was bitterly weeping and

two brothers with friendly compassion were trying to console him. I asked them what had happened and they answered: ‘This father was elevated to be an abbot of such-and-such a monastery. Yet, he has lived here thirty years. How can he avoid weeping when, for the sake of obedience, he has to abandon his own native monastery?’” This incident was related by Fr. Leonid Kavelin to his disciple Nikon, the future Bishop of Vologda, as an example of how external monastic surroundings do not guarantee any success in the spiritual struggle. One can reach the depths of despair from an inability to leave a place while another can sorrow in a God-pleasing manner at being unable to stay in that same place. Elder Macarius, in a similar vein, wrote to Kavelin: “One cannot hide anywhere from temptations except in the depths of humility.” Reaching this understanding in his heart, Kavelin decided to follow this advice both in choosing a monastery and discerning the will of God.

By 1840, the translation and publication activity of Patristic books in Optina Monastery had become well established. In 1851, the famous writer and traveller Andrew N. Muraviev visited Optina Monastery and encouraged the monks to gather information and publish about contemporary ascetics. Elder Macarius asked the young Kavelin, then still a layman, to take upon himself the task of visiting various monasteries and collecting information on local ascetics. Fulfilling this obedience of Elder Macarius, the young Kavelin went to the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra to meet the writer Muraviev. This made Leo decide to enter Optina, at which the Elder wrote: “See to it that the world does not bind you to itself . . . may the Lord strengthen you and make you firm in your good intention—may He help you to bring it about.”

“I see,” wrote the Elder in January 1852, “how much it cost you to rid yourself of the world. With great combat you had to overcome not only your inward battle, but also the persuasions



The waters of the Zhizdra in springtime, reflecting Optina Monastery.  
An aquarelle depicting a novice crossing the river.

and arguments of the lovers of this world based on various secular successes of well-being, glory, honor, comfort, family happiness, wealth, etc. Yet God helped you in your good intention in this first battle, and you were the victor." The young Kavelin settled immediately in the Skete of Optina Monastery. As a novice he experienced great spiritual joy: "Never in my whole life had I been as happy as that day when the Elders blessed me to put on the simple cassock of a novice. For my obediences outdoors, in the open air, they gave me a simple sheepskin coat."

In Optina Monastery the spiritual tradition of the Athonite Sketes was strictly observed, consisting of an absolute severing of the novice's will and the giving of oneself in total obedience to a spiritual director-Elder, who, in Fr. Leonid's case, was Elder Macarius. Ten years later, in his book on Elder Macarius, Fr. Leonid Kavelin wrote: "Gifted with spiritual discrimination and a strong memory, Fr. Macarius instructed his disciples according to the words of the Holy Scripture and Patristic teachings, which had been imprinted in his pure mind and heart. As long as his strength allowed him, he strove before all else to maintain among the Monastery and Skete brethren the practice, introduced by his predecessor Fr. Leonid, of the revelation of thoughts—from which proceeds the guarding of the conscience—justly considering this the foundation of the Monastery's inward order and consequently the source of its vigor."

Fully entrusting himself to the Elder's guidance, the novice Leo diligently carried out all of the labors that were entrusted to him in the Skete. His main obedience was to serve as the secretary to Elder Macarius in the translation of Patristic books. Leo was well equipped for this, for he knew Greek and Latin, together with many modern European languages—German, French, English, Serbian, Bulgarian, and Polish.

At that time future luminaries labored in Optina as young novices along with Leo: the future Elder Ambrose, Fr. Platon (Pakhrovsky) and Juvenal (Polovtsev), the future Archbishop of Lithuania. Leo lived in the Skete as a novice for three years and was tonsured into the mantle with the name of Leonid in honor of Elder Leonid (Leo in schema). Later he would tell his disciple Nikon: "I went through that monastic upbringing which cannot be replaced by any book-knowledge, in the spirit of true monasticism." And he remained for the rest of his life a true monk in the ancient monastic tradition.

In 1857 he was ordained a priest and sent to the Russian spiritual mission in Jerusalem. Two years later, on his return route to Russia, he visited Mt. Athos. He met there elder-ascetics who were close to the Optina Elders, and paid special attention to the spiritual order of the Athonite monastic life. In one monastery he encountered a brother who endured great insults from his brothers. Calling him aside, Fr. Leonid asked him: "Tell me, for God's sake, how do you endure all this?" And the man answered: "Is it worth it to pay attention to them? They are not people but dogs." With a feeling of horror Fr. Leonid stepped aside from that monk and said to himself: "May the Lord deliver us all from such truly demonic endurance." In another Greek monastery he met another endurer in patience, a Bulgarian, and asked him, for his own spiritual benefit, how he endured it, and received the following answer: "I endure it as an ox—I'm not worthy because of my sins to be called a man, so I endure everything like an ox: what they place upon me I bear patiently." "Truly you have acquired salvation," Fr. Leonid responded.

When he arrived in Optina, Elder Macarius received him with fatherly love and said to him: "God returned you to bury us." And indeed, the prophetic words came true when, on the 7th of September, 1860, he went to the Lord, and Fr. Leonid,

staying by his side until his death, gathered all the necessary information and, as a tribute to his Elder, wrote his biography. Two years later, Fr. Leonid was made an archimandrite and again sent to Jerusalem, only this time as the head of the Russian Mission. In this capacity he endured a great deal of sorrows. Two years later he was made the head chaplain in the Constantinopolitan Consulate, where he learned Turkish and Arabic. There he gathered a great many manuscripts of spiritual content, which he published on his return to Russia. A few years later, he was elevated to the Abbacy of New Jerusalem Monastery near Moscow, which was originally founded by Patriarch Nikon, in whose honor Fr. Leonid erected a museum. In this Monastery one of his disciples, Nikon, showed great devotion to Fr. Leonid and followed in his steps.

In 1877 Fr. Leonid was elevated to one of the highest monastic positions in Russia, that of Abbot of St. Sergius Lavra. It was a great joy for the Optina monks to have one of their kind become the head of one of the leading monastic houses in Russia. Here Fr. Leonid was able to spread the monastic-desert ideal throughout the whole of Russia by way of the famous *Trinity Leaflets*, which he founded. His disciple Nikon continued these *Leaflets*, enlightening millions of people with these weekly publications. It was Fr. Leonid's idea, suggested to him by the Optina Elders, to popularize these *Trinity Leaflets*. This occurred to such an extent that almost every household throughout the whole gigantic Russian land knew and treasured their truly spiritual content. These *Leaflets* touched the living soul of the people of Holy Russia with that element of "humility of wisdom" which Elder Macarius epitomized so wonderfully.

Archimandrite Leonid died on October 21, 1891, and was buried in his Lavra behind the Holy Spirit Church. His grave is preserved to this day. Soon after he died, remembrances of him were written by another Optina fledgling, writer and publicist



of the monastic ideal. We present these remembrances below in full. Their author, Eugene Poselyanin, had been converted by Elder Ambrose of Optina, whose biography he also wrote.

"Once in my early teens, on the day of St. Nicholas I was taken to the St. Sergius-Trinity Lavra and there, during the All-night Vigil, I saw for the first time the Abbot and Archimandrite Leonid, with whom many years later I was to become acquainted. In that great mystically solemn atmosphere of the Lavra's services, Fr. Leonid evoked some special *grand impression*. With white, in parts yellowing hair, with an expressive face full of lofty spirituality, penetration and awe, as a true monk he, in those days, personified some special authority and awe. It was especially so when he—in a shining golden mitre that complemented his silver hair and stern, almost iconographic face—after reading the Gospel, retreated to the narthex of the cathedral next to a large ancient icon of St. Nicholas the holy miracle-worker, who looked down from the dark icon with penetrating eyes as if he were alive. When Fr. Leonid stood next to this icon, anointing hundreds of people who gathered together for veneration, and when he pronounced with a certain solemnity the short words: 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,' it seemed to me there was something in him deeply akin to that sacred antiquity which the icon represented. There was some deep connection between him and the light-bearing and pure world of which the icon spoke. Even then I had heard stories of the severity of his life and with what strictness he kept his monks. Later, after this first impression, in the course of the following ten years, I saw him serving when I would come from time to time on Feast Days to the Trinity Lavra. He aged before my eyes. His legs gave him pain when he had to stand in the middle of the church for a long time, such as during the Litia. Then they would bring him a certain analogion-type stand, upon which he would lean.

"A man of a famous, noble family—that of the Kavelins which occupied a position of distinction in the royal court—a military officer, and later a monk-ascetic, Fr. Leonid naturally evoked the interest of lay people, and various stories circulated about him which, although false, were indicative of the extent to which people were interested in him.

"The influences that brought this high-ranking officer to monasticism were his upbringing and the impressions of his childhood. The revered mother of Fr. Leonid was a woman of deep piety. The Kavelin estate was located not far from Optina Monastery, which the family frequented in order to hear the counsels of the Optina Elders. Under the influence of this righteous mother, the first grace-filled seed fell into the soul of the child. Fr. Leonid always remembered his mother not only with love, but with deep contrition of heart, inner trembling and tears. Her remarkable death was described by her son, Fr. Leonid, in his book about his spiritual instructor, the famous Optina Elder Macarius.

"In 1859, while living in the Monastery guesthouse near the Optina Monastery walls within which her son was a monk, Mrs. Kavelina was on the edge of her grave. Believing in the prayers of the Elder [Macarius], she asked him to pray to God that He might extend her days so that she could see her son, who was absent at that time. The Elder told her firmly: "You will get well, but we will die together." Having gotten well she would say to her close ones: "Fear my death. The life of the Elder is connected with it. This is what he told me." And, indeed, she died on the 23rd of August, 1860, and the Elder died in two weeks.

"Fr. Leonid completed a rather complex course of ecclesiastical service. His last positions were Superior of the Resurrection Monastery (called New Jerusalem) and Abbot of the Holy Trinity—St. Sergius Lavra. Everywhere he tirelessly continued his studies of Russian archeology and history, especially Church

history, which gave him a reputation as a “venerable scholar.” The final fruit of his extensive and conscientious research on ancient Russia was the book *Holy Russia*, a rich publication sponsored by Count S. D. Sheremetev. It contains a list of all Russian saints, with successive columns designating their dates of birth, death, burial, canonization, the location of their relics and when and by whom services were composed for them. As Superior, Fr. Leonid performed all his duties with integrity and led a lofty spiritual life. He was strict and demanding, especially with novices, which is a system that must be conceded to be the most beneficial. When novices are treated strictly—not heartlessly or formally, but with fatherly strictness—it helps them maintain zeal and vigilance over themselves, and places them on the right path. First of all, however, he was strict with himself. His life was that of an ascetic. He ate little, and his food was simple. He made no concessions to the world, and did not look for them in anyone else.

“Although he was somewhat severe towards anything he considered ‘worldly,’ he was very pleasant when talking privately with people with whom he had common interests. When I was a student I would sometimes take a train early in the morning to go to the late Liturgy at the Holy Trinity Lavra. I would stay there until four o’clock in the afternoon. After the Liturgy, Fr. Leonid used to take walks on the gravel path leading from the Holy Trinity Cathedral to the Smolensk Church. I would approach him and start a conversation that would continue in his reception room—in which there hung portraits of the Tsar’s family and foreign royalty who had visited the Holy Trinity Lavra—and we would share a modest meal. His conversation would become animated. How many times did I see tears glistening in his eyes when he spoke of his elder, Fr. Macarius of Optina, about the Emperor Alexander II, or about the Russian people. He would recall events from his former military

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

life. He had a sense of humor and his speech scintillated with variety and exuberance.

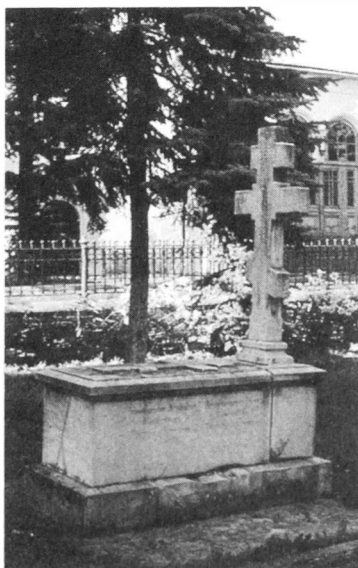
“When visiting the Lavra now, I sometimes stop at the humble marble monument over his grave which is behind the altar of the church dedicated to the Holy Spirit. I remember his crystal pure, solid image; I seem to feel again the beating of his deeply-loving heart which often was misunderstood.... I then recall the words of the Apostle: ... *the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and humble spirit* ... (I Peter 3:4), and I think of how happy he is now, in that place where all are evaluated not by external, deceptive standards, but by the way one has lived one’s life. There he will be justified for his righteous and pious life. I imagine his happiness there, in a single contemplation of God, together with his righteous mother and his great Elder Macarius. There, nothing can disturb him who, while still in the flesh, forsook almost everything earthly.”\*

Fr. Leonid, the author of the biography of his Elder, was a man of his time. He possessed discipline, restraint, good intentions and fairness of spirit. He was a good spiritual son to his Elder, a good, kind father to his monks, a conscientious head of a major mission in Jerusalem and a wise shepherd of the leading monastic flock of the great Lavra. He was a veritable epitome or apogee of the great advance of the Paisian monastic army, himself a spiritual leader—a general. He had the heart of a dove, and his success lay in faithfulness to the initial command resounding like an echo among the choir of the Paisian disciples. These disciples showed the path to heaven through earthly and military spiritual discipline, and it was the precision of this

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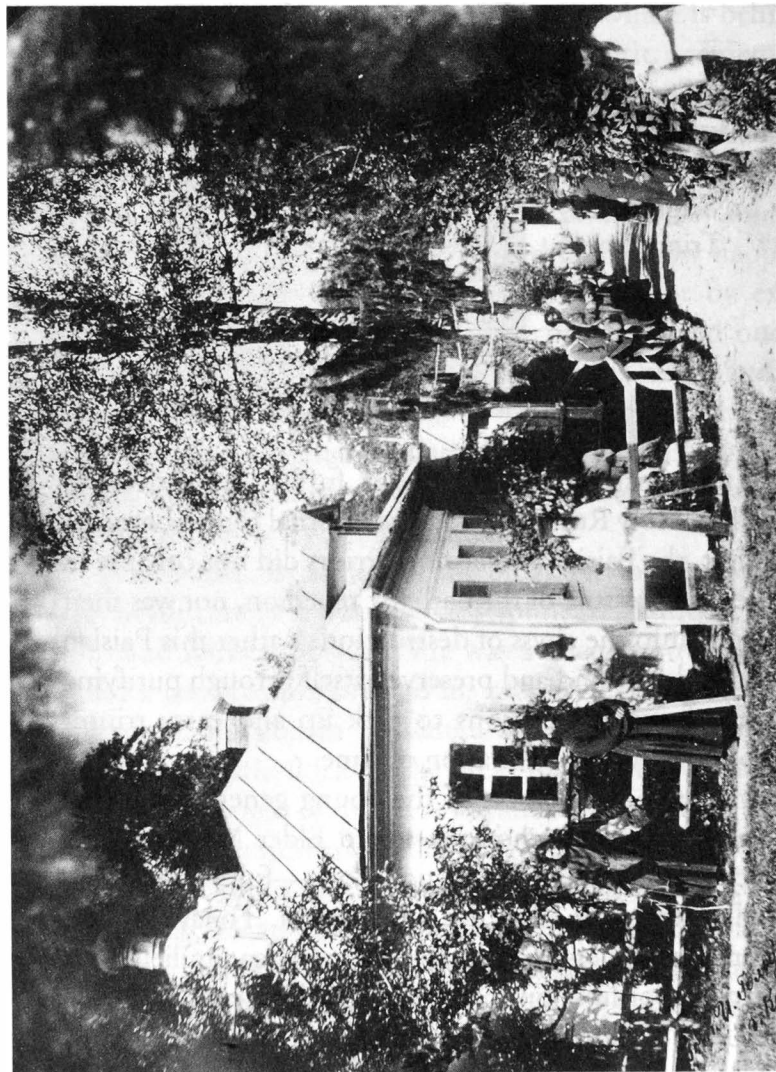
\* E. Poselyanin: “Archimandrite Leonid Kavelin: Remembrance of a Layman,” in the weekly newspaper *Prilozhenie* (supplement) to *Church News*, 1891 no. 38, St. Petersburg.

A recent photograph  
of the grave of Fr.  
Leonid Kavelin at  
St. Sergius–Holy  
Trinity Lavra.



discipline that ensured the success of future generations of monks. When Holy Russia fell and the external form of monasticism with it, the Paisian monastic warriors did not collapse in spirit under the pressure of the barbaric rebellion, nor was their spirit dragged into the abyss of destruction. Rather this Paisian spirit went underground and preserved itself through purifying suffering for future generations to pick up and carry triumphantly to the very consummation of time.

Today there are members of the young generation of the English-speaking world who look up to Elder Macarius as a spiritual icon, and, indeed, he is such a one—full of truth and power, enlightening us from the other world. Today's youth, educated in ungodliness and brought up in a pagan milieu, will, by accepting subordination to such spiritual generals as Archimandrite Leonid, indeed charge behind him to join that glorious army of the saints on high.



Inside Optina Skete—monks, novices and pilgrims wait for confession on a summer afternoon. A rare mid-19th-century photograph showing disciples of Elder Macarius. At right is a monk-gardener.

## 2

### *The Disciples of Elder Macarius*

IN ORDER to better understand Elder Macarius' influence on those who aspired to monasticism, it would not be superfluous to enumerate some people who experienced the grace-emitting influence of this humble Elder, whom one might call the personification of "humility of wisdom." This will also offer a deeper glimpse into Elder Macarius' personality as it manifested itself on the private level. Elder Macarius taught spirituality only through self-discipline. Those who were sensitive enough to catch the deeper significance of his behavior were truly fortunate; for at the same time that Optina Monastery flourished together with hundreds of other outstanding monasteries and convents, literal bastions of spirituality, an ominous revolutionary spirit was growing in the midst of the Russian society of the 19th century—a spirit that threatened to destroy Holy Russia, and which indeed almost did. By 1933, only sixteen years after the Bolshevik take-over, not one remained of the more than a thousand monastic establishments which for centuries were the nation's primary source of inspiration, piety and morality.

The following brief sketches of a few close zealous disciples, accompanied by their portraits, were drawn from Optina

sources of pre-revolutionary origin. Today, with the discovery and opening of various archival resources, new material will inevitably surface—as is evident from the new religious periodicals that have sprung up in Russia in the last six years. We hasten to present these brief accounts in the hope that they will serve as a reminder and inspiration to bring forth new material.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, himself a disciple of the Optina Elders, was in contact with Optina throughout his literary career. He collaborated in preparing material which Optina Monastery, under the leadership of Elder Macarius, began to publish. He also authored a Life of one of the disciples of Paisius Velichkovsky, Elder Theodore (of Svir), the spiritual Abba of Elder Leonid and of Ignatius himself. Of all those who notably participated in the publication and promotion of Patristic literature, St. Ignatius best understood and voiced the value of Elder Macarius' labors, both literary and educational. St. Macarius, he knew, was raising a whole pleiad of carriers and disseminators of the Patristic "wisdom of humility."

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov put it this way: "Both Elders [Leonid and Macarius] were saturated with Patristic literature on monastic life. They both were guided by these writings and with them guided others who turned to them for instructive advice. Their memory was richly adorned with thoughts divine. They never gave advice from themselves. Always, they would introduce in their advice quotes either from Holy Scripture or the Holy Fathers. This gave their advice definite power. Those who would have wanted to object to the words of men would hear the word of God, and they found that it was right to submit their wills to them."

Today, when our Orthodox presence in the whole modern world is so feeble and boring (to borrow the favorite words used by the late Fr. Seraphim Rose's to describe our spiritual climate), it would be good and healthy to let the invigorating,

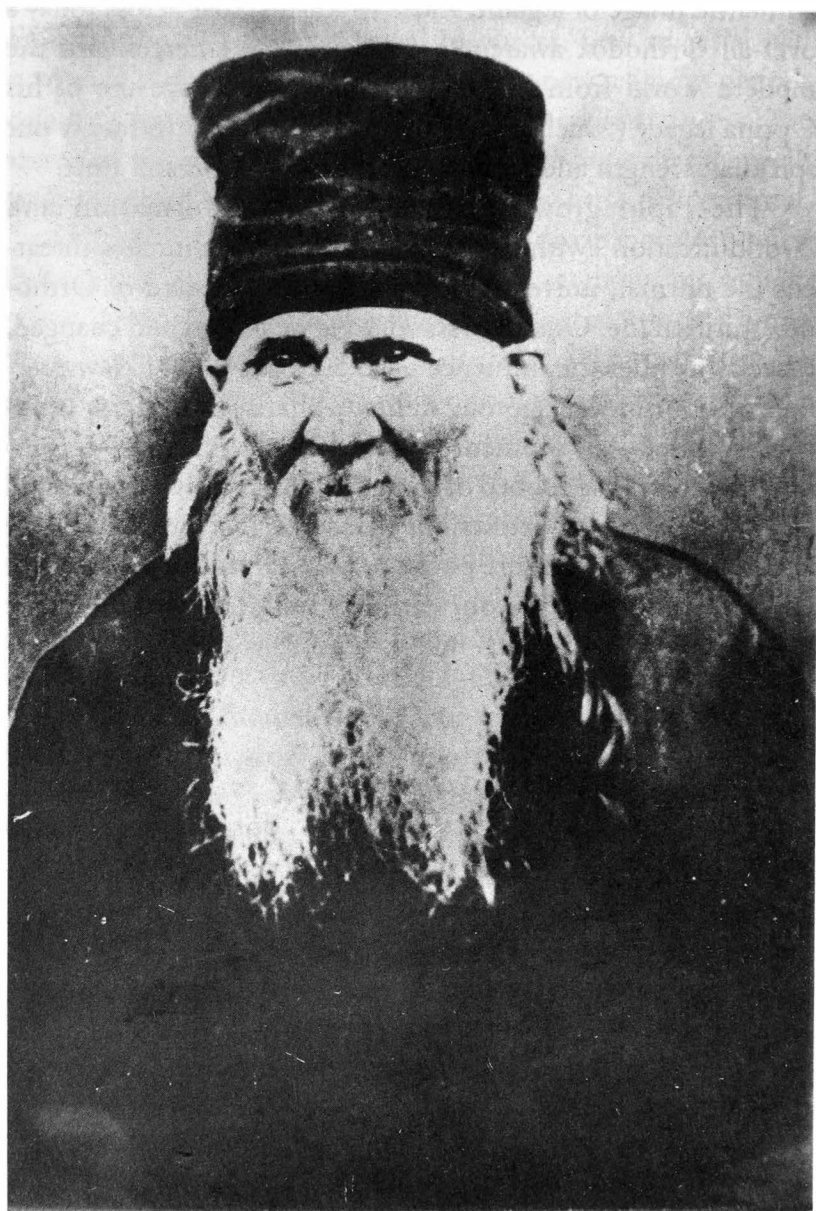


## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

authentic image of a giant, Elder Macarius, soar across today's over-all Orthodox awareness. As his image emerges into the modern world from Holy Russia, we must make use of his Optina legacy (which is still alive today) in order to fortify our spiritual strength and knowledge—while there is still time.

The rapid growth of the spirit of reformation and “worldlification” within the major Orthodox churches threatens the normal, universally acknowledged standard of Orthodox spiritual life. Once this standard is weakened and changed, especially under the influence of today's prevalent “New Age” mentality or of the rigorous militant phariseism of the ultra-conservatives—the moment might be lost. And the new generation surely will be robbed of something extremely valuable and noble, in danger of extinction, like some rare breed of white swans gliding across azure pools, or bald eagles soaring freely in the blue yonder, above our earthly vanity, as symbols of the lofty aspirations for which man is born to yearn.

Abbot Herman  
Pascha, 1995  
Monks' Lagoon,  
Spruce Island, Alaska



Elder-Saint Ambrose of Optina  
† October 10, 1891

## 1. ST. AMBROSE, ELDER OF OPTINA

Elder Ambrose is the most famous disciple of Elder Macarius, and his sanctity has been universally recognized. He was by far the most famous of all the Optina Elders. He achieved his holiness through his self-sacrificing wisdom and miraculous power, which he inherited from Elder Macarius and multiplied. There exist several major biographies that emphasize various aspects of his extraordinarily holy personality: (1) A brief but precise account, published in 1904, written by a lay spiritual disciple whom Elder Ambrose had converted, and who became a tireless ecclesiastical writer on a popular level, Eugene Poselyanin, the co-editor of the *Rusky Palomnik* weekly. (2) The longest and most comprehensive biography, published in 1900, written by his own closest spiritual son, Fr. Agapitus. The latter was groomed to be an elder himself, but out of humility he declined the office, and in nine years he followed his Elder to the other world. (3) Another biography introducing new material, based on surviving letters to and from the Elder, by priest Sergei Cherverikov, who was also the compiler of his letters (1912). Fr. Sergei, working with the nuns of Shamordino, unearthed many letters of several Optina Elders, and published them in serial form. After the Revolution, he emigrated to France where he wrote a book on the Optina Elders, two volumes on St. Paisius Velichkovsky and, in collaboration with Abbot Chariton of Valaam, a two-volume compendium on the Jesus Prayer. He died as a monk in the Czechoslovakian Monastery of St. Job of Pochaev. (4) A recent biography published by Valaam Monastery written by the grandson of the Optina defender St. Paul Florensky, Fr. An-

dronicus, Abbot of Valaam (1993, ninety years after the original Optina publication).

Elder Ambrose was born in 1812, and he arrived at Optina in 1839, when Fr. Leonid was the Elder. It is said that the latter summoned Elder Macarius to himself and said, looking at the future Ambrose: "This man clings to us Elders. I am an old man, I am going away, and I am handing him over to you. Govern him as best you know. He will be of help to you." Elder Macarius took maximum care of him, instilling in him the wisdom of humility, and keeping him in the Skete until his death. After the death of Elder Leonid, it was quite apparent that Ambrose would succeed Macarius, because his sharp mind, loving heart, and refined discipline opened to him the secret of the power of obedience. He was clothed a ryassophore monk only a year and a half after entering Optina Monastery. The following year he was tonsured a monk, and in one more year ordained a priest. When Ambrose became Elder, he increased his predecessor's activity, spiritually guiding various convents, and eventually founding his own convent, Shamordino, wherein he died in 1891.

Elder Ambrose was a man of practical mind, who, due to the mystical input he received from both Elders Leonid and Macarius, was also not a stranger to mystical realities. This was abundantly apparent when, though staying in his cell in Optina, he could see troubled people miles away and appear to them in dreams to give instructions, or heal them spiritually or physically. Cases of his clairvoyance and miracles occur even today, in spite of the fact that the Communists levelled his grave and built a garage over it in order to discourage his popular veneration. Only after freedom came to Russia in 1988 was he unearthed and canonized, and now he is widely venerated as a Saint. He rests in the main church in Optina Monastery, which is functioning once again, populated by one hundred monks.

## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

Almost at the beginning of his monastic life, Elder Ambrose fell ill with some strange sickness that enfeebled him for the rest of his life. Either before or after his illness—we do not know—he had a near-death experience, in which the reality of eternal rest was revealed to him. The remembrance of this glimpse into eternity, we believe, was a God-sent source of strength for his subsequent self-sacrificing, self-crucifying care for people, which duly earned him “rest with the Saints.” Elder Macarius asked his disciple to write this vision down. Such was the custom of the monks of Optina Monastery—to keep spiritual diaries—and hence it was recorded for posterity.

The relatives of Elder Macarius, the Glebovs, often visited Optina Monastery and kept close to this Elder and his world. Once when they visited Optina Monastery they were granted to acquaint themselves with the account written by Macarius’ disciple, Ambrose, which years later, after Ambrose’s death, S. Glebov published in the magazine *Russky Palomnik* (*Russian Pilgrim*). Subsequently it did not appear in any biographies of Elder Ambrose. Yet it indeed provides a very revealing witness into Ambrose’s inner world and his awareness of spiritual phenomena, and is very characteristic of that *monastic silence* so real in Optina. This short glimpse of the other world is quoted here in full, since, according to Mrs. Helen Kontzevitch, it is unquestionably authentic and not foreign to Orthodox mysticism:

### THE ACCOUNT OF S. GLEBOV

In the late 1860’s, I was travelling to various Holy Places throughout Russia with my elderly mother, who in her old age desired for the last time in her life to venerate the holy relics of saints of God at the places of their eternal rest. We stopped for a few days in Optina Monastery in the Kaluga region with the

definite intention of visiting there the local ascetic Fr. Ambrose, well known for his holy life. He lived not far from the monastery in his own little desert-skete, where he received weary pilgrims who would come to him, some for advice, others for the consolation of their sorrowing hearts.

The beautiful location of Optina Monastery, surrounded on all sides by evergreen forests, luxurious monastic orchards, delightful spacious ponds filled with leisurely swimming fish of various kinds—all this never leaves the memory of a pilgrim who has been there even once.

Fr. Ambrose received us kindly and invited us to his log-cabin cell, which was surrounded by an orchard and in which he usually received all his visitors, who were always thirsty for his soul-profitting talks and spiritual instruction. Our talk with Fr. Ambrose was a very long one and highly beneficial for our souls.

Anyone who saw him at least once found it impossible to forget his meek face with smooth parchment-like white skin, a face which reminded one of something sacramental in all of his actions. Having found out about the purpose of our pilgrimage throughout Russia, the good Elder invited us to stay in Optina for ten days or so. Blessing our stay in the Monastery, the holy Elder said: "In our Monastery life is like in paradise, and you will never be able to fill yourself to satiety—so much grace is here. The services in our temples here are so solemnly beautiful that they draw one involuntarily to God by their holy teaching and compunctionate church singing."

Taking advantage of Fr. Ambrose's blessing, we stayed in Optina for seven days. During that time we visited the Elder several times and heard his wise Gospel teaching on life. Having found out that I take part in various periodicals of the "secular type," Fr. Ambrose handed me his short manuscript and offered it to me to look at it. This was the content of this manuscript:

[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 throw myself into nature's embrace, and that paradise of spring, which I chose as a place of my daily visits, 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. Around me there was only the slumbering forest. Its ancient giants stretched far into the skies. They searched for God. I also was in search of Him.

But suddenly, I am outside of the forest, somewhere far away, in another world, quite unknown to me, never seen by me, never imagined by me.... Around me there is bright white light! Its transcendence is so pure and enticing that I am submerged, along with my perception, into limitless depths and cannot satisfy myself with 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 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 see only its endless shining and bright light. The whole space in which I glide without hindrance, without end, without fatigue, is filled with white, just as is its light and beautiful beings, transparent as a ray of sun. 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 any longer enticed by anything earthly, not a single beat of my heart is any longer moving with human cares or earthly passion. I am all peace and rapture. But I still am 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. But all these beings do not resemble me, nor are they 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 are 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 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 superseded everything. I sank into this eternal rest. No longer was my spirit disturbed by anything. And I knew nothing else earthly. None of the tribulations of my



heart came to mind, even for a minute. It seemed that everything I had experienced before on earth never existed. Such was my feeling in this new radiant world of mine. And I was at peace and 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 least, 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, 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 experienced with all its hosts of numberless visionary entities, vividly remained impressed before my mental eyes. But my physical vision did not see it any longer. This terrible and tearful sorrow I could not endure and I began to cry bitterly.

Only after that experience did I believe 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. And in order to penetrate into this mystery I left this world into which I was born, and embraced the monastic life.

"Oh, Father, then that must have been your dream?" I asked Fr. Ambrose, pointing to his manuscript.

"I do not know whether it was a dream or whether it occurred in reality," answered the righteous Elder with concentration. "I still have not solved that mystery for myself, but I believe that my spirit lives separately from my body; otherwise it could not have seen that which my physical vision does not know. After all, one cannot perceive the light of day with the tips of the fingers on one's hand. So also, I think my soul cannot visualize that which is not in God's world. And if the soul sees this world, which my eyes do not see, then it must be that it factually does exist as something real. And I believe in this absolutely...."

With these words, the thoughtful glance of the Elder prayerfully rose to the icon of Christ, and he reverently crossed himself.

With such universal mysteries was the soul of this highly-revered Optina Monastery Elder, Ambrose, filled. With such an outlook on God's world he directed all believing pilgrims who used to come to Optina to him to get a holy blessing for their lives. And precisely in this transcendent spirit he greeted all people who were suffering in heart and soul, who sought in his holy guidance healing of their infirmities. And how many living examples there were of the miraculous spiritual transformations of many people, who were truly partaking of the good counsel of Elder Ambrose....

*I knew a man in Christ ... (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) such a one caught up to the third heaven (II Cor. 12:2).\**

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\* S. Glebov. From *Rusky Palomnik*, 1904, no. 17, pp. 286-288.

## 2. ST. HILARION, ELDER OF OPTINA: “SOTAINNIK” OF ELDER MACARIUS

Elder Hilarion, the Skete Superior and devoted disciple of Elder Macarius, came to Optina already a formed man at age thirty-four. In his formative years he had been inspired, influenced and trained by a lay elder, Symeon Klimych (†April 5, 1837), who was a holy man in his own right. Originally Elder Symeon had not even been Orthodox, but he was a man of deep faith in God’s Providence. When the fullness of Orthodoxy was revealed to him, he became the founder of a whole chain of Orthodox brotherhoods which evangelized Orthodox people who had fallen away from Orthodoxy—people who, living in a society where Orthodoxy was the state religion, had ceased to practice Christianity on a personal level and took Orthodoxy for granted. Thanks to his missionary training under Elder Symeon, Fr. Hilarion was, by the time he became a disciple of Elder Macarius, already ripe to be a spiritual leader within the walls of Optina.

As a zealous missionary thirsting for Orthodoxy in practice, Hilarion had first visited Sarov Monastery. There he met Elder Hilarion, the former disciple of Abbot Nazarius of Valaam, who, recognizing at once his spiritual caliber and zeal, directed him to Optina. When Hilarion arrived in Optina, Elder Macarius took immediate notice of him. The Elder gave him a cell next to that of another Valaamite, the former Abbot of Valaam, Barlaam, who was to be Hilarion’s initial Optina instructor, and later his first teacher of the Jesus Prayer. Barlaam himself was a great doer of the Jesus Prayer. Elder Macarius made Hilarion his cell-attendant and secretary, placed him in charge of the spiritual direction of convents, and eventually made him the next Superior of the Skete.

Elder Macarius did not treat novices with the same leniency, warmth and openness as did Elder Leonid. Elder Macarius demanded total seriousness, fear of God, and absolute obedience. He was very active, not idle for a minute. He always seemed to be seriously preoccupied, and wordlessly insisted that his disciples follow suit. He would never be the first to remark on a person's negative aspects, but would wait until that person revealed his own self-negligence, and then the Elder would rebuke him. He could not tolerate sluggishness.

Elder Hilarion lived for twenty years near Elder Macarius doing various obediences which were very dear to him, such as gardening and horticulture. The closeness of Elder Hilarion to Elder Macarius could be called *sotainichistvo* (the sharing of a mystical monastic bond). When Macarius died, a great number of nuns who were his spiritual daughters came under Hilarion's spiritual care. When Macarius was on his deathbed, he blessed Hilarion with the mantle and paraman which he had inherited and which had once belonged to St. Paisius Velichkovsky.

When the time came for Hilarion to die, the already-reposed Elder Macarius, began to appear to him many times in dreams, and these appearances became more frequent according to the measure of his suffering and closeness to death. A month before he died, Elder Macarius appeared to him and said: "I came to visit you on my way, for I am in haste. I have no time now, I have a lot to do. I'll visit you again, but meanwhile, forgive me." Thus, his death was postponed. One brother saw Elder Macarius the same day hastening to the Skete, surrounded by many people, both monastic and lay. The brother asked the Elder for a blessing, and the latter said to him, blessing: "Hurry up, take the blessing, I must hasten to the Skete. I'll stay there." At that time in the Skete, Hilarion was dying in a sitting position, semi-paralyzed, in front of a large portrait of Elder Macarius which had been presented to him by



Elder-Saint Hilarion of Optina  
† September 18, 1873

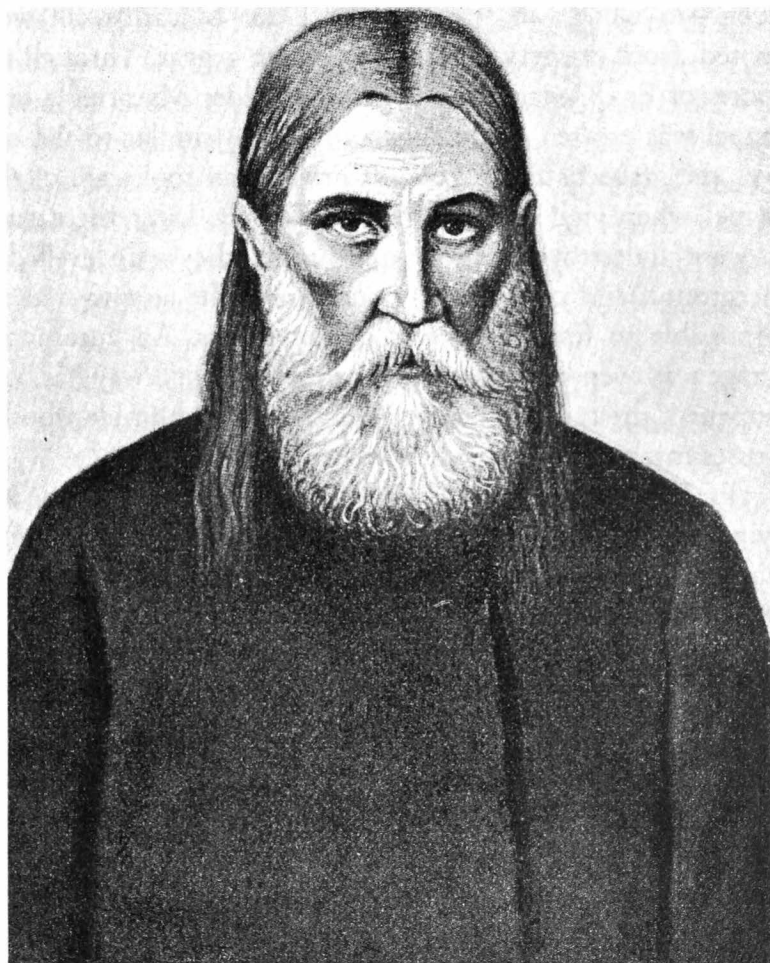
## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

one of his spiritual daughters. He would often ask to be given that portrait to kiss. He would say that he had to endure his suffering, stating that Elder Macarius almost took him, but apparently he was not ready yet. There was another mysterious vision of Macarius to him, whose message remains a secret. After that, all pains ceased, and the Elder sat quietly in total peace, pulling the knots of his prayer rope, a visible sign of his unceasing prayer. He died in this position, tightly holding his prayer rope, on the 18th of September in 1873. He was buried right next to the grave of Elder Macarius.

### 3. HIEROSCHEMAMONK FLAVIAN

Hieroschemamonk Flavian, the future highly respected cellarer of Optina Monastery and the immediate disciple of Elder Macarius for seventeen years, made pilgrimages to the Monastery several times before entering its ranks. His own father became a monk of Optina, with the name Meletius, and he followed him there. Monastic life appealed to him very much, and he was amazed at Elder Leonid's love and clairvoyance. He wanted to join Elders Leonid and Macarius; but Elder Leonid, instead of accepting him, gave him a piece of apple-tree wood and ordered him to make a spoon out of it. Only if he made a good spoon would he be accepted. After the second try he made a good spoon, but was able to enter the Monastery only after the repose of Elder Leonid. He became one of the most ardent disciples of Elder Macarius. He would read the Optina publications beginning with the first through the most recent, and then would start over again; thus he became an expert in the teachings of the Holy Fathers. He also accompanied Elder Macarius in his travels and was a cell-attendant to him.

In 1858 Fr. Flavian was ordained a hierodeacon. He served Elder Macarius to the very end his life, and the Elder breathed



Hieroschemamonk Flavian  
† May 30, 1890

his last breath in Fr. Flavian's arms, leaving him to serve just as dedicatedly as a cell attendant to Elder Hilarion.

Fr. Flavian kept a special memorial twice a year in memory of Elder Macarius, both on the day of his repose and on his nameday. A special festive dinner in his honor would be given—to which, in the spirit of Elder Macarius, all were invited, from the very rich to the poorest beggar. Through the efforts of Fr. Flavian, on the grave of Elder Macarius a little chapel was erected behind the catholicon, similar to the one over the grave of Elder Leonid. Fr. Flavian took care of this chapel, where vigil lamps burned perpetually. Later, these chapels were all destroyed by the Communists: they were levelled to the ground and cement was poured over the area to make it impossible to find the graves of the Elders. An automotive garage was even built there. Now that the Monastery has been reopened, the cement has been removed, and humble wooden crosses mark the graves that have been identified.

Fr. Flavian was of a such meek character that, when he was dying, it was discovered that there was not a single person with whom he had ever quarreled. On the 7th of January, 1890, he was tonsured into the schema, retaining his name. He died quietly on May 30th, after receiving Holy Communion; and the venerators of Fr. Hilarion (whose cell attendant he had been) had a worthy memorial erected over his grave.

Fr. Flavian, the faithful disciple of Elder Macarius, represents a typical Optina monk, and adorns the Optina Patericon. Another Optina disciple, Fr. Adrian Rymarenko (Archbishop Andrew), who founded a women's monastery in America in the 1950's, had a special veneration for Fr. Flavian and even looked like him. Fr. Flavian in turn resembled Elder Joseph of Optina (the disciple of Elder Ambrose). Thus, even the external likeness of the Optina Elders reappeared in their disciples; and we know that today, even though the line of Elders was broken, a



## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

certain flavor of Optina remains through the inheritance of these disciples, to which testify simple, believing people, both Russian and American.

### 4. SKETE-SUPERIOR ANATOLE I

Known in later life as the main fellow-struggler of the great Ambrose of Optina, Fr. Anatole (Zertsalov) was earlier Elder Macarius' closest disciple, and was dedicated to that Elder with his whole heart all his life. Elder Macarius had said to Fr. Anatole's mother when she had come to visit her son: "Blessed art thou, O kind woman, for the good path on which thou art setting thy son." Elder Macarius himself taught the Jesus Prayer to Elder Anatole, who would go deep into the forest to pray in seclusion. He came to Optina in 1857, at the time when the future Elder Ambrose was being groomed to replace Elder Macarius, and the latter directed Anatole to assist Ambrose. But life in Optina was not easy for the young monk. He was constantly moved from one cell to another. When he lived in a tower above where the firewood was split, it was especially hard for him to concentrate on the perpetual reading of ascetic books, which was an indispensable rule of life under the Elders. There he developed headaches which would last for a long time.

Elder Macarius took special care in developing Anatole's good qualities, and would not hesitate to humble him down, as was seen in one incident when St. Ignatius Brianchaninov visited Optina. St. Ignatius was very impressed with Fr. Anatole's qualities. Elder Macarius reprimanded Fr. Anatole for receiving his compliments, but after Anatole had left, he called him indeed very intelligent, educated and respected by all. He often called him "tall," referring not only to his physical height, but also to his great spiritual stature. After the repose of Elder Macarius, when Elders Anatole and Ambrose were working together, the latter saw to it that Anatole was made the Abbot



Elder-Saint Anatole I of Optina  
† January 25, 1894

## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

of the Skete. Elder Anatole then began to be an elder in his own right, especially for the neighboring women's convents. He was Elder Ambrose's main assistant in founding the Convent of Shamordino.

When Elder Leonid was in Valaam together with the Paisian disciple Theodore, they taught the Jesus Prayer to one of the Valaam monks named Euthymius. This Euthymius once taught the Jesus Prayer to a pious little peasant girl, and she in her humility succeeded in attaining to a high level in that prayer. When Elder Macarius heard about the girl, he had Elder Anatole fetch her to Optina, in order to learn from her how to do the Jesus Prayer. That was how Elder Anatole came to be so learned in this activity, as is attested by his multitude of letters.

Elder Anatole participated in the translation of Patristic literature such as the *Philokalia*, and worked on its publication. When Elder Ambrose died in 1891, Elder Anatole missed him so much that in three years he followed him to the grave, on the 25th of January.

## 5. MONK ANDREW THE GENERAL

General Andrew Andreyevich Petrovsky (born in 1786 and reposed in 1867) was in charge of eleven companies. He was victorious in eighty-five battles, and not once was he wounded, defending himself with the 90th Psalm. In 1840, he retired and joined the ranks of heavenly warriors, the monks of Optina. There, in the quietude of his cell, surrounded by loving brothers, his monastic life of prayer and diligence gave him the gift of compunctionate tears. He never performed his cell rule without tears. He taught that thoughtless, hasty actions deviate from grace. During his last days, combatting all form of *smuscheniye* (disturbance, confusion, or upset of soul), he would call his cell attendant to read the Prayer "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered ..." and then would command that

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

his cell be sprinkled with Holy Water to drive off the earthly attacks of the enemy. He died peacefully on the 23rd of January, grateful for the spiritual leadership of Elder Macarius and others.

On the 14th of February, Monk Andrew's cell attendant Pachomius saw the following dream: "I saw that I was in some large garden, a beautiful terrain, where grew fragrant, luxuriant flowers and trees which amazed my sight. Beautiful birds, sitting in the trees, sang wondrously, and it was unutterably pleasing to my ears. Further on I saw some huge building towering over the wide open space amidst the garden. It was elegant from all sides due to its rich decoration, which surpassed all description. The interior walls of the house, it seemed to me, were made of a brightly shining crystalline material. In one of the three great halls was a large table of great craftsmanship, with decorative birds depicted on its surface. A bit further on, there stood people facing the holy icons that were in the corner. They were dressed in bright, white garments tailored to look like monastic garb. They were girded with monastic belts and in their hands they had black prayer ropes. They had curly hair, not too long, the locks resting on their shoulders. All of these monks—none of whom I knew—sang the Cherubic Hymn together in full chorus, with splendid harmony. At this time, from the adjacent room on the left I could clearly hear the voice of Fr. Andrew addressing me: 'You see, Brother Pachomius, what mercy the Lord has vouchsafed me! Blessed is that man who holds to the Lord!' I knew that it was the voice of Fr. Andrew, but I did not see his face. At these words, I woke up."

## 6. ABBOT MOSES OF KALUGA

The man who renewed the old St. Tikhon of Kaluga Monastery was the Optina monk Moses. He was born in 1814 with the name Michael Krasilnikov. At first he was a disciple of



Archimandrite Moses of Kaluga  
† November 4, 1895

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

Elder Leonid, to whom he was wholly devoted. He was officially accepted as a member of the Optina brotherhood two years before the Elder's death. Just after the Elder's death, the young Moses was reading the Psalter at his coffin. He happened to doze off, and at that moment Leonid appeared to him, threatened him with his finger, and said: "Listen, you are reading without attention. That is wrong!" This incident showed him that, although his Elder had reposed, he was still alive. Elder Macarius then became his spiritual father, and Moses was dedicated to him until his death.

By Elder Macarius' blessing, Fr. Moses moved against his own will to the St. Tikhon of Kaluga Monastery. There he became not only the Monastery's Abbot and rebuilder, but also its Elder, and the Elder of many convents and lay people as well. While under the spiritual guidance of Elder Macarius he had developed a great love for St. Tikhon of Kaluga, respecting his love for eremitic activity. With this in mind, he built a skete for desert-lovers five miles from the Monastery, dedicating it to the Meeting of the Lord. He also built an infirmary in his Monastery to alleviate the lot of the sick brethren, and ordered it well. Less than a decade after his repose, a young monk named Gerasim laid his monastic beginning there, having an obedience in that infirmary building; and later this Fr. Gerasim came to America and refounded St. Herman of Alaska's New Valaam.

Fr. Moses thus laid a good foundation for the St. Tikhon of Kaluga Monastery, which became one of the major spiritual centers in Russia before the Revolution.

## 7. FR. EPHRAIM OF KALUGA

Fr. Ephraim was originally a disciple of Elder Leonid of Optina, arriving and joining the Skete brotherhood in 1829. In 1837, when Elder Leonid sent him to assist in renewing the St.



Schema-Elder Ephraim of Kaluga (at left).  
† June 25, 1884

Tikhon of Kaluga Monastery, he gave to him as a blessing for the Monastery the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God that had been in the cell of St. Paisius Velichkovsky, saying to him: "Do not grieve, my son, but go there as an obedience. The God-pleaser Tikhon will glorify his Monastery, and in time it will be equal in abundance to Optina."

After undergoing a series of difficulties in various monasteries, Fr. Ephraim returned to St. Tikhon's Monastery as Schemamonk John and became an outstanding Elder. He died in the 77th year of his life, on June 25, 1884.

## 8. SCHEMA-ABBESS PALLADIA

Schema-Abbess Palladia, the Abbess of Veliki Luki Convent, was a spiritual daughter of Elder Macarius, who wrote her many letters. She was born in 1812 to a landowner's family in the Smolensk area. Two of her sisters and seven of her cousins became Abbesses of various convents. When she was eighteen years old, having completed her education, she visited Elder Macarius. He became her spiritual father, and under his guidance the young lady entered the Ascension Convent in Veliki Luki, in the Pskov region, as a novice. The moral qualities and strict monastic life of the young novice attracted the attention of the Abbess, and soon she herself was given the difficult position of Abbess. She was responsible not only for adorning her Convent with a multitude of icons, but also for building chapels and oratories along the highway. Especially famous were the chapels dedicated to Saints Charalampus and Panteleimon, containing holy objects which were brought by visiting monks from Mount Athos at that time.

Through her tireless labors Abbess Palladia became a benefactress of the monastic cause, and many young people joined the ranks of the monastic army, thanking her for her labors in both the external and internal promotion of monastic life and





Schema-Abbess Palladia  
† February 22, 1894

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

ascetic endeavors. During her Abbacy the number of sisters reached two hundred. Having reached old age and feeling the approach of her entrance into the other world, she asked the Bishop of Pskov to give her the great schema. Afterwards, in prayer and tears, she begged God for a peaceful end, which followed on the 22nd of February, 1894.

### 9. ABBESS PAULINA OF BELEV

Abbess Paulina was born with the name Pelagia in 1813 to a peasant family, and from childhood displayed a character suited for desert-dwelling and monasticism. Once a nun from a closed monastery prophesied that the five-year-old girl would be a nun. At the age of sixteen she entered Belev Convent, where, after years of great trials, she became the Abbess at age twenty-seven. In her first great trial, when she was falsely accused of theft and expelled from the Convent, she ran to Optina Elder Leonid, who came to her aid and continued to do so until his death. When the great Elder Leonid was accused of being a heresiarch, the young Paulina also shared his shame. Later, when Elder Macarius moved from Ploschansk to Optina, she became his spiritual daughter. The sisters used to walk 40 kilometers to Optina to see Elder Macarius. She used to say: "As you are returning from there after a talk with the Elder, you forget yourself, you walk as if on wings, so greatly would his words satisfy your soul."

As abbess, Mother Paulina erected many sketes and buildings, including a two-story house in honor of her Elder, dedicating it to St. Macarius the Great. Her immediate assistant was Mother Magdalena, who was also a spiritual daughter of Elder Macarius, and in her she had great consolation. In former days, Elder Macarius would say, pointing to Abbess Paulina: "That is an angel of God. I know few people whom honor doesn't harm,



Abbess Paulina of Belev  
† June 20, 1877

but in her case it brings humility, and thereby lifts her above earthly things.”

Going to Optina at the beginning of 1877 (seventeen years after the repose of Elder Macarius), Abbess Paulina parted for the last time with Elder Ambrose. She returned to his cell several times, saying: “Forgive me, Batiushka, and farewell,” as if feeling her near departure from the Elders. She died on June 20, 1877, with a smile. On the day of her departure a little chapel was built. An icon of the appearance of the Theotokos to St. Sergius, with which Elder Macarius had blessed her on his deathbed, was placed inside the chapel, and before this icon was lit a perpetual lamp.

## 10. ELDER ANTHONY OF THE KIEV CAVES

Hieroschemamonk Anthony (Medvedyev) of the Kiev Caves was originally a disciple of Elder Leonid. When he met the Elder, he was struck by his clairvoyance, and remained in the Monastery for the rest of his life, becoming a monk. Elder Leonid showed special love for him, brought him to live as a novice in the Skete, and had him as his cell attendant. After Elder Leonid’s death, Fr. Anthony became the spiritual son of Elder Macarius.

Many years later, after Elder Macarius’ repose, Fr. Anthony related an important event which occurred at the time of the Elder’s burial: “The Optina monks told me that, during the burial the Elder, Hieroschemamonk Macarius, when he was placed in the grave alongside Elder Leonid, the latter’s grave was found intact and his body incorrupt and fragrant. Knowing the holiness of Fr. Leonid, I believe this with my whole soul.”

With the repose of both Elders, Anthony travelled to Valaam, Solovki, and Svir, to his patron Saint, Alexander of Svir. At the Svir Monastery he was a witness to the incorruption



Fr. Anthony of Kiev Caves  
† October 10, 1880

of the relics of Theodore, the elder of Leonid and a disciple of Paisius Velichkovsky.

During most of the rest of his life Anthony lived in the Kiev Caves Lavra as a father-confessor for monks and laymen, renowned for his spirituality.

Fr. Anthony's love for the Patristic writer St. Theophan the Recluse, whom he had known in Kiev before Theophan's reclusion, compelled him to travel to Vysha and beg to see the recluse face to face. For his sake St. Theophan made an exception to his reclusion and agreed to console him—he invited him to his quarters and conversed with him on spiritual matters. Fr. Anthony treasured this meeting as an enrichment of his spiritual activity.

Fr. Anthony died on October 10, 1880, the same day that Elder Ambrose died eleven years later. Through Fr. Anthony, a strong Paisian legacy was implanted in the spiritual tradition of the Kiev Caves Lavra.

## 11. ABBOT NICODEMUS OF MALOYAROSLAVETS

Of noble origin, the Optina monk Nicodemus entered Ploschansk Monastery early in life, and there became the spiritual son of Elder Macarius. Elder Macarius—already a hierodeacon and then under the leadership of Elder Athanasius—was at that time being trained to be a spiritual guide.

Nicodemus lived for a time at the house of Elder Macarius' brother. At that time he also became friends with John Nemytov, a lay disciple of Elder Athanasius of Ploschansk. As for most people of high society, it was not easy for Nicodemus to enter the monastery, accustomed as he was to a life far removed from monastic poverty. He even attempted to stay at the hermitage of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, who highly re-



Abbot Nicodemus of Maloyaroslavets  
† February 7, 1864

spected him and provided him with Patristic literature. When Nicodemus learned that Elder Macarius left for Optina after the death of his Elder, Athanasius, Nicodemus hastened there as well, having received a blessing to do so from St. Ignatius Brianchaninov. He was overwhelmed with happiness to be in Optina, where Abbot Moses drew him into his administrative life, sending him on various important missions which prepared him to be an Abbot. He eventually headed various monasteries in the vicinity of Optina, his final Abbacy being in the Monastery of Maloyaroslavets, where he succeeded Elder Anthony. He re-created the whole of Optina tradition in his new monastery—it became a new Optina, where Patristic literature played a large part in the daily life of the average monk. As an administrator, he modeled himself after Abbot Moses, and won high praise within the ecclesiastical structure. But in his soul he was a simple monk, often saying: “It would be nice to have a grave dug for me while the earth is still not frozen. Put boards around it and then cover them with earth.” Thus did he prepare himself for the hour of death, which indeed arrived on the 7th of February, 1864. A chapel was soon built over his grave.

Fr. Nicodemus was a co-ascetic and spiritual brother of Elder Macarius, since in his youth he had been, along with Elder Macarius, a student of Elder Athanasius. Fr. Nicodemus followed in Macarius’ footsteps by becoming himself a director of souls, but he always remained a humble disciple of that great Elder of Optina.

## 12. FR. GABRIEL, THE SAINTLY MYSTIC

Born to a clerical family, Hieroschemamonk Gabriel was chosen by God from his youth. He came to Optina a year after Elder Leonid died, and two years later became a monk. At the same service in which he was ordained a hierodeacon, the future





Hieroschemamonk Gabriel  
† January 2, 1871

Elder Ambrose was ordained a hieromonk, and they served their first Liturgies together and became close friends. After Elder Macarius died, Gabriel was appointed father-confessor of the Skete.

Young Fr. Gabriel acquired the spirit of Optina right away. His creative, sensitive soul was receptive to Elder Macarius' emotional tenor. He would always remember the image of Elder Macarius during Passion Week, singing alone in the Skete Church the Matins exapostilarion, "I see Thy bridal chamber adorned, O my Savior ..." The Elder's voice would be trembling as if in truth he saw before him the doors of heaven slowly opening up. There in the altar the multicolored lights would mysteriously glitter and shine.... (Lovers of Optina since Elder Macarius' time have kept the tradition during that service of having the holy doors slowly open up, to reveal a multitude of lampadas of all colors on top of, in front of, and all around the altar table, flickering before the cross and mysteriously illuminating the otherwise darkened church. After the exapostilarion verse is sung three times, the doors slowly close, leaving the temple in darkness again.)

Fr. Gabriel was responsible for the formation of the women's convent on the "White Hoof" (Belokopytin) estate. The Roslavl Elder Abraamius, who lived in that vicinity, prophesied to the White Hoof landowner's widow, Alexandra, that there would be a convent there; and Fr. Gabriel was sent by Elder Macarius to form that community.

Being endowed with a gift of clairvoyance, Fr. Gabriel foresaw his own death. For this reason he summoned a local priest, Fr. Andrew to become the Convent's Elder. This priest was secretly tonsured by Gabriel into the great schema, with the name Abraamius, after the Roslavl desert-dweller.

On January 2, 1871, Fr. Gabriel collapsed while looking at the icon of the Mother of God, and in half an hour he was gone



Abbess Alexandra of White Hoof (Belokopytova)  
† February 7, 1883

to the other world. After his death, Elder Ambrose reported in one of his letters that over thirty people had had him as an Elder, and that he had seen visions. The bright image of the saintly Gabriel was carried for thirty years in the heart of his disciple Fr. Andrew (the secret Schemamonk Abraamius), who died in 1902 and was buried in the same vault as Gabriel.

This holy Elder Gabriel was also an iconographer and painted a large copy of the Kaluga Mother of God which was highly revered. He remains in the galaxy of Optina fathers as an especially bright star in the formation of women's monasticism, and his mystical significance is yet to be fully revealed.

### 13. ABBESS ALEXANDRA

Abbess Alexandra Belokopytova ("White Hoof") was the spiritual daughter of Optina Elder Macarius, and a foundress of a convent in the vicinity of Optina on her estate (Belokopytin). Not far from her estate, there lived in a dense forest a desert-dweller, the aforementioned Elder Abraamius, who in his younger days had been the cell attendant of the leader of the Roslavl desert-dwellers, Archimandrite Gennadius. Elder Abraamius was frequented by many God-seekers, including many young women, whom he directed to the widow Alexandra Belokopytova. As related above, he even prophesied that there would be a convent on her estate and in her house, indicating where the chapel and altar would be located. The esteemed hundred-year-old Elder visited her house and remained as a guardian angel to the Convent, which originally followed a skete typicon. Elder Macarius blessed the future Abbess Alexandra to follow the steps indicated by Abraamius. After the repose of Elder Macarius, Hieromonk Gabriel became her spiritual father, and advised her to found a convent. In 1868 Fr. Gabriel moved to the estate with the permission of the Church admin-

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istration, and the Convent was founded. A peasant brought to it a wonder-working icon of the Kazan Mother of God, which began to perform miracles. On January 1, 1871, Elder Gabriel asked Mother Alexandra to stay for a Liturgy which he would serve, because the day before he had felt very sick. But Mother Alexandra had to go to the grave of her late husband. When she returned, Elder Gabriel had reposed.

Fr. Gabriel's position as spiritual advisor was taken by Fr. Moses of the St. Tikhon of Kaluga Hermitage. But the local saintly priest, Andrew, became the Elder and carrier of the Optina traditions in that Convent. The Convent progressed rapidly, attracting many pious women.

When Fr. Gabriel died, Mother Alexandra moved into his cell, and, because of her ardent devotion to his memory, thought of him as alive. That cell was situated right next to the church, and a side door led into it.

Abbess Alexandra died on February 7, 1883, and Fr. Andrew moved into the same cell. Fr. Andrew (Abraamius in schema) had not talked much before the death of the Abbess, but immediately afterwards he received the gift of speaking. On her deathbed the Abbess begged Fr. Andrew to take upon himself the work of being an Elder to the sisters, which work she herself had carried after the death of Gabriel. Thus his lips were opened, and he became an outstanding preacher and Elder, living and trembling before the Kazan Icon.

## 14. HIERODEACON METHODIUS

During Elder Macarius' period of the Eldership, there lived in Optina one brother, Hierodeacon Methodius, who for twenty-four years lay paralyzed and could not even speak except to say "Lord have mercy." This brother outlived Elder Macarius by only two years. He acquired a high degree of spirituality

through his long-suffering, at which Elder Macarius was always amazed.

Hierodeacon Methodius had come to Optina in 1825. He had been the first secretary to Fr. Moses, since he had remarkable calligraphic skills. He also had a good voice and had been the choir master in the Optina cliros. His quiet carrying of the cross of his infirmity in his cell was spiritually directed by Elder Macarius. During the last few years of his life, Fr. Methodius' helper was Monk Nicholas, a baptized Jew, of meek character, quiet, peaceful and very loving to all. He had a special devotion to Fr. Methodius' cross, and Fr. Methodius loved him very much. It is remarkable that this Fr. Nicholas died on the fortieth day of Fr. Methodius' repose, and even at the same hour, six o'clock in the morning. Fr. Methodius' last name was Shklambovsky, and originally he lived in the Rykhlon'sky Monastery. He died on the 21st of April in 1862.

## 15. ARCHBISHOP JUVENAL OF LITHUANIA

Archbishop Juvenal belonged to a noble family and received a good education. He was the youngest of six brothers. Having finished his military education the young officer once became dangerously ill. He vowed to become a monk if he became well.

Even earlier he had begged his mother to bless him to go to a monastery. As soon as he was free he went to Optina. Elder Macarius liked him at once and kept him in the Skete near to him for novitiate training. Soon after the Elder died, the young monk was made Abbot of Glinsk Monastery, and then was sent to the Russian Mission in Jerusalem.

Because he was well-educated, Fr. Juvenal took part in literary activities during his years in Optina: translating, editing, and publishing Patristic literature under the guidance of Elder Macarius and subsequent Elders. He was the first to



Archbishop Juvenal of Lithuania  
† April 12, 1904

translate from Slavonic into Russian the famed spiritual text *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St. John Climacus.

An illness required Fr. Juvenal to live in a separate house as in seclusion. This house became known as Juvenal's House, and it was in this house that the philosophers Leontiev and Sergei Nilus later wrote their books. Here Fr. Juvenal composed a monastic manual, *Monastic Life According to the Sayings of the Holy Ascetic Fathers*, which was reprinted many times because of its popularity. In Optina and other major monasteries it was used as a textook for novices.

In 1884, Fr. Juvenal was summoned to be the Abbot of the Kiev Caves Monastery and in 1892 he was made a bishop, at first of Belgorod (where St. Ioasaph had served) and then of Vilnius, Lithuania, where he died on April 12th, 1904.

The humble prelate Juvenal, a participant in Elder Macarius' publishing work, was the author of the biography of Abbot Moses of Optina, which, according to Helen Kontzevitch (co-author of the definitive work on Optina Monastery, *Optina Monastery and Its Era*) is perhaps the best of all the Optina hagiographic volumes. He was an able writer and a knowledgeable spiritual director, and possessed a noble and generous heart. He was handsome externally and appealing internally, and beautiful in his expression of spiritual reality through the written word. He was perhaps the most talented of all the literary collaborators of the great Elder Macarius.

## 16. THE SCHOLAR-PILGRIM, FR. DANIEL

Fr. Daniel Musatov was an outstanding graduate of the Petersburg Academy in 1831. When he was twenty-five years old, after receiving the highest scholastic degree, he was sent to the Kaluga Seminary as a professor of Theology, and while there he visited Optina and met Elder Macarius. The proximity to



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Optina and to the experienced Elders Macarius and Anthony satisfied his deep longing for spiritual life. He was not able to enter Optina Monastery due to his scholarly obligations, which required him to move to various centers of higher theological learning until he finally ended up in the Kiev Theological Academy. From Elder Macarius' letters to him, it is apparent that he was fully guided by his devoted sonship to the Elders, even in the minutest details. He also received many Patristic instructions from the Elder regarding his theological endeavors.

The piety of Fr. Daniel was attested to by Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev, who observed that his main occupation was "purifying his heart by mental vigilance to all its movements, and estrangement from earthly attractions." Every week he confessed thoroughly and received Communion. But the most striking aspect of Fr. Daniel was that he would go on pilgrimages dressed as a simple wanderer, walking for hundreds of miles. For example, when he was thirty years old he walked on foot from Kaluga to Kiev. During church services he would be transported into a higher realm, and when he met his Optina Elders there would be no end to his joy. He instructed his students that, every time they receive Holy Communion, it is like another Pascha. He was especially radiant during Pascha, almost unrecognizable, as was remembered by his students. He died at a relatively young age, on July 17, 1855, in the Kiev Caves Lavra, not having realized his desire to die in Optina.

### 17. HIEROSCHEMAMONK THEODOTUS

Hieroschemamonk Theodotus entered Optina in 1834, and entrusted his soul entirely to Elders Leonid and Macarius. A decade later he was already in priestly rank. In his earlier years in Optina he had the difficult obedience of collecting alms for the Optina buildings. By the prayers of his Elder Macarius,

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however, he was not harmed by this contact with the world; but on the contrary, in 1853 was tonsured into the great schema by Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow himself.

After some time Fr. Theodotus entered the Gethsemane Skete of the Holy Trinity–St. Sergius Lavra with the blessing of Metropolitan Philaret. There he lived in the dense forest with two hieroschemamonks, in three separate cells a stone's throw apart. Thus was founded the Skete of the Holy Spirit and St. John the Baptist (known as the Skete of the Paraclete), which had a stone church. As many as thirty monks lived with Fr. Theodotus, who was the Skete's Abbot. After four years he returned to Optina, but Elder Macarius was already dead.

Fr. Theodotus reposed on March 8, 1873.

## 18. ST. ISAAC, ABBOT OF OPTINA

It is hard to say which of his Optina disciples loved Elder Macarius most. One of the more devoted was definitely Isaac, the future Abbot of Optina.

While Isaac was growing up, his father was strict with him; he placed all his worldly hopes in the boy, for his other son had gone to Optina to be a monk. While visiting his brother in the Monastery, young Isaac met the Elders, who left a deep impression on him. He at once opened his soul to Elder Macarius, with whom began a correspondence. Once, while returning from a business trip to the Ukraine, he decided to flee to Optina and was received at once into the Skete. But Elder Macarius felt he must make peace with his father, and even accompanied the young novice so that the latter would ask forgiveness of his father for his willful act. Thanks to the prayers of Elder Macarius, peace was restored between father and son, and the boy settled into a cell with Fr. Juvenal, the future biographer of Elder Moses and Archbishop of Lithuania. His cell-mate's quiet



Abbot-Saint Isaac of Optina  
† August 22, 1894

disposition was very conducive to prayer, and the young ascetic was so happy with this friendship that he did not wish for any other friends, who might have distracted him from his love for the Jesus Prayer.

Another influence on Fr. Isaac's monastic life came from the former Abbot of Valaam, Barlaam. Barlaam had been a friend of St. Herman of Alaska when they were novices together at Valaam Monastery, and he had been taught the Jesus Prayer by Elder Euthymius the Valaam desert-dweller. This Elder Euthymius had been, in turn, the disciple of Elder Theodore of Svir, who had lived in Moldavia with the great Elder Paisius.

Fr. Isaac begged not to be ordained and it was only through the persuasion of his Elder Macarius that he was made a hieromonk in 1858. But he never changed his previous ascetic way of life.

Elder Macarius, foreseeing the imminent death of Abbot Moses of Optina—and feeling his own rapid loss of strength—went to Moscow to suggest to Metropolitan Philaret that Hieromonk Isaac succeed Abbot Moses. This opinion was shared by Abbot Moses. Soon afterwards, Elder Macarius died and Fr. Ambrose succeeded him as Elder; and two years after that, Abbot Moses died and Fr. Isaac succeeded him as the Abbot of Optina. The new Abbot soon showed signs that he was well suited for this position, and the Monastery grew stronger in its Patristic influence. Under these two new lamps, Ambrose and Isaac, Optina became the main center of spiritual enlightenment for Holy Russia in the 19th century.

Archimandrite Isaac was sensitive and desert-loving; he was a practical helmsman steering the Optina ship to realms not of this world. Reaching great old age, he died on the 22nd of August in 1894 with fear of God in his soul, saying: "It is frightful to die. How will I appear before the face of God at the Last Judgement?—for that is unavoidable." His last testament

## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

to the grieving brothers was: "Live according to your conscience and ask help from the Queen of Heaven, and all will be well." His breathing became less frequent and by evening he fell asleep in the Lord.

### 19. FR. THEODOSIUS POPOV

The humble monk Theodosius was already in his old age when he finally settled in Optina Skete. He had been a disciple of Elder Macarius since adolescence. The Elder had guided him as a spiritual son but had not blessed him to live in Optina, since his ascetic personality was needed as a leaven of righteousness in run-down monasteries. And indeed, through his personal *podvig* he was a strong influence in spiritual improvement of such monasteries, himself remaining in the background as a simple monk, pining away for life in Optina.

When he was finally able to settle in Optina, Fr. Theodosius asked for an obedience from Elder Ambrose, who gave him the following instruction: "Your obedience is to write down your own life." To this the humble Theodosius said: "Who needs to know the life of a pig?" But the Elder retorted: "The time will come when they will write books about us pigs." And indeed the autobiography of Theodosius was written and published, becoming one of the most outstanding ascetical texts in the rare category of autobiographies of saints.

In his book, Fr. Theodosius testifies to Elder Macarius' remarkable gift of clairvoyance. When as a youth Theodosius came to Optina for the first time, being a total stranger, Elder Macarius looked at him, called him by his own name, and knew from which town he had come.

Needless to say, Theodosius wanted to stay in Optina. But Elder Macarius, out of his genuine love for him, kept on blessing him to go to various morally decayed monasteries and

endure their degradation, grow in prayer and humility, and through that to lift the moral level of those idiorrhymic communities and turn them into healthy monasteries. Theodosius' prayers were so fervent that miracles took place, and the Most Holy Lady Theotokos even appeared to him. At the same time the evil spirit did not leave him alone; but through enduring these demonic attacks Fr. Theodosius became an ascetic of the caliber of the ancient monastic fathers. His book is of especially great value because of its clear, graphic depiction of the piety of the simple people that comprise "Holy Russia." Fr. Theodosius was truly a worthy disciple of such an honorable Elder as Fr. Macarius.

Elder Macarius once gave him the following instruction: "Temptations in you will give birth to vision; knowledge of your own weaknesses will enrich you with humility, and you will be condescending to others." "These prophetic words of Elder Macarius were fully realized," said Elder Joseph of Optina, who blessed the publication of Fr. Theodosius' biography, adding: "He [Fr. Theodosius] did not acquire this greatest of Christian virtues at once, as is evident from his autobiographical notes, but gradually, and brought forth fruit only at the end of his earthly life, when he had reached the measure of Christ's manhood." According to the Optina brethren, whose love surrounded Fr. Theodosius in his last years, his distinguishing characteristics were his extraordinary absence of malice, his humility, and a rare gift of contrite tears during the celebration of the Divine Services, especially Liturgy. He had a sense of humor and a loving attitude towards people, and delighted in self-humiliating obediences.

Fr. Theodosius warred with the enemy of our salvation right until the last moments of his life. While the cell attendant ran for medicine, Elder Theodosius peacefully died, having garbed himself in his monastic mantle and holding a cross in his

## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

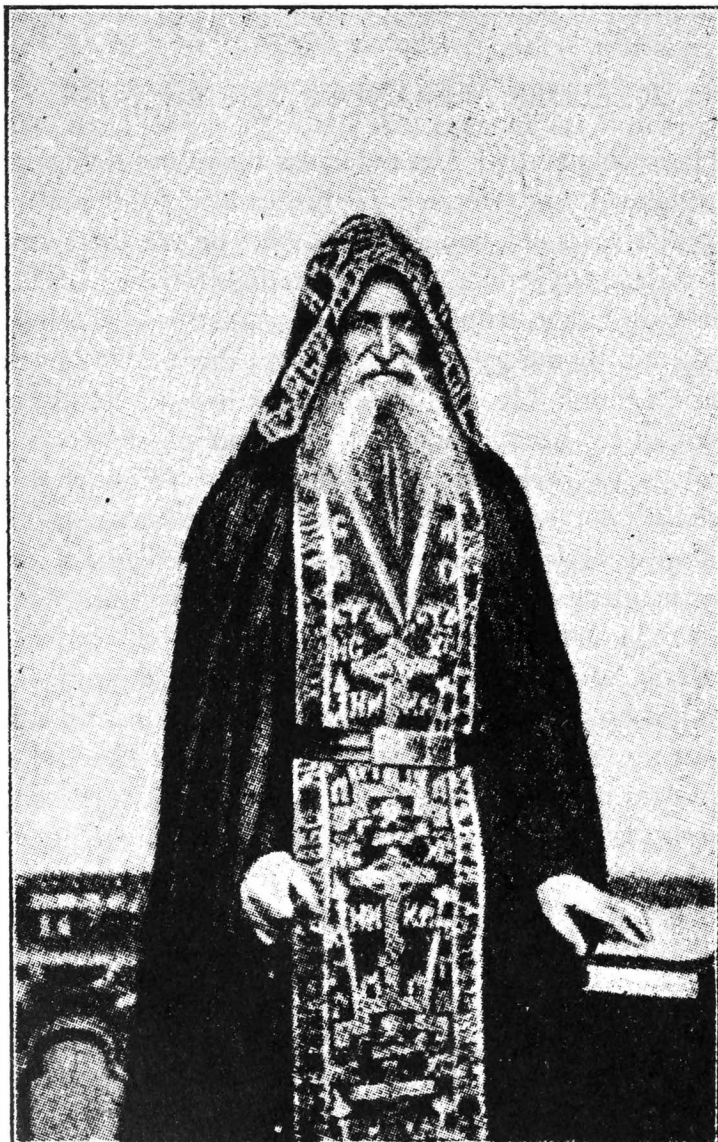
hand, with his paraman on his back and a peaceful expression on his face. His repose took place on October 20th, 1903.

### 20. ELDER ALEXANDER THE RECLUSE

Hieroschemamonk Alexander was a native of Kaluga province, where Optina is located. He first came to Optina when he was twelve years old, and the first service he saw there was the monastic tonsure service. He was introduced to the Jesus Prayer by his own father, who had himself learned it in Optina and practiced it. By the age of sixteen he was already determined to become a monk. He used to remember how the Jesus Prayer worked in his heart, bringing it consolation. He would say: "What joy I experienced at that young age!" Although he was enticed by the world, was married and widowed, he never abandoned the Jesus Prayer in moments of difficulty. He used to say that the grace of God that he had acquired from the Jesus Prayer in his early youth never left him.

Alexander entered Optina Monastery and immediately embarked on further study of the Jesus Prayer under the guidance of the Elders. After five years in Optina, he went with Elder Anthony as a helper when the latter was sent to Maloyaroslavets Monastery to be the Abbot. There he occupied himself with the Jesus Prayer to such an extent that nothing would upset him. "I would sit on the floor," he later recalled. "I was poor and often hungry for months. But in spite of that I was extremely thankful to God for everything."

Alexander then left to be a cave-dweller in the Gethsemane Skete near the St. Sergius Lavra. For five years he lived in a cave without seeing daylight, being already in the great schema. When his health worsened, he was taken out of the cave and offered many positions as Abbot, in many monasteries. Being an experienced spiritual father, he was sought after as a father-



Elder Alexander the Recluse  
† February 9, 1878



## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

confessor, but his poor health prevented him from doing this. He foreknew his repose, which took place on the 9th of February in 1878.

Alexander often reminisced over his Optina days, and was extremely happy for the unforgettable time he spent there training in the Jesus Prayer according to the instructions of the Elders.

### 21. NEW MARTYR IOASAPH OF KALUGA

We owe our information on the life and spiritual gifts of Schemamonk Ioasaph to his disciple, Archimandrite Gerasim Schmaltz, who lived as a desert-dweller in Alaska, at Monks' Lagoon, Spruce Island. Reminiscing about his Elder in his letters, Fr. Gerasim wrote:

"In the Monastery of St. Tikhon, I had a most kind Elder, Fr. Ioasaph, in the world John Nekrasov. He brilliantly finished the Tula Seminary; he was the son of a priest and a relative of Metropolitan Isidore. After finishing seminary he began working at the Holy Synod. But he was inclined to monastic life and visited Old Valaam. He could not stay there, however, as the damp climate was bad for him and he suffered from fevers. He returned to St. Petersburg, resigned his post, and went to Moscow to seek out a monastery.

"He entered the St. Nicholas of Ugresh Monastery and stayed there for three years. The brothers in our Russian monasteries were mostly peasants, as were most of the superiors. Some of them were crude, lovers of authority, and did not like educated people. And it was because of the crudeness of the Archimandrite that Br. John Nekrasov left this monastery and hastened to Optina, which at this time was renowned throughout Russia for its Elders.

"Br. John went to Optina and went to Elder Macarius for counsel. Fr. Macarius listened to him and then told him: 'Go,

Br. John, to St. Tikhon's Monastery, and finish your earthly life there.' And so he went there, was tonsured with the name Ioasaph, and lived there more than fifty years."

At St. Tikhon's Monastery, Schemamonk Ioasaph became the main Elder of the community. It is evident from Fr. Gerasim's recollections that he attained a high spiritual level by his holy life and that God endowed him with the gift of clairvoyance. Fr. Gerasim wrote about how his Elder hinted at the future course of his (Fr. Gerasim's) life:

"Fr. Ioasaph was a doer of the mental Jesus Prayer, and he was a clairvoyant Elder. Two years before I left St. Tikhon's Monastery he told me, 'Misha, a learned hierarch will meet you, will take a liking to you, and soon you will receive everything like a learned man.' Such words he repeated several times.

"But at that time could I, the poor novice Michael, even think that a learned bishop would come to like me?... But still everything Elder Ioasaph told me came to pass."

In another letter, Fr. Gerasim wrote: "Fr. Ioasaph told me: 'Misha, when sorrows, slander, and persecution come, then rejoice in them, kiss them, for that is a royal path that leads to God.' The Elder told me much that has now come to pass in my life. Glory be to God for everything! In that faraway time, everything in Russia began to go downhill. Of course, our monasteries did also, and behind their massive walls both Christian love and brotherhood died away. Almost all monks were of peasant stock, and everybody knows how hard life is in the villages of our plowmen peasants. But even monks would murmur, living in the monastery.

"Elder Ioasaph would often tell me in those years: 'Misha, you see how monks are complaining—either the food is bad or something else is not good enough! Misha, grumbling is a frightful sin. For grumbling, God punished the chosen Israelite people not just once. Palestine is not far from Egypt, but the

## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

Lord led the Jews a whole forty years, and not many of them reached the Promised Land. See what a terrible sin it is—grumbling against God. And why should monks grumble? They usually have a warm cell, decent food, and enough bread to eat any time they want it. They have both shoes and clothing. While our peasant, having a family, often lacks those things, and then there are crop failures, and they have to pay taxes. And yet many of them are bearing this horrendous burden. Oh Misha, you'll see, the Lord will send terrible trials. He will take everything away from us, and then we will say, "Bad times have come; we have nothing to eat." Misha, this will inevitably take place if we do not repent; for such a sin God will not spare either our luxurious temples or the beautiful belfries, or the bells, or even the whole of our brotherhood—everything, everything will be taken away for our sinful grumbling.'

"So spoke the Elder with great sorrow, with frequent tears in his eyes. He himself was starved to death in 1918, ending his life as a martyr.

"I will add that the calamities over Russia, the persecution of Christ's Church and monasteries were foretold also by other monks, hierarchs, priests, and pious people."

But through Elder Ioasaph's disciple, the desert-dweller Archimandrite Gerasim, the spirit of Optina lived on in Spruce Island, in New Valaam.

## 22. SCHEMA-ABBOT HILARY

Hilary was a contemporary and spiritual son, first of Elder Leonid and then of Elder Macarius. He was born in 1796, and at the age of twenty entered a monastery. He lived for a while in Valaam, Konevits and Solovki, the monastic centers of the North. Then he lived in the St. Alexander of Svir Monastery, where he was ordained a hieromonk. He soon left for Optina,

where under the guidance of the Elders he received his final monastic formation.

All the above monasteries were under the influence of St. Paisius Velichkovsky, stressing primarily a desert-dwelling manner of life. Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, knowing of Fr. Hilary and his formation in these monasteries, wanted him to be a disseminator of that type of monastic life. At first Fr. Hilary was the Abbot of the St. Nicholas of Ugresh Monastery; then he was the co-founder of the Gethsemane Skete together with another Optina monk, Theodotus. The last years of his life were spent in Optina, where he was exceptionally humble. Although bearing the rank of Abbot, he always asked for blessings, even from simple novices. Since he had been an expert prosphora-baker in the St. Alexander of Svir Monastery, he would supervise the same work in Optina. He did not disdain any kind of work, and was always ready to help, never missing any church services. Before his death he became a schemamonk with the name of Elias. He died in utter humility, on July 9, 1863.

### 23. LAY-ASCETIC JOHN M. NEMYTOV

Among the disciples of Fr. Athanasius, St. Macarius' Elder, was a rich merchant, John Michailovich Nemytov. He was taught by the Elder to do the Jesus Prayer while remaining a layman, having a thriving business, a large household, and many children.

John had a separate cell built for himself, where he spent nights doing the Jesus Prayer, until four o'clock in the morning. Not even the people of his household knew how he prayed. But the devil would not leave this righteous layman alone. John fell into a state of excessive zeal, and it was only through the instructions of Elder Athanasius that he was saved from spiritual

## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

delusion (*prelest*). For this he was ever grateful to the Elder, treasuring his portrait all his life.

John loved to help pilgrims, the homeless, and paupers, but in a constructive way. He also helped hospices and hospitals.

John had a close friend who was a pious bookseller, named Gerasim Makarov, of the city of Orel. Together they transformed Gerasim's bookstore into a tearoom where, in an informal atmosphere, John would give talks, and people would conduct spiritual conversations and receive instructions in the Jesus Prayer. The Optina publications worked miracles in such an atmosphere, and the message fell on fertile ground. John frequently visited Optina, where Elder Macarius, the disciple of his Elder Athanasius, took over the spiritual instruction of this fervent doer of the Jesus Prayer and conductor of mental activity. He was granted the gift of tears, always weeping over his sins, and his sobbings were heard in his rich house.

Once John fell so ill that his close ones thought his hour had come. In a hopeless condition, he suddenly saw before him an Elder in monastic garb who blessed him and said that God was granting him recovery. John asked, "Who are you?" to which the light-bearing man answered, "Amphilochius," and disappeared. This vision was not a dream, but reality. John later found out and recognized that it was Elder Amphilochius (†1824), whose obedience it had been to guard the relics of St. Demetrius of Rostov in the Rostov Monastery.

Before John Nemytov died, he secretly became a schema-monk. In the midst of his large extended family he reposed like a saint on the night of May 5, 1875.

## 24. ABBESSES PAISIA AND MAGDALENA OF SEVSK CONVENT

Mother Paisia was born in 1740, and in 1779 became Abbess of the Sevsk Convent, not far from Optina. She was an

outstanding abbess, quite influential in her neighboring area. She kept the Convent under strict surveillance, upholding in it the principles of monastic life. It was once visited by Elder Athanasius of Ploschansk (the disciple of Paisius Velichkovsky), together with his disciple Macarius of Optina and Elder Basil Kishkin, the restorer of Glinsk Monastery. This visit left a deep impression on the sisters of the Convent, influencing them to read the writings of the Holy Fathers. Even young girls read these writings, learning *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* almost by heart. During Elder Athanasius' lifetime, Elder Macarius was made the official spiritual father of the Sevsk Convent. There were several very holy nuns in this Convent, some of them virtual saints.

The Convent's blind gate-keeper, Eve, was especially humble. For years she would sit at the gate from morning till evening, sometimes receiving donations. Having great love for St. Nicholas the Prince of Chernigov, who had been the gate-keeper at the Kiev Caves, she fortified her soul with prayer to him. Her long acquaintance with her job served her in place of sight, and people would hardly believe that she was blind. Only Abbess Paisia seemed to know. One day an unknown pilgrim talked with her and donated a coin. The coin did not fall into the bag, but on the ground, and began to roll away. In fear, Nun Eve told him that she was blind, and that his donation would be lost. To this the stranger answered: "Don't worry, you'll find it." At that moment her eyes opened, and she saw St. Nicholas. After that she could see, and she lived to be almost a hundred years old.

There was another holy nun in Abbess Paisia's Convent by the name of Ryassaphore Nun Vitalia, who never asked for anything and endured everything in silence. Her repose was remarkable. A certain large star appeared in the sky over her cell, and was seen day and night until her burial.

## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

Abbess Paisia lived out the last years of her life in a poor small cell, out of humility. She had great love for the Mother of God. At her deathbed, they brought to her an icon of the Most Pure Virgin, gave her Holy Communion, and said a prayer—at which her pure soul departed from her much-suffering body with a reflection of joy on her face. She reposed on July 30, 1838.

Abbess Paisia's successor, Magdalena, was of high spiritual stature. She travelled to Sevsk for the first time with the blessing of Elder Zosima Verkhovsky of Roslavl and Siberia, coming together with the future nun Dorothea. As they were descending from a mountain towards a river, they saw a vision of a beautiful golden-domed monastery similar to the Kiev Caves Lavra, and behind its gate they saw a synaxis of saints, with the Mother of God holding an omophorion over them. The people with them saw the same vision. When they approached the Monastery, they didn't believe their eyes, for they saw a humble place, and the vision disappeared. They had arrived at the Sevsk Convent. Entering the Convent's church, they understood that the vision they had seen was a sign that they should stay. Later, during Mother Paisia's lifetime, that Convent grew to resemble the vision.

During Magdalena's Abbacy, one of her nuns was a great beauty. Once during a church service she was noticed by a dashing bachelor hussar, who decided to lure her out of the Convent, first by writing her letters, and then, as his regiment was very close to the Convent, by ordering his troops to perform military maneuvers in front of it. The army band played loudly, and he displayed his skillful horsemanship and cavalry drills. He gave no peace to the poor Convent. At first the wise Abbess Magdalena pleaded with him by letter, but then, gathering a synaxis of eldresses, she made the following plan:

The terrified beauty wrote the hussar a letter of invitation for tea in the Abbess' quarters, which he gladly accepted, already sensing his victory. Without hesitation he entered the walls of the Convent, only to be locked in the Abbess' quarters, where Abbess Magdalena instituted a trial, with the eldresses as the jury. They demanded a sentence of death for the military hero, whereat she told him: "Now prepare yourself to die." At first the hussar thought it was a joke; but then, at her abbatial gesture, two dozen nuns entered with ropes and tied him hand and foot to a chair. The Abbess asked them: "What kind of punishment does this man deserve for his shameless attacks against our Monastery?" And all answered: "He is worthy of death!" The poor hussar began to tremble with fear, the more so as the Abbess informed him that the gates were locked tight, and no earthly power could free him from them. He began to repent of his light-mindedness and abased himself before the women, begging mercy from the Abbess and the nuns. After frightening him to their satisfaction, they made him sign a document promising to leave their Monastery in peace, and even to move his whole regiment away from their city. Only then did they let him go in peace from the walls of their Monastery. And the lesson worked, for the very next day the whole regiment left town, and the Convent received its long-awaited peace and tranquillity. After that, whenever Abbess Magdalena appeared in Optina, Elder Leonid would say: "Here comes the General!"

When Magdalena died as a schemanun on April 25, 1862, at midnight, she appeared at the same hour to another spiritual woman as she was entering Paradise. There exists a letter of Elder Macarius himself concerning her repose:

"Abbess Magdalena of the Sevsk Convent died on the 25th of August at twelve o'clock. The Convent became orphaned! Inconsolable lamentations, cries and moans in the whole Con-



## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

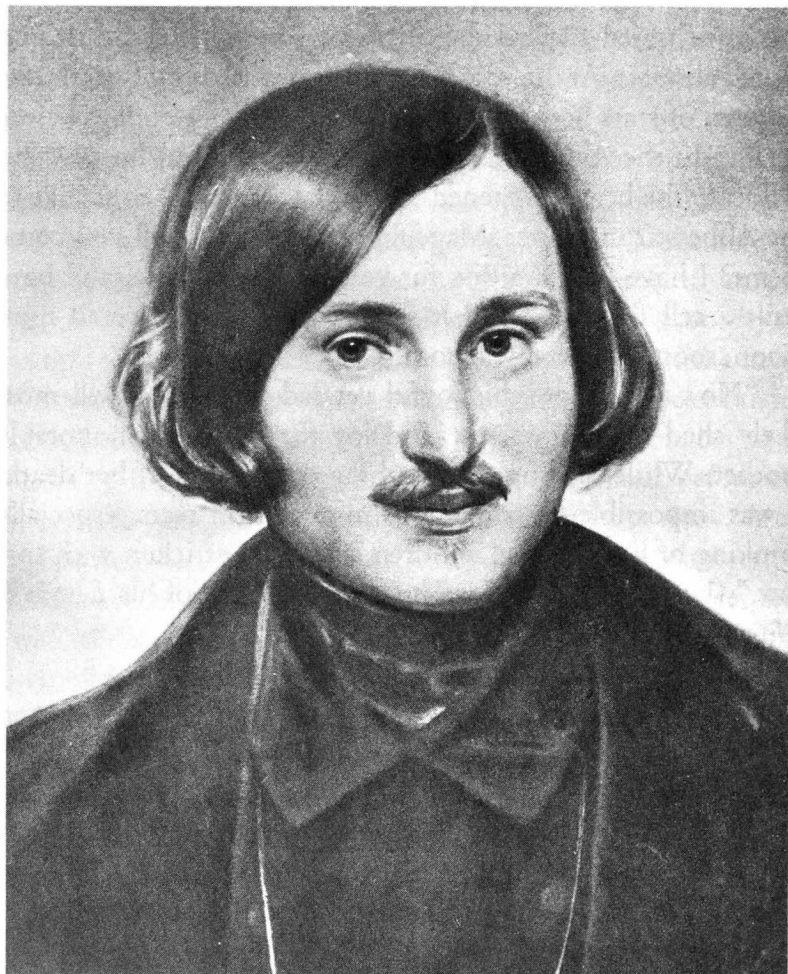
vent still continue. Even all the lay people are weeping over the loss. Mother earned such love by her simplicity, humility, patience, and lack of malice. Three hundred sisters found haven under her humble and wise governance. Without question, she was vouchsafed blessed eternity: she foretold her death and hinted about it. At the very hour of her death, certain sisters saw a crown of stars hovering over her cell. For several days before her death, the Abbot of Ploschansk saw a dream: he saw that suddenly the heavens opened up and Fr. Leonid (Leo) spoke to the Abbess from there: 'Magdalena! How soon will you come to me? I have been waiting for you for a long time, and have built a cell for you.' And it seemed that she answered him: 'Soon, soon, Father, I will come.'

"Now you know this joyful yet sad news. You will most likely shed tears of sorrow and joy for this most honorable mother. While reading the touching description of her death, it was impossible for anyone to refrain from tears, especially thinking of her spiritual children who were stricken with sorrow." (Letter of Elder Macarius in the volume of his *Letters to Monastics*, 1862, p. 65.)

### 25. HIERODEACON PALLADIUS OF OPTINA

Fr. Palladius began his monastic life at the age of fifteen in the Ploschansk Hermitage. There he became a friend of Macarius, and had him as a spiritual father to the very end of his life. In that monastery there was total poverty; there was one pair of bark shoes for both him and Fr. Macarius.

As a ryassophore monk he received the name of Paisius. Afterwards he lived for forty-six years in Optina, where, dwelling alone in a forest ranger's hut, he endured many temptations from the demons and wanted to flee. When his Elder read a



Nicholai Gogol  
† 1852

## THE DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

prayer to the Mother of God over his head, however, he was freed from demonic fears.

Fr. Palladius was a simple man who treated everyone equally, be he a metropolitan or a beggar. Being a bookbinder, he learned and taught others to have great respect towards paper and printed texts. "Through disrespect for paper," he would say, "respect for sanctity is diminished, because in printed texts appears the word 'God.'"

Externally Fr. Palladius appeared very severe, but he was a very kind and loving man, given over to contemplation, especially while observing nature. He died on November 5, 1861, just a year after Fr. Macarius. He was known to be especially humble, and had a gift for speaking.

## 26. NICHOLAI GOGOL, THE WRITER

Elder Macarius also left a major influence on the life of the great Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. Once, almost accidentally, Gogol heard a sermon of a village priest, Matthew Constantinov. This righteous priest, being a man of deep heroic prayer, was also an outstanding orator. Struck by the oratorical power of this priest, the renowned writer expressed the desire to have a private conversation with him, only to discover that this priest was also a clairvoyant elder. The priest unhesitatingly directed Gogol to Elder Macarius in Optina, stating that this was what his heart was searching for. Elder Macarius made a profound impression on Gogol, who under the Elder's influence drastically changed his liberal thinking and was converted to age-old, traditional Orthodoxy. When he wrote his famous *Correspondence with Friends*, Gogol so stirred up liberal society against himself that the leading literary salons totally disgraced and dismissed him. Elder Macarius, however, continued to have a close relationship

with the great writer, and even wrote a whole critique of his last work (found later among his books).

The sensitive soul of Gogol was deeply grateful to Elder Macarius for the Orthodox teaching he gave to the Russian intelligentsia, although the intelligentsia itself did not appreciate it. Although he was not a monk and therefore cannot strictly be viewed as a full disciple of that monastic teacher, Gogol felt the mystical presence of Macarius' loving eldership to the end of his life.

"On my way I visited Optina Monastery, and carried away for ever a most wonderful impression. I think that even on Mount Athos itself it isn't better. The grace of God visibly reigns," wrote Gogol among other things about Optina. In July of 1852, the year he reposed, Gogol wrote to Optina: "For Christ's sake, pray for me. Ask your respected Abbot and all the brothers, and ask all who pray more diligently there, to pray for me. My path is hard. My work is of such a kind that without the obvious help of God in each minute and in each hour, my pen cannot move. My power is not only minimal but it does not even exist without refreshment from Above.... For Christ's sake pray for me: I tell you that I must, every minute, be in my thoughts above all earthly squabbles and, in all places of wandering, be as though in Optina Monastery. May God reward you all for your good work. With all my soul, your Nicholai Gogol."

So wrote Gogol concerning the responsibility of a writer before God. These thoughts came not without the influence of Elder Macarius, to whose clairvoyant ministry for the Orthodox Church Gogol submitted his universal sorrows.

## 27. IVAN AND NATALIA KIREYEVSKY, LAY-DISCIPLES OF ELDER MACARIUS

Two of the most devoted disciples of Elder Macarius were the the married couple, Ivan and Natalia Kireyevsky. They were lay-zealots of Patristic wisdom, who dedicated their whole lives to the support of Elder Macarius' Paisian labors. Ivan Kireyevsky's life was written by Professor Kontzevitch and included in his book on Optina Monastery. In the present book it follows this chapter on Elder Macarius' disciples. But concerning his wife, we hasten to note that it was she who, immediately after the Elder's repose, labored to collect his letters, and with her own money published six thick volumes of them. (The sixth volume alone, published in 1862, contains 760 pages.) In order to gather them she visited many monasteries and convents—there is evidence that she visited about two hundred women's convents alone! In the Sevsk-Trinity Convent there lived two of the Elder's nieces and one cousin; and the whole third volume consists of letters to them. The nuns of very many women's monasteries used to come to Optina, and it is quite likely that from time to time the Elder visited their monasteries personally.

The letters that Natalia Kireyevsky gathered, having been written from day to day, constitute a veritable diary reflecting Elder Macarius' life in detail. He wrote many letters to Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, and also to his monks when he was absent from the Monastery. With one of his spiritual sons, Abbot Anthony Bochkov of Cheremenetsk Monastery, he conducted a particularly interesting correspondence. In one place Fr. Anthony says: "His [Macarius'] treasured letters are probably still covered with the tears he shed for those he instructed.

"Elder Macarius did not possess very good health, but he nevertheless travelled frequently. He would go with one or two

of his cell attendants, always departing at dawn, and in winter when it was still dark. Wearing a worn-out fur coat, with a staff in his hand, he would settle down in the sleigh and take off.... How many miles of the Russian roads he traversed, only God knows! How many people would he console along the way, would save, heal, and spiritually resurrect by the name of God! Although he suffered from shortness of breath, he was unusually quick, walking briskly, and was quick to make decisions. He even spoke quickly, and could not tolerate any sluggishness. One had to run after him, especially when he was ready to go travelling; he would not endure inattentiveness or sloppiness in those who were involved in his travels."

The Elder would leave, and soon letters from him would arrive at the Skete—a careful father instructing his children. They would come from all the places he had gone to, and he would carefully describe all that had occurred. Here, for example, is a letter from October, 1848:

"It's already a week that I have been in Sevsk, though I planned to spend only three days here. An unexpected occurrence has caused this, and I might spend another week. As we were going from Orel on the 13th of October, about 11 miles before Dmitrovsk, our carriage fell into a ravine on the left side of the road, and I hurt my right arm. Upon my arrival in Dmitrovsk, the doctor found that the shoulder was dislocated, and that below the shoulder the bone was broken. He straightened the dislocation, bandaged my arm, gave me some ointment, and with that I successfully arrived at Sevsk, where I was greeted by the mothers and sisters with both joy and sorrow."

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The whole realm of literature on Elder Macarius and the other Optina Elders has not been thoroughly studied, especially



A recent portrait of Elder Macarius from Russia.

in the English language. This is regrettable because of Elder Macarius' great spiritual significance, and because of the misconceptions on the part of contemporary scholars, who for the most part remain entirely ignorant of the context of these people's lives.



Natalia P. and Ivan V. Kireyevsky



### 3

## *The Life of Elder Macarius’ Disciple, Ivan V. Kireyevsky*

*This brief biography was translated from Ivan M. Kontzevitch’s monumental work, Optina Monastery and its Era.\* It is the portrait of an extraordinary man, whose life’s work was the fruit of his spiritual bond with Elder Macarius and with Optina itself, and his devotion to the sanctity and essential Christianity he found embodied in both.*

THE INITIATIVE for undertaking the great task of the publication of the writings of the Holy Fathers proceeded simultaneously from Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky and Elder Macarius of Optina. Thanks to this undertaking, theological academies, seminaries, ruling bishops, rectors and inspectors were able to obtain these books, and monastics and all spiritually disposed Russian people gained access to previously inaccessible ascetic literature. True Orthodoxy shone, and was upheld and fortified to counterbalance the invading Western books of false

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\* I. M. Kontzevitch, *Optina Pustyn i Eya Vremya (Optina Monastery and its Era)* (Jordanville, New York: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1970), pp. 201ff.

spiritual orientation. The appearance of these manuscripts to the world is an event of an importance that cannot be expressed in mere words.

The other achievement of Kireyevsky, as the history of Russian philosophy recognizes, is the foundation he laid for independent Russian philosophy. As Professor Nicholas O. Lossky confirms, "although they (Kireyevsky and Khomiakov) did not work out a philosophical system, they did initiate a spiritual-philosophical movement which comprises the most original and valuable achievement in Russian thought."\*

The basic supposition of Kireyevsky's philosophy was the following: "The doctrine of the Holy Trinity attracts the mind not merely because it is the focus of all holy truths made known to us through revelation, but also because—as I concluded while occupied with a composition on philosophy—the direction of philosophy depends first of all on the understanding that we have about the Most Holy Trinity."\*\*

Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky was the son of wonderful Russian people. His father Basil Ivanovich, Second Major of the Guards, was a wealthy landowner, who owned Dolbino village, twenty-four miles from Optina Monastery. Basil was distinguished by his extraordinary kindness. He had a genuine, flaming love for people, ready at all times to share another's grief, to help someone in need. He devoted his entire life, which was not long, to acts of compassion. In 1812 he traveled to Orel, which was near one of his villages, and he gave over both his homes, one in town and the other in the country, to be used as hospitals for the wounded, refugees and the many families who had fled the disturbance along the Smolensk highway. He

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\* Nicholas O. Lossky (London, 1952), p. 13.

\*\* I. V. Kireyevsky, *Complete Collected Works*, Volume I (Moscow, 1861), p. 100.

personally visited the sick, was stricken with typhoid fever and died in Orel on the 1st of November, 1812, on the commemoration day of the Unmercenary Physicians Cosmas and Damian, fulfilling to the end the commandments of Christ.

With all his virtues, Basil Ivanovich Kireyevsky was highly original: he was an Anglophile; he studied chemistry and medicine; and he purchased the writings of Voltaire in order to burn them. He loved to read while lying on the ground and cared little for his appearance. When they were living in Moscow for his young wife's childbirths, he spent entire days in bookshops, and in his distraction he left his wife without any money, not knowing how to provide for the large household.

He punished his serfs in no other way than by assigning them a number of prostrations to make. Civil service employees were punished in the same manner when he held the position of judge. "Negligence in duty is guilt before God," he said.

His wife Avdotia Petrovna, nee Yuskova, born of the nobility, was cultured and educated. If he represented a moral type, then she represented an aesthetic type. Endowed with literary talent, she wrote and translated. She loved flowers, poetry and art, and painted as well. She helped V. A. Zhukovsky in his translations. They were relatives: she was the daughter of his eldest stepsister, who was Zhukovsky's godmother, to some extent his tutor, and his childhood friend. When Avdotia was widowed and then married A. A. Elagin, she cultivated in her Moscow home a famous salon where all the outstanding and famous people gathered together to exchange ideas. This continued over many decades, until her very death.

After the death of Basil Ivanovich Kireyevsky, Zhukovsky lived for more than a year with his relative. His personality left a strong impression on the soul of the orphaned boy, Ivan. Their close relationship endured throughout his life.

Ivan's stepfather, A. A. Elagin, gave his stepchildren a wonderful education. They studied first of all mathematics, foreign languages—French and German—and read many books about literature, history and philosophy from the library their father had collected. In 1822, the entire family, on the occasion of the completion of their education, travelled to Moscow, where professors of the University gave them personal examinations. In addition Ivan listened to public lectures about natural sciences read by M. G. Pavlov, a follower of Shelling. His colleague in his studies was A. I. Koshelev. At this time the Kireyevsky brothers were studying the English language and classical languages. Their linguistic knowledge at that time was not comprehensive, however, and Ivan Vasilievich later had to continue learning when he took an active part in the translation of the Holy Fathers that began in Optina. Soon Kireyevsky took his national exam, as it was called then, in front of the committee, and began his work in the Foreign College Archives.

Kireyevsky's first literary presentation was an article on Pushkin, published in the *Moscow Messenger* in 1828 under the title "A Note about the Character of Pushkin's Poetry." His essay was perhaps the first attempt in Russian of a serious criticism and strictly artistic appraisal of Pushkin, reminiscent of Zhukovsky. In the following year he published an article entitled "A Review of Russian Literature for 1829" in the almanac of Maximovitch, *The Morning Star*.

In the same year, he proposed marriage to Natalia Petrovna Arbenina but received a refusal. He fell ill and travelled abroad, where he attended lectures in Berlin and Munich on theology, philosophy and history. Among the professors were Hegel and Schelling, with whom he became personally acquainted. Returning within a year to his homeland he began publication of the journal, *The European*. Two issues were published. The

journal was well-intentioned, but was viewed suspiciously by the government as secret revolutionary propaganda. Zhukovsky was barely able to save Ivan Vasilievich from administrative exile. From that time on a dark shadow of suspicion of political unreliability surrounded Kireyevsky, which throughout his entire life did not allow him to demonstrate his talents and capabilities. In 1834 he married, at last, the girl he loved.

After Kireyevsky's wedding and during the next twelve years of his life in Dolbino, his civic duties were limited to those of the inspector of the Belev public school, where he was honored for his conscientious attitude toward his work. This quiet life in the village seemed to one ill-disposed "biographer" like some kind of sleep or inactivity. But these years were not lost for Kireyevsky—they passed in spiritual and mental self-deepening. If in his younger years he believed in European progress and was a Westernizer (while being editor of *The European*), now he drastically changed his worldview. Ivan Vasilievich became himself: that "Kireyevsky" whose image is stamped on the history of our spiritual culture. The years spent in studying scientific books broadened his knowledge. In the 1840's he made another attempt to enter the public arena but was again unsuccessful. He sought a chair at Moscow University and was rejected. His desire to fully express the philosophical convictions which had matured through his deep contemplations in the quiet of the countryside, was so insistent within him that he decided to take upon himself the editorship of the journal *The Muscovite* published by Pogodin (1844). The censorship and difficult temperament of the publisher, however, compelled Ivan Vasilievich to resign this job after the first three volumes.

Here several words must be said about what caused and aided the ultimate formation of Ivan Vasilievich's worldview. On one hand it was his brother Peter Vasilievich, to whom he

was united in the closest friendship, and on the other hand it was his wife Natalia Petrovna.

Peter Vasilievich fought for the preservation of "Russian-ness" in the Russian people. In this lay the entire meaning of his existence; he did not have a private life. He was a collector of ancient spiritual verses and folk songs. The poet Yazikov called him "the great sufferer over ancient Rus'" and "the enlightened ascetic of his people's own heritage."

"The fullness of national life can only exist," said Peter Kireyevsky, "where tradition is respected; and where a place is given to tradition, there will a place be given to life...." "Every imitation is a concentration of lifelessness. That which is alive is original. The fuller a man's existence is, the more distinctive will his face be, the less similar to others. That which is called the common physiognomy of man implies nothing other than a face that resembles everyone else's, that is, a vulgar physiognomy." From this it can be seen how deeply conscious Peter Vasilievich Kireyevsky was of the importance of the Russian people's preservation of their own way of life, their own distinguishing characteristics, so as not to have "the same face as everyone else" and not to lose their national character. He was deeply conscious of the serious trauma inflicted upon the Russian people a century and a half before that time by the sudden and violent Europeanization of the entire fabric of their life.

Peter Vasilievich's thought was not wasted on his older brother. But regarding religious matters, the influence on Ivan came from his wife Natalia Petrovna. Ivan Kireyevsky never was an unbeliever. Even during his stay in Germany in 1830 he advised his sister in a letter to read the Gospel daily. But although he was a Christian, Ivan Vasilievich was not a strong member of the Orthodox Church. He was far from the Church, as was almost the entire educated class at that time. His wife was

a different matter—a spiritual daughter of Elder Philaret of Novospassky Monastery. In her youth she had travelled to Sarov Monastery and had conversed with St. Seraphim. For this reason the Superior of the Holy Trinity St. Sergius Lavra, Archimandrite Anthony, called her “sister” in his letter to her [because Archimandrite Anthony was a spiritual son of St. Seraphim].

A meeting with Fr. Philaret of Novospassky was a decisive moment in Ivan Kireyevsky’s life: he became his devoted spiritual son. But the Elder’s days were already numbered. After his repose, Fr. Macarius of Optina became the Elder of the Kireyevsky couple.

Kireyevsky wrote to his friend Koshelev: “More essential than any books or meditations is to find a holy Orthodox Elder, who can become your director, to whom you can disclose every thought and hear not his opinion, more or less intelligent, but the judgment of the Holy Fathers.” Such exceptional happiness did he find in the person of Fr. Macarius!

Of all the lay people who spent time in Optina Monastery, Kireyevsky was closer than anyone to its spirit. Like no one else, he understood its significance as a spiritual pinnacle, where the highest spiritual feat of inner activity, crowned by an abundance of the grace-filled gifts of the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, was combined with total service to the world in its spiritual and material needs. In Optina he saw the wisdom of the Holy Fathers brought to life. Being a philosopher, he felt that higher knowledge of truth was linked with integrity of spirit, with the restoration of the harmony of all mankind’s spiritual powers. This restoration is attained by inner ascetic labor, by spiritual activity. Kireyevsky in his philosophical research, especially in his teaching on knowledge (epistemology), pointed to an inner dependence (functional bond) of the cognitive capacities of man on spiritual labors, which transform the

natural, lower condition of mankind's power to higher spiritual wisdom (linking philosophy with asceticism).

In his service to the publishing work of Optina, Ivan Vasilievich had the opportunity to study Patristic literature in its entirety. Having earlier received an excellent philosophical education at home and having supplemented it during his stay in Germany, he was thus entirely familiar with Western culture. In him the Western philosophical tradition met the tradition of the Eastern Church. How was this encounter of two opposing principles resolved?

The answer to this question is given in his essay "On the Character of European Enlightenment in its Relationship to the Enlightenment of Russia," printed in 1852 in *Moscow Anthology*, the publication of a Slavophile circle. This essay incurred censorship prohibition against the anthology; but there was not in it anything against the state. The sense of the essay is as follows:

Being trained in the West and knowing it perfectly, Kireyevsky harshly criticized its culture. The West had reached a spiritual dead end. The spiritual disease of Western culture was "the triumph of rationalism." In this lies its essence, as Professor V. Zenkovsky testifies: "The accusation of rationalism brought against the entire West arose in the West itself in the 18th century, both in France as well as in Germany."\*

Kireyevsky spoke in greater detail about this malady of Europe: "European enlightenment has now reached the fullness of its development, but the result of this development has been an almost universal feeling of discontent and betrayed hope. The very triumph of the European mind has revealed the one-sidedness of its fundamental aspirations.... Life itself has

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\* Archpriest V. V. Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, Volume II (Paris, 1948), p. 200.



been deprived of essential meaning.”\* “The cold analysis of many centuries has destroyed the foundations upon which, from the very beginning of its development, European enlightenment has rested. As a consequence, its own basic principles (i.e., those of Christianity) have become strange and alien to it. And this analysis which has destroyed its roots—this self-propelling knife of reason, this syllogism, recognizing nothing except itself and individual experience, this despotic rationality, this logical activity—is cut off from all man’s other cognitive powers” (Vol. II, p. 232). “The Western world, just as the East, originally lived by faith, but faith itself was impaired when Rome placed syllogisms above the consciousness of the whole of Christianity” (Vol. II, 285). Kireyevsky showed that this impairment resulted in the “development, first, of scholastic philosophy within faith, then of a Reformation of faith, and finally of philosophy outside of faith” (Vol. II, 284). “The Western Church substituted the outward authority of its hierarchy for the inner authority of truth (when arbitrarily and without the consent of the East it changed the Symbol of Faith).” This “has led to ... rationalism, i.e., the triumph of autonomous reason,”\*\* which in turn has led to the inevitable disintegration of spiritual wholeness. “Dualism and rationality are the ultimate expressions of Western culture.”\*\*\*

The West overlooked Eastern wisdom. Its scholars mastered in detail all the ancient philosophies: Egyptian, Persian, Chinese, Hindu, etc. But the mysticism of the Orthodox East was closed to them. Russia, on the other hand, inherited from Byzantium great treasures of this spiritual wisdom contained in

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\* Kireyevsky, *Complete Collected Works*, Vol. II, p. 231. (Further quotations will be marked in the text.)

\*\* Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 230.

\*\*\* Ibid., p. 232.

the writings of the Holy Fathers. Hence, Russia's historical task was to build on the rich Byzantine heritage a new spiritual culture which would impregnate the whole world. Kireyevsky posed the problem in all its fullness. According to him, Russian philosophy was to be built on "the deep, living and pure love for wisdom of the Church Fathers, which is the embryo of the higher philosophic principle" (Vol. II, 332).

"The task of Russian philosophy is not to reject Western thought, but to supplement it with what is revealed in higher spiritual vision—the living experience of 'higher knowledge'—in which wholeness of spirit, which was lost in the Fall and impaired by the triumph of logical thought in Western Christianity, is recovered."\*

Kireyevsky's essay, as was mentioned, was published in the Slavophile journal *Moscow Anthology*. Although Ivan Vasilievich, leaving the Westernizers, found himself in Slavophile circles, among whom were his closest friends A. S. Khomiakov and especially Koshelev, nevertheless in our view it is a mistake to number Kireyevsky among the "early Slavophiles." In the entire collection of his compositions there is not a single word which justifies giving him such a label. He fought as did his brother for the preservation of characteristics of Russian self-identity. Our Byzantine roots upon which Orthodoxy had been founded were as dear to him as they were to Constantine N. Leontiev. In the same essay he said: "The teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church came to Russia, one can say, together with the first toll of the Christian bell; by their lead the Russian mind became rooted and was nurtured."\*\* In a much earlier article ("A Reply to

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\* Ibid., p. 230.

\*\* "On the Character of European Enlightenment," in *Complete Collected Works*, Vol. II, p. 259.

Khomiakov”), he wrote: “These hermits, having left a life of luxury for the forest, in inaccessible gorges learned the writings of the profoundest sages of Christian Greece, and left there to teach the people who understood them.” This is consonant with the words of C. N. Leontiev: “The Byzantine spirit, the Byzantine principles and influence, like the complex fabric of the nervous system penetrates the great Russian social organism. Russia is indebted to her [Byzantium] for her past ...” (*Byzantium and Slavdom*). It is not surprising that the Westernizers, out of lack of understanding, considered Kireyevsky to be a Slavophile. “With my whole soul I respect Kireyevsky,” writes Granovsky, “despite his absolute opposition to our convictions. In him there is so much holiness, directness, and faith as I have not seen in anyone....” A. Herzen expressed himself sorrowfully in regard to Kireyevsky: “Between us were the walls of the Church....” The brothers Kireyevsky did not join a single one of the ideological currents which then existed. Herzen also testifies to this: “He (Kireyevsky) was intimately close neither with his friends nor with us. Beside him stood his brother and friend Peter. Both brothers would appear at a discussion or meeting looking sad; it was as if the tears had not yet dried, as if misfortune had struck yesterday,” This sorrow is understandable: neither then nor after their death were the Kireyevskys properly understood or valued. They still await a dispassionate researcher.... They both desired the renewal of national life. “What is national life?” asked Peter Kireyevsky. “It is like all that is alive, not captive to any formula. Tradition is needed.” This tradition was understood by them to be the foundation of genuine Russian culture and its transfiguration in the spirit of Orthodoxy.

In 1856, in the Slavophile anthology *Russian Conversations*, Kireyevsky’s last essay was published: “On the Possibility and

Necessity of New Principles in Philosophy.” This was the essay that laid a foundation for independent thought in Russian philosophy. Long before in 1848, the poet Khomiakov had dedicated the following verses to I.V. Kireyevsky’s ideas expressed in this essay:

Beyond the sea of meditation,  
Beyond, like waves, your thoughts, your dreams:  
A realm of bright illumination,  
Transcendent beauty, radiance gleams.  
Unfurl thy sail, thou trav’ler bold,  
Like the white wing of a swan;  
Prepare to journey, and behold,  
Before thine eyes, a new sun dawn.  
Return again with precious treasure;  
Bring nurture to the hungry heart,  
Granting burdened souls new leisure,  
Strength to weary wills impart.

Within several months after the publication of this essay its author died unexpectedly (June 11th, 1856). Ivan Vasilievich died from cholera in Petersburg, whither he had travelled to greet his son who had just graduated from the lyceum. His death terribly shook all those close to him. Peter Vasilievich died within the same year.

The French writer Gratieux, the biographer of Khomiakov, ends his book with these words: “He, like Ivan Kireyevsky, died suddenly from cholera. He also left unfinished the work he had inherited, and this twofold fate, interrupted by the same cause, in the pursuit of the same goal, must show that the true majesty of man consists rather in searching than in finishing, more in the attempt than in the attaining, more in beginning than in finishing. The care for its continuation is the work of the



Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky  
† June 11, 1856

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

Husbandman Himself. And this should serve as a consolation to the good laborer who departs so as to sleep in peace.”\*

Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky's body was buried near the Optina Monastery Catholicon at the feet of the grave of Elder Leonid. Learning of this, Metropolitan Philaret perceived the great honor which was shown by Optina Monastery to her devoted son.

### A LETTER OF I. V. KIREYEVSKY TO ELDER MACARIUS

*(From the book On the Bank of God's River, Volume II, by Sergei A. Nilus.)*

1855. July 6. Midnight.

Sincerely beloved and respected Father!

I have just read your letter from Kaluga to Natalia Petrovna and now I want to congratulate you with receiving the pectoral cross. Although I know that neither this nor any other visible distinction is of any substance to you, and that you would have received no such distinctions if it had been up to you, nonetheless it pleases me to hear about it. Perhaps this has occurred for the sake of all who love you. We have always seen how you bear within your heart the Cross of the Lord and co-suffer with Him in His love for sinners. Now this sanctity which is within your loving heart will be visible for all on your breast. May God grant you many, many successful years! And may God grant many years because of this to our pious Archpastor!

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\* A. Gratieux, *A. S. Khomiakov and the Movement of the Slavophiles* (Paris, 1939), p. 194.

The other part of your letter had a totally opposite effect on me. You write that you suffer from insomnia and that you have been unable to sleep for four nights already. Besides the fact that it is tormenting you, it is furthermore extremely harmful for the health. I think that your sleep escapes you because of your cares for all of us sinners who come to you with our suffering and sins. You are thinking about how to help those who ask your help, and this deprives you of your peace of heart. But think, dear Father, how our souls' health is dependent upon your physical health. Look at yourself as at your neighbor. One single sigh of yours to the merciful God for all of us is sufficient so that He will take us under His warm wing. Rest in this true faith, dear Father, for the sake of our health. Cast off those worrisome thoughts as enemies not only of your but also of our tranquility, and lying on your pillow, entrust your cares for us to the Lord Who does not sleep. Your love, which knows no bounds, is destroying your body.

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The acquaintance of I. V. Kireyevsky and our blessed Elder Macarius took place, according to the words of the wife of Ivan Vasilievich, Natalia Petrovna, under the following circumstances:

"I myself," Natalia Petrovna related, "became acquainted with Elder Macarius in 1833 through another ever-memorable Elder, his predecessor, Fr. Leonid; I became his spiritual daughter and until the present time I have been continually under his spiritual care. Ivan Vasilievich knew little of him until 1846. In March of that year the Elder was with us in Dolbino\* and Ivan Vasilievich first confessed to him. He

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\* The Kireyevsky estate in the Belev district of Tula province.

wrote Father for the first time from Moscow at the end of October, 1846, telling me: 'I have written to Father, asking him many questions which are important to me; I purposely didn't tell you about this because I feared that out of love for him you would somehow or other write to him. I am anxiously awaiting his reply. I am aware that it will be difficult for him to answer me.'

"I thanked Ivan Vasilievich for having told me that he had decided to write to the Elder, and I was convinced that Ivan Vasilievich would get a stunning response from the Elder. An hour had not passed when two letters were brought from the post office in the Elder's handwriting—one addressed to me, the other to Ivan Vasilievich. Without opening it, he asked me: 'What does this mean? Fr. Macarius has never written to me before!' After he read the letter, his face changed and he said: 'Amazing! Stunning! How can this be? In this letter are the answers to all my questions which I had only just now sent.'"

From that moment a noticeable seedling of spiritual trust for the Elder began to grow in Ivan Vasilievich. This would later be transformed into a fervent and boundless love for him and would bring forth fruit sixty and a hundred fold, for knowing that *wisdom could not otherwise be obtained except God gave her*, he, under the assistance of experienced guide, *besought the Lord* (Wisdom 8:21).

Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky and his brother Peter together with the wife of Ivan Vasilievich, Natalia Petrovna, are buried alongside the Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple at Optina Monastery next to the graves of the great Elders Leonid (in Schema Leo), Macarius and Ambrose. On the gravestone of Ivan Vasilievich the following inscription has been carved:



## LIFE OF IVAN V. KIREYEVSKY

*Court Councilor Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky. Born 1806, March 22nd. Reposed 1856, June 12th.*

*"I loved wisdom and sought her out from my youth. When I perceived that I could not otherwise obtain her, except God gave her me, I prayed unto the Lord and besought Him. For they shall see the end of the wise, and shall not understand what God in His counsel hath decreed of him."*

*"O Lord, receive my spirit!"*

What kind of wisdom Ivan Vasilievich loved is clearly evident from the words of his Elder:

"The heart flows with blood," the Elder wrote to one of his spiritual children, "in pondering our beloved fatherland Russia, our dear mother. Where is she racing headlong, what is she seeking? What does she await? Education increases but it is pseudo-education, it deceives itself in its hope. The young generation is not being nourished by the milk of the doctrine of our Holy Orthodox Church but has been poisoned by some alien, vile, venomous spirit, and how long can this continue? Of course, in the decrees of God's Providence it has been written what must come to pass, but this has been hidden from us in His unfathomable wisdom. Yet it seems that the time approaches when, according to the prophecy of the Fathers: "He who is working to save his soul will save it."

Obviously, it was not the wisdom of this age that Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky loved.



Archimandrite Macarius (Glukharev), missionary to the Altai.  
† May 18, 1847

*This Archimandrite Macarius was in correspondence with Optina and was in its same spirit, being a disciple of Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow.*

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# *The Letters of Elder Macarius*

BY PROFESSOR I.M. KONTZEVITCH\*

Preface by Helen Kontzevitch

ELDER MACARIUS was a great teacher of humility. "For," as St. Isaac the Syrian says, "humility, even without works, gains forgiveness for many offences. For without humility all our works are in vain, every virtue and every righteous labor." \*\*

Elder Macarius did not state anything new on his own, but in his teaching, as in a calm lake, the entire starry heaven of Patristic teaching was reflected.

His spiritual teaching, for the most part, is expressed in the collections of his letters. It is interesting to note his personal views of contemporary life. One may call his views "Optina" views. They were shared by spiritual figures of the "Optina spirit" such as, for example, Fr. Anthony (Bochkov), and "Optina" laymen like the Kireyevsky brothers and many others. In his Letters to Monastics (Letter #165) the Elder writes: "The

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\* I. M. Kontzevitch, *Optina Monastery and its Era* (Jordanville, New York: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1970), pp. 182-200.

\*\* *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*, Homily 69 (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), p. 338.

heart flows with blood, in pondering our beloved fatherland Russia, our dear mother. Where is she racing headlong, what is she seeking? What does she await? Education increases but it is pseudo-education, it deceives itself in its hope. The young generation is not being nourished by the milk of the doctrine of our Holy Orthodox Church but has been poisoned by some alien, vile, venomous spirit, and how long can this continue? Of course, in the decrees of God's Providence it has been written what must come to pass, but this has been hidden from us in His unfathomable wisdom. Yet it seems that the time approaches when, according to the prophecy of the Fathers: "He who is working to save his soul will save it." In his Letter #172 the Elder says: "It befits us to love Holy Russia, leaving aside European fashion, and to *repent* for our past attraction to it, to be steadfast in the Orthodox Faith, to pray to God and to offer repentance for the past." In the subsequent letter he writes: "Europe, our benefactor, has taught us external arts and sciences, but it has taken away inner goodness and shaken the Orthodox Faith, drawing money to itself."

More than once in the letters of Fr. Macarius, one will encounter similar disapproval by the Elder of Russian society's grasping at European customs and despising the previous good morality of Holy Russia.

In the Elder's letters we do not encounter any mention of Alexius Stepanovich Khomiakov [the Slavophile philosopher] or his worldview. It is uncertain whether Khomiakov ever went to Optina Monastery; and in any case he cannot be considered a disciple of the Optina Elders.

The Slavophiles regarded Byzantium negatively, while Optina Monastery regarded the Byzantine saints as the basis and foundation of her faith and ideology. I. V. Kireyevsky, who was absolutely of the same mind with the Elders and was one in spirit with them, personally taking an active part in the publi-

## THE LETTERS OF ELDER MACARIUS

cation of Patristic literature, cannot be called a "Slavophile." Such an appellation demonstrates ignorance of the history of Optina Monastery and its significance.

The letters of Elder Macarius were published in two volumes: 1) *The Collected Letters of the Optina Elder Hieroschemamonk Macarius of Blessed Memory to Monastics*, with an appendix: "Two Essays Compiled by the Elder on the Basis of the Word of God and the Writings of the Holy Fathers, as well as His Writings on Humility" (Moscow: The Kozelsk Optina Monastery of the Entrance of the Theotokos, 1862), 343 pages; 2) *The Collected Letters of the Optina Elder Hieroschemamonk Macarius of Blessed Memory to Laymen* (Moscow: The Kozelsk Optina Monastery of the Entrance of Theotokos, 1862), 700 pages.

Below we present the reader the first seven letters of the latter collection as rearranged by I. M. Kontzevitch not long before his death.

## INTRODUCTION

*If you love true knowledge, devote yourself  
to the ascetic life, for mere theoretical  
knowledge puffs up a man.*

St. Mark the Ascetic\*

At the basis of every construction one must lay the correct foundation. The high quality and durability of what has been created depends on this.

This is true whether it be the construction of a house in the material world, or an acquisition in the sphere of intellectual knowledge, or inward activity in the spiritual life. In a word, in everything where creation takes place, everything depends on the base, the foundation on which it is built. A house may be built on rock or on sand; in the latter case its fall will be great, as we are told in the Gospel (cf. Matt. 7: 27).

Our intention is to study the works of the Holy Fathers and, in the most recent epoch, the letters of Elder Macarius, organically linked with the Patristic works.

What must we place at the foundation of our study?

First of all, we must provide ourselves with a clear realization of what the writings of the Holy Fathers are. Besides being canonical and liturgical treasures, they encompass the grace-filled psychological experience of many centuries of Orthodox

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\* St. Mark the Ascetic, "On Those Who Think that They are Made Righteous by Works" 3:7, in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Vol. I (London: Faber and Faber, 1979) p. 125.

ascetics. Over the centuries the Eastern ascetics, with the aid of the grace of the Holy Spirit, perfected their knowledge concerning the soul of man, the laws governing the life of the soul, and the path of her spiritual ascent. Their writings analyze and point out the correct and only path to the lofty perfection of holiness and the vision of God, for all times and for all peoples.

Their works show a wondrous oneness of mind, and everything organically flows from one thing to another. The Holy Fathers, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, spoke only the truth, and therefore their authority for us must be absolute.

Now let us investigate with what attitude we must approach the present task.

The Lord says: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled* (Matt 5:6). Here the law of knowledge of higher spiritual truths is made known to us: the goal of knowledge must be truth for truth's sake, for the sake of God's righteousness contained in it. Knowledge must come out of a desire for truth and out of love for it. Then and only then will it be revealed to us.

But there can also be another approach, when truth becomes no longer a goal in and of itself but a means of achieving other goals.

In this case there can be many various motives: an honest yearning to achieve success in life; or else simple vainglory—to make a brilliant display of the wealth of one's knowledge; or perhaps even plain curiosity—to get a greater smattering of all kinds of information. There can be yet other motivations.

In all these cases knowledge remains superficial, external—it does not penetrate to the depth of the soul and, like the seed in the Gospel parable (cf. Matt. 13: 20-21) that fell into stony ground, it does not bear fruit and can cause only harm. True knowledge of God's righteousness—of the Gospel commandments—unfailing draws one to the fulfillment of the Gospel

commandments, but *mere theoretical knowledge puffs up a man* (St. Mark the Ascetic).\*

No matter what his station in life, such a superficial understanding of truth cannot save a man, be he an educated theologian, a rector of a theological academy, a senior hierarch of the Church, an ascetic in a monastery, and so forth—not to mention those who live an entirely worldly life.

Taking this into consideration, we do not marvel at the fact that theologians and hierarchs have fallen into heresy and initiated schisms and disturbances in the Church, and that renowned ascetics have fallen into delusion and perished.

All of this occurs because “the builders have rejected the stone which must be at the head of the corner” (cf. Ps. 117:22). This Rock is Christ and His commandments! Neglect of the commandments of God leads to an increase of passionateness; and every passion, like smoke, obscures our mental gaze, so that it can no longer see the truth.

The most striking example of this is given to us in the Gospel in the person of Judas the betrayer: even his exclusive proximity to the Savior, his apostolic calling, did not save him from perdition. Judas like the other apostles was given authority to work miracles, to cast out demons; he was an eyewitness of numberless miracles and the miraculous deeds of the Lord Himself. As an apostle, Judas knew the mystical meaning of the parables and teaching of Christ, to him the Mysteries of God had been revealed. And, in spite of all this, the passion of avarice remained untreated. But that is not all, it grew to such horrendous proportions that it even moved Judas to betray his Teacher.

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\* *Ibid.*



## SEVEN LETTERS OF ELDER MACARIUS TO A LAYMAN

The first forty letters were written to a single individual over a period of eleven years: from May of 1840 to January of 1851.

This person was a young wealthy landowner. He worked as an official, not out of need, but so as to bring some benefit to his neighbor. He read spiritual books, he strove to attain passionlessness, but it was not given to him: there were constant "failures." He grew despondent. "Woe is me!" "I am a wicked and slothful servant and therefore am consigned to hell and death;" "I am the lost sheep."

There was disturbance and conflict in his soul. He could not decide what path in life to choose: whether to go to a monastery or remain in the world.

Then one can notice a certain gap in the correspondence. Perhaps, because of the intimacy of the correspondence, the recipient decided not to present some letters to the public, but it is possible that there were no letters written following his personal meeting with the Elders.

After this, another period of his life begins: he gets married. Their first son dies; other sorrows and difficulties and battles in the spiritual life follow.

On account of all this, the spiritual son of the Elder turns to the latter for counsel and consolation. The clairvoyant Elder, seeing his state, gives counsel corresponding specifically to his need, but not from himself, not from his own understanding, but from the Holy Fathers whom he knew to perfection.

Elder Macarius skillfully hides his clairvoyance so that it is very easy not to notice it.

## LETTER ONE

### *Reply*

May the small offering which you brought, the icon lamp, be acceptable before God. It is a symbol of your zeal, but not a substitute for your good works. With regard to the latter you must exert effort so that your heart may be set aright *according to God's commandments*; you must ask for this His help, since *without Him ye can do nothing* (John 15:5). But the devil, *like a lion seeking whom he may devour* (I Peter 5:8), opposes our good intention, wars against and *inclines us to the passions*.

When he does not succeed in doing this, then he instills in one *an opinion about one's own virtues*—warring on the right and the left against the soldier of Christ.

A sure weapon against him is *humility*. One must take care to acquire it *in every way*, during rebukes as well as with regard to the infirmities of the soul.

Condemnation is a sign of *pride* and so is *anger*.

Those who wish to correct themselves but are conquered by the passions, *providentially* receive this trial in order to humble them *involuntarily*, and by this they *attract the grace of God* to themselves.

You must have *humility* on a daily basis, then you will not be conquered by anger. When you are conquered by it, *do not be troubled*, but repent and humble yourself and with God's help it will depart from you.

## LETTER TWO

I set forth my poor judgment not from my own meager understanding, but—hoping in the God of wisdom and Lord,

## THE LETTERS OF ELDER MACARIUS

Who grants speech even to irrational beasts for the benefit of His people—I set it forth from His word and from the writings of the God-inspired Fathers, who after an active life left us their teaching as guidance.

Faith is the foundation of all good deeds, and without faith it is impossible to please the Lord (Heb. 11:6). She is the gift of God (cf. Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19-20).

The Holy Apostle James teaches: *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works, can faith save him?... Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also* (James 2:14,17,26).

For our salvation one needs not simply faith alone, but works also. The words of the Apostle Paul: *By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified* (Romans 3:20) refer to the works of the Old Testament laws and not to the new commandments of grace.

The reasoning that justification is obtained by faith alone without works is *Lutheran*, heterodox.

But *he who trusts in his own works even with faith errs*.

After baptism it is without fail necessary to keep God's commandments, by which the grace given at *baptism* is preserved and, to the measure of one's proficiency in the commandments, is increased.

Having transgressed the commandments, by repentance one again acquires grace. All this acts through faith, but without faith one could not perform deeds of repentance.

In every case both faith and deeds are involved.

But one must not think that one's deeds merit salvation: the merits of the Savior afford us this.

One must do good deeds but not place hope in them. To place hope in one's deeds is a sign of *self-reliance*. The Lord does not always grant us strength to perform good deeds, but rather

allows the passions to be strengthened in us so that we might acknowledge our weakness and humble ourselves before God, remembering God's commandment: *Whenever you do what has been commanded you, say we are unprofitable servants, for we have done that which it was our duty to do* (Luke 17:10). Read in Volume One of *The Philokalia* the book by St. Mark the Ascetic, "On Those Who Think that They are Made Righteous by Works" (Chapters 1-7, 11-24).

Knowing that deeds are necessary for salvation and striving to perform them, one finds no strength in oneself, one is conquered by the passions, one is troubled and perplexed as to what to do. Of course, placing one's hope in God and on the prayers of those who pleased Him can help much in the work of our salvation, but becoming troubled at one's fall proceeds from spiritual pride. The evil spirits oppose our salvation: our *adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour* (I Peter 5:8).

"If you love true knowledge, devote yourself to the ascetic life, for mere theoretical knowledge puffs up a man" (St. Mark the Ascetic).\*

*Our warfare is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and against the world rulers of darkness of this age and against spiritual wickedness in the underheavens* (Eph. 6:12).

Fighting with such foes, one must have a strong weapon against them, and that is *humility*, which they cannot oppose. But in doing battle with them without humility, self-reliantly and proudly, one will always be defeated. For this reason the Lord allows us to fall so that we might humble ourselves (see Homily 51 of St. Isaac the Syrian and also in Volume One of

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\* *Ibid.*

## THE LETTERS OF ELDER MACARIUS

*The Philokalia*, Homilies 7 and 46 of St. John of Karpathos). *A heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise* (Ps. 50:17) and *The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart and He will save the humble of spirit* (Ps. 33:18).

### LETTER THREE

The severing of one's will and the distrust of one's understanding is the first means of acquiring humility, and from the knowledge of this, humility is engendered. But you, just considering this, are disturbed in mind and heart, the root of which is self-love and pride.

Until the present time, by your own will you have based your correction and salvation on your own opinion and understanding. From this your strength in struggle has grown weak, for on account of this self-opinion the enemy has free and forceful access to you.

What is done with obedience without arguing is carried out extremely easily and peacefully with profit. (St. Theodore of Edessa writes how the enemy does not tolerate someone who is in obedience to his spiritual father and what revenge he takes against him. See St. Theodore of Edessa, chapter 44.)\*

You write: "One should reason less so that one's thoughts can be occupied with prayer." But your misfortune is that knowing all this you do not carry it out and, moreover, feel that *you will be without defense at the Dread Judgment*. If this latter strongly effects and troubles you, it is the scheme of the enemy and the fruit of pride.

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\* St. Theodoros the Great Ascetic, "A Century of Spiritual Texts," *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Vol. II (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 21-22.

Acknowledging yourself to be a sinner you must not despair, but *humble yourself* more and marvel at God's love for mankind, for He forebears you and awaits your conversion and repentance. (See St. John Chrysostom, *Eighth Discourse On Repentance.*)\*

"Repentance is a plaster for sins, the destruction of transgression, the wiping away of tears, boldness before God, a weapon against the devil, a sword to cut off his head, hope of salvation, the annihilation of despair. It opens heaven for mankind, it leads him into paradise, it conquers the devil....

"Are you a sinner? Do not despair.... Your weapon against the devil is *your forbearance*.... If you sin every day, then you must repent every day. Have you decayed today because of sin? Renew yourself by repentance.... 'Spending my whole life in sins, if I repent, shall I be saved?' Of course you shall!

"Repentance is attended by God's mercy. God's love for mankind is immeasurable and His goodness is beyond words, but your wickedness has limits. Your sin, whatever kind of sin it might be, is a human sin, but God's mercy is ineffable. So trust that it will exceed your malice. Imagine a spark falling into the sea: can it withstand the sea and continue to glow? How small is a spark in contrast to the sea, and how small is sin in contrast to God's love for mankind! Incomparably less, inasmuch as the sea, though it is great, nonetheless has its bounds, while God's love for mankind is unlimited."\*\* (See also Volume III of *The Philokalia*, St. Peter Damascene).

You ask to be taught how to acquire the gift of *prayer*. This request is like asking a poor person for riches. I consider myself in this respect to be in a very miserable position. How can I

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\* *Collected Works of St. John Chrysostom*, Vol. II, Book One (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Theological Academy, 1896), pp. 375-6.

\*\* *Ibid.*

teach someone about something that I do not have? Nevertheless, I will present *the teaching of the Holy Fathers* about this.

According to God's commandment and that of the Apostle and the teaching of the Holy Fathers, it is our duty to pray about everything, that is, for our preservation, our salvation, for the forgiveness of sins, for our neighbors and about much else. But we must do so with *great humility, and not seek the gift [of prayer] for ourselves*. The Lord Himself will grant this gift only to those who are worthy of it, as St. Isaac the Syrian writes in his Second Homily: "The things of God come of themselves, without one being aware of it. Yes, but only if the place is clean and not defiled. If the pupil of your soul's eye is not pure, do not venture to gaze at the orb of the sun, lest you be deprived of your sight (which is simple faith and humility, confession from the heart and your small labors according to your capacity) and lest you be cast aside in a lone region of the noetic world (which is the outer darkness, outside of God, an image of hell) like that man who shamelessly entered into the wedding feast with unclean garments" (cf. Matt. 22:11-13).\*

St. Macarius the Great writes: "The crown of every good endeavor and the highest of achievements is unceasing diligence in prayer; through it we daily come to acquire the other virtues requested by God.... But if you are not adorned with humility of wisdom, simplicity of soul and goodness, an image of prayer will profit nothing."\*\* And he teaches how one must begin to persevere in prayer: "First, one must believe in the Lord steadfastly and give oneself wholly to the words of His commandments and renounce the world altogether, so that the mind is

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\* *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*, Homily 2, pp. 13-14.

\*\* "St. Symeon Metaphrastes, Paraphrase of the Homilies of St. Makarios of Egypt," *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Vol. III, Chapter 2 "On Prayer," pp. 292-293.

not distracted by any visible thing but ever remains unshakable in prayer, continually waiting in expectant faith for the visitation and care of the Lord, keeping the aim of the mind always in Him.”\*

“When someone forces himself only toward prayer, while he does not exert or force himself with regard to humility of wisdom, love, gentleness and all the other independent virtues, the result is much as follows: Sometimes in response to his entreaty divine grace visits him, because God in His goodness and love does respond to the petitions of those who call upon Him; but because he has not habituated and trained himself in the practice of the other virtues, either he lapses from the grace he has received, falling through self-conceit, or else he does not dedicate himself to this grace and grow in it. The abode and resting-place of the Holy Spirit are humility of wisdom, love and gentleness and the other holy commandments of Christ.”\*\*

“Unless humility of wisdom and love, simplicity of soul and goodness regulate our prayer, this prayer—or, rather this mask of prayer—cannot profit us at all.”\*\*\*

See what is entailed in the preparation for prayer, in its execution and in the attainment of the gift of prayer. Examine yourself to see whether you stand at that level, and what measure you have attained in the heights of that virtue, which not even many of those who have abandoned the world and renounced everything have attained.

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\* *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, Homily 19:1 (London: S.P.C.K., 1921), p. 157.

\*\* “St. Symeon Metaphrasis, Paraphrase of the Homilies of St. Makarios of Egypt,” *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Vol. III, “The Freedom of the Intellect,” #135, pp. 345-6.

\*\*\* “Ibid., Chapter 2 “On Prayer,” #22, p. 293.



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St. Isaac the Syrian says: "Just as among ten thousand men scarcely one will be found who has fulfilled the commandments and what pertains to the Law with but a small deficiency, and who has attained limpid purity of soul; so only one among thousands will be found who after much vigilance has been accounted worthy to attain pure prayer, and to break through that boundary, and to gain experience of that mystery. Indeed the majority of men have in no wise been deemed worthy of pure prayer, but only a very few. But as to that mystery which is after pure prayer and lies beyond it, there is scarcely to be found a single man from generation to generation who by God's grace has attained thereto."\*

But about those desirous to attain some gift before the time, St. John of the Ladder writes: "Scan the mind of inexperienced novices and there you will find deluded notions: a desire for stillness, the strictest fast, uninterrupted prayer, for absolute freedom from vanity, for unbroken remembrance of death, for continual compunction, for perfect freedom from anger, for deep silence and surpassing purity. *If by Divine Providence, they are without these to start with*, they leap in vain from one thing to another, having been deceived. *For the enemy urges them to seek these perfections prematurely* so that they may not persevere and attain them in due course." \*\*

Read further in *The Philokalia*, Chapter Eight of St. Gregory of Sinai from midway "Concerning the simple..." and in his "Instruction to Hesychasts," Chapter Seven: "If some people have gone astray..." and you will see how remembrance of God or noetic prayer is higher than all other activities, and what

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\* *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*, Homily 23 (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), p. 117.

\*\* St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 4:118 (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1978), p. 52.

chastisement befalls those who dare to practice it at their own direction.\*

I have written all this to you not to lead you away from prayer, but to suggest how dangerous it is to seek its gifts prematurely, in a self-willed way and above one's means.

You can see what kind of delusion comes to pass from this, for: "The greater the good a person has in his care, the greater the attacks the devil launches on him. Hence he must keep strict watch for the fruits of love, humility of wisdom and the rest" (St. Macarius the Great).\*\* Furthermore, as I think you are aware, in the absence of humility, *it is dangerous to seek the lofty things*.

Pray simply at the appointed time a fixed quantity of prayers with humility, *from which quality of prayer, too, will be born*, forcing yourself to prayer. About this St. Zosima writes: "Whoever forces himself to pray does so by exertion of the will, but he who prays with peace does so through grace."\*\*\*

St. Peter Damascene writes: "*He granteth prayer to him that prayeth* (I Sam. 2:9), that is, to one who truly prays the prayer of the body God gives the prayer of the intellect" (Book 2, Homily 24).\*\*\*\*

\* St. Gregory of Sinai, "On Silence and Prayer," Chapter 8, and "Instructions to Hesychasts," Chapter 7: "On Prelest and Other Subjects," *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), pp. 88-9, 83.

\*\* St. Symeon Metaphrastes, Paraphrase of the Homilies of St. Makarios of Egypt, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Vol. III, "On Prayer," Chapter 2:19, p. 292.

\*\*\* "Discourses of St. Zosima," in *Selected Ears of Food for the Soul* compiled by St. Paisius Velichkovsky (Moscow: Optina Monastery, 1848), p. 166.

\*\*\*\* St. Peter Damascene, "Conscious Awareness in the Heart," *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Vol. III, Book Two, Homily 24, p. 277.

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One should not be troubled on account of distraction in prayer, but should humble oneself and acknowledge one's wretchedness. But we can find solace in what St. John of the Ladder teaches: "Constantly wrestle with your thought, and whenever it wanders call it back to you. God does not require ... prayer completely free of distractions. Do not despond when your thoughts are plundered, but take courage and unceasingly recall your wandering thought. Inviolability is proper only to an angel."\*

One can pray also at a time not designated for prayer, and at all times, but having taken this sword against the enemies, one must be careful that one does not turn it against oneself, "before the time."

Although many fathers have written about prayer and its activity, they have done so for those who have reached a certain advancement and have progressed through the various stages. Nevertheless, look what precautions they have taken, knowing the great multitude of the enemy's traps which appear in the guise of truth and which delude those who brazenly advance to this sacred noetic activity, who desire and seek the gift for themselves.

St. Isaac the Syrian says: "Therefore I am admonishing you, O holy man, lest such a thing should enter your mind. Above all things acquire patience in what befalls you. In great humility and contrition of heart with respect to our thoughts and whatever pertains to us, let us ask God for the forgiveness of our sins and for humility of soul.

"One of the saints wrote: 'If a man does not count himself a sinner, his prayer is not accepted by the Lord.' But if you say that some of the Fathers wrote on purity of soul, health of

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\* St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 4:92, p. 45.

soul, dispassion ... know that they did not do this so that we should seek these things prematurely, for it is written, *The Kingdom of God cometh not with the observation* (cf. Luke 17:20) of expectancy. Those in whom such an intention is found have gained for themselves pride and downfall. But for our part, let us put in good order the realm of our heart by deeds of repentance and discipline well-pleasing to God, and thus things which are of God will come by themselves, if the place of the heart is pure and undefiled. But to seek '*with observation*' these lofty things which are of God—this is rejected by the Church of God; and those who have so received them have rather gained for themselves pride and downfall. This is a sign not that a man loves God, but rather that his soul is sick."\*

Whoever, before training completely in the first stage (namely, total cleansing of the heart from the passions by outward ascetic labors and the fulfilling of the commandments of God), proceeds to that second activity, that is, divine vision, seeking exalted spiritual gifts—such a one will incur the wrath of God. For he did not first mortify his members *which are upon the earth* (Col. 3:5) by the patient endurance of labor, which is *bearing the reproach of the cross*, but he dared to imagine in his mind the glory of the cross.

In other words, first comes the struggle of Golgotha, and then the glory of the Resurrection: consolation in prayer and exalted gifts.

And again: "Every man, who before training completely in the first stage, proceeds to that second activity, out of passionate longing for its sweetness (or rather, should I say, out of sloth) has wrath come upon him, because he did not

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\* Homily 55 in Russian. In English, see "Epistle to Abba Symeon," *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*, Appendix B, p. 434-5.

## THE LETTERS OF ELDER MACARIUS

first *mortify his members which are upon the earth* (Col 3:5), that is, heal the infirmity of his thought by patient endurance of the labor which belongs to the bearing the reproach of the cross. For he dared to imagine in his mind the cross' glory."\* The first stage is "the labor accomplished by the activity of the soul's incensive part in the patient endurance of the tribulation of the flesh ... which purifies the passionate part of the soul by the power of zeal. The second is called divine vision carried out by the subtle working of the intellect, in steady divine rumination, in constancy of prayer and in other such practices."\*\*

Such is the teaching of the Fathers, by whose prayers may the Lord enable you to walk undeluded on the true path of humility, and to receive salvation of soul.

### LETTER FOUR

Bringing to mind Communion of the Holy Mysteries, you say: "If the Lord will look down on my wretchedness, then perhaps sometime I will be admitted to Communion of the fountain of immortality. Woe is me! I am the wicked and slothful servant and therefore I am the prey of hell and death!"

Reply: To consider yourself worthy is a sign of unworthiness. Sts. Basil the Great and John Chrysostom say: "I know, O Lord, that I partake unworthily...." "I am not worthy, O Lord, that thou shouldest enter under the roof of my soul"... (from the Prayers before Holy Communion).

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\* *Ibid.*, Homily Two, p. 13.

\*\* *Ibid.*

## LETTER FIVE

St. Peter Damascene writes: "Even if you are not what you should be, you should not despair. It is bad enough that you have sinned; why in addition do you wrong God by regarding Him in your ignorance as powerless? Is He, who for your sake created the great universe that you behold, incapable of saving your soul? And if you say that this fact, as well as His incarnation, only makes your condemnation worse, then repent; and He will receive your repentance, as He accepted that of the prodigal son (cf. Luke 15:20) and the prostitute (cf. Luke 7:37-50). But if repentance is too much for you, and you sin out of habit even when you do not want to, show humility like the publican (cf. Luke 18:13): this is enough to ensure your salvation. For he who sins without repenting, yet does not despair, must of necessity regard himself as the lowest of creatures, and will not dare to judge or censure anyone. Rather, he will marvel at God's compassion, and will be full of gratitude to his Benefactor, and so may receive many other blessings as well. Even if he is subject to the devil in that he sins, yet from fear of God he disobeys the enemy when the latter tries to make him despair. *Because of this he has his portion with God.*"\* He writes further concerning *The Great Benefit of True Repentance*: "It is always possible to make a new start by means of repentance. *Have you fallen*, it is written, *now arise* (cf. Prov. 24:16). And if you fall again, then rise again, without despairing at all of your salvation, no matter what happens. So long as you do not surrender yourself willingly to the enemy, your patient endur-

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\* St. Peter Damascene, "That We Should Not Despair Even If We Sin Many Times," *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Vol. III, Book One, pp. 160-1.

## THE LETTERS OF ELDER MACARIUS

ance, combined with self-reproach, will suffice for your salvation.”\*

“So do not despair in any way, ignoring God’s help, for He can do whatever He wishes. On the contrary, place your hope in Him and He will do one of these things: either through trials and temptations, or in some other way which He alone knows, He will bring about your restoration; or He will accept your patient endurance and humility in place of works; or because of your hope He will act lovingly towards you in some other way of which you are not aware, and so will save your shackled soul. *Only do not abandon your Physician*, for otherwise you will suffer senselessly the twofold death because you do not know the hidden ways of God.”\*\*

It seems that this should raise you from the pit of despair. I reminded you that your disturbance proceeds from spiritual pride. St. Abba Dorotheus says: “If passion assails us, we ought not to be disturbed, for to be disturbed by these experiences is sheer ignorance and pride and because we are not recognizing our own condition and we are *running away from labor*, as the Fathers have said.”\*\*\*

I wish for you to grow wise in the spiritual combat, come to know of the snares of the enemy, and, most of all, humble yourself. Humility is the most powerful weapon against the enemy and his arrows.

May the Lord strengthen you for this warfare and may He crown you on that day, but for now do not seek recompense for yourself: the humble man does not see himself worthy of this

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\* *Ibid.*, p. 170.

\*\* *Ibid.*

\*\*\* St. Abba Dorotheus, “On Enduring Temptation Calmly and Thankfully,” *Dorotheus of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1977) p. 194.

but he is great before God. The saints regarded themselves as worse than all creation in their own thoughts, but God glorified them.

## LETTER SIX

Glory be to God Who has granted you together with life the possibility to enjoy its good things. Feeling inexpressible thankfulness for His compassions, one must strive, by the fulfilling of His holy commandments, to acquire His love according to the words of His holy lips: *If a man loveth me, he will keep my words* (John 14:23).

You complain about the lack of time, about the waves of the sea of life and about the impossibility, consequently, of taking care for your soul. But amidst the waves in our relationships with people we are given the means of caring for the soul, that is, of fulfilling of the commandments of God. How can we fulfill them if we have no intercourse with men?

You are still not at that level where you might be able to lead a totally reclusive and solitary life and to war solely with demons or to take delight in noetic vision of the hidden mysteries, about which you have already read in Homily 55 and Homily 2 of St. Isaac the Syrian, while St. John of the Ladder does not permit one who has some opinion about himself to dare to set foot on the way of stillness.\*

For the fulfilling of God's commandments one must endure much from the world, the flesh and the devil, for *all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution* (II Tim. 3:12), says the Apostle Paul, and *whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God* (James 4:4). *The carnal mind is enmity against God* (Romans 8:7). *The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh*

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\* Cf. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 27:36, p. 203.



## THE LETTERS OF ELDER MACARIUS

*about, seeking whom he may devour* (I Peter 5:8). Here, from these three enemies, are our hindrances to fulfilling God's commandments. These enemies are the world (that is, the passions), our flesh, and the devil.

They oppose us also in the monastery, but in the monastery there are fewer temptations, and amidst a small number of people it is more convenient to fulfill the commandments of God. (See St. Abba Dorotheus "On Renunciation")\*

But you have still not found the strength to abandon the things of life. What should you do? Emulate St. Peter who was drowning in the waves: *O Lord, save me for I perish* (Matt. 14:30) and St. David who cried out: *Show me, O Lord, the way wherein I should walk* (Ps. 142:8) and *remove from me the way of unrighteousness* (Ps. 118:29).

The reason for all your falls is *pride*: its offshoots—self-exaltation, a high opinion about yourself, despising others and condemnation of them. No matter how we strive to do good deeds, yet in light of these actions *they are tainted* and bring no benefit because they are criminal and directly opposed to the will of God.

The teaching of the Lord and His life are meekness and humility, which He taught us to learn of Him (cf. Matt. 11:29). The cause of all our evil is pride, and the mediator of all good is humility!

If even in the performance of good deeds we must have a broken and humble heart and a contrite spirit, which *God will not despise* (Ps. 50: 19), how much more must we in the poverty of our present state cast ourselves into the abyss of humility.

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\* *Dorotheus of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings*, "On Renunciation of the World," p. 90-92.

## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

Read the Patristic books, but read the ones which speak about the active life because in your state contemplation can bring more harm than good. From the books on the active life you will learn your own weakness and humble your heart, and then God, gazing down upon you, will send His aid for the fulfillment of His will.

Though you might have a thorough knowledge of the Scripture, yet with self-opinion you will not gain any profit. For the enemy knows how to ambush and deceive such ones by false consolation. As he appears in the form of an angel of light (cf. II Cor. 11:14), so too in noetic activity and the activity of the soul he produces his own movements, from which may the Lord deliver you (cf. II Thes. 2:4).

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The Lord has care for His creatures and ordereth all things by His wise Providence and foreknowledge, chastising one and rewarding another. His ways are inscrutable for us.

## LETTER SEVEN

You write that while reading spiritual books you become despondent—you force yourself to fast, keep vigil, pray, and you think that you are doing this without knowing why. You know that you must do this out of love for God, yet you do not feel this love within you. When one thought leaves you, another takes its place and the passions pass one after another through your heart; you ask my advice.

*Reply:* The reading of the Patristic books is very necessary and beneficial for the knowledge of the will of God, for the Fathers fulfilled the word of God handed down to us in the Scripture; they lived the active life and bequeathed us an example in their teachings.

## THE LETTERS OF ELDER MACARIUS

If you read only the word of God without reading the Fathers, then, not knowing their manner of life and warfare, you will think that you can fulfill it and will not humble yourself.

But in reading the writings of the Fathers you must strive to practice what is written. Not having reached their stature, you should acknowledge your weakness, humble yourself and receive the mercy of God which is especially conferred upon the humble.

In the Patericon the following is written:

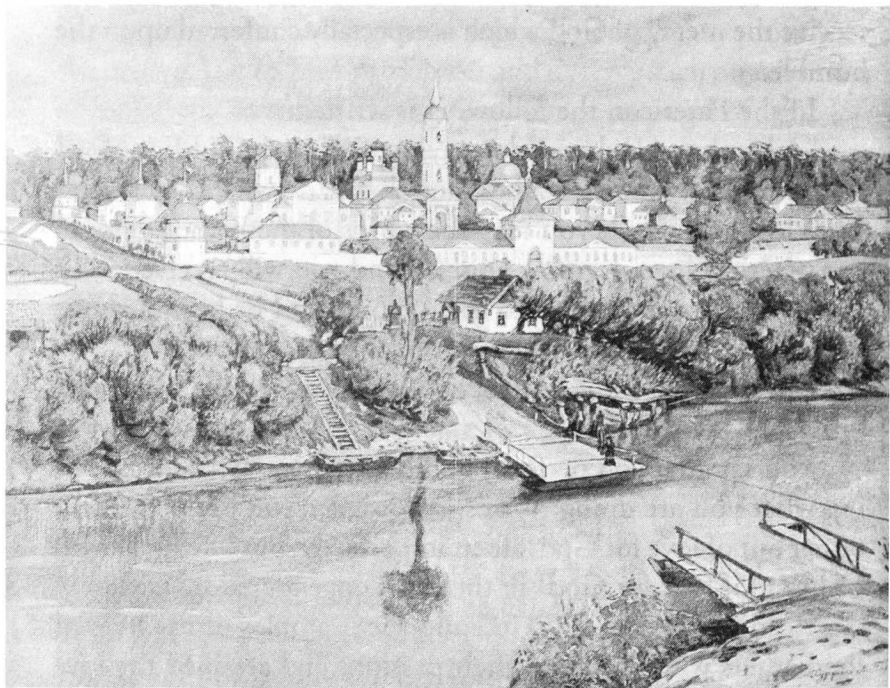
“A brother asked an elder, saying: ‘What should I do, for I read the writings of the Fathers and do not do what they teach?’ The elder replied: ‘If you read the words of the Fathers and do not practice them, humble yourself and you will receive God’s mercy. But if you don’t read them, you won’t be humbled nor will you receive God’s mercy.’”

Therefore, reading instructive teachings on the active life brings no small benefit.

You say that you perform bodily activities “without knowing what you are doing”—this is not true. You perform them rather out of love for God, albeit imperfectly, but having a small embryo [of love for God] in the heart engendered by faith.

Reading the word of God and the examples of the lives of the Fathers who overcame their passions and attained the love of God, we believe [the word of God] and force ourselves to first perform bodily actions and show love for our neighbor through our deeds.

When we have accomplished this properly, with humility, then we pass on to *vision*; our souls find consolation and our godly love (for God) is clearly manifested.



General view of Optina Monastery.  
A watercolor of the 19th century.

## 5

## *Reminiscences of a Spiritual Son of Elder Macarius*

*The following personal testimony is an excerpt from Holiness under a Bushel: The Mystery of the Orthodox Monastic Soul,\* a book that “sets upon a candle-stand” that very light of sanctity that shone in Optina Monastery.*

ONLY our monastic heart knows what we have lost in the late Elder Macarius. But what was lost by the world, or at the very least by those of its representatives whose hearts have still retained the ability to comprehend the truth, is shown by the manuscript lying before me, composed by an eminent spiritual son of the late Fr. Macarius and sent to our Monastery with a request for Fr. Archimandrite Moses’ blessing on its publication. The manuscript begins as follows:

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\* Compiled by Sergei Nilus, Sergiev Posad, 1911, pp. 269ff. This is from the journal of Schemamonk Euthemius (Trunov), Abbot Moses’ correspondence secretary.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Please excuse me if the beginning of my story appears to be a little far from the point. I can't simply begin it; I need to show how I happened to become acquainted with one of the greatest Elders of Orthodox Russia, who later became my mentor in Christian activity and my spiritual father, a fervent man of prayer before God, at Whose altar he stands wearing a crown of righteousness....

And so, a few words about myself.

I am a Russian landowner and, by the grace of God, a married man. My wife and I received a modern education; however, being brought up by my late mother in Orthodoxy, I had preserved in my soul a spark of the fear of God, and neither the student life nor service in the Hussars nor any urban amusements extinguished this spark in me. It is true that, like others, I rarely visited the Church of God. I forgot my morning and evening prayers and I loved the theaters and various other social entertainments. But there were moments when, in my soul, my conscience began to speak with irresistible reproaches and I, with a deep sigh of remorse for my degradation, turned my thoughts to the One Who said, *I do not desire the death of a sinner, but that he repent and live forever* (Ezek. 33:11).

Once I had to travel to various places on business. This was during a raw and gloomy autumn; the mud was very deep, and my business situation didn't please me very much. Thus, I was in the very ugliest disposition of spirit. My wife, meeting me on the threshold of our house, said that some acquaintances had come to see us. I wasn't up to seeing them, but what could I do? I changed my clothes and came into the sitting room. After I greeted the guests, we seated ourselves around the boiling samovar and carried on a conversation about hay, buckwheat

and other such "thought-provoking" reflections. Our discussion grew louder by the hour, and we interspersed it with jokes and tales about various rural events. Suddenly, it was announced that a monk was waiting in the foyer. After a few minutes of hesitation, we decided to receive this unexpected guest. The monk came in and, after praying before the icons, declared that he was K., a hierodeacon of the Optina Monastery. After the usual greetings, he explained the purpose of his visit, which was that he had been sent from the Monastery to collect charitable alms. It was already late. My wife and I invited him to spend the night, and he agreed. After that, we resumed our interrupted conversation, and soon we were in our usual rut of rumors and gossip. The presence of the monk constrained us a little, so we tried to carry on more of the conversation in French. The monk was silent. Feeling the awkwardness of the situation, we tried somehow to include our guest in the general conversation. I don't remember just how it happened, but the conversation turned to religious questions. Easier questions were raised at the beginning, followed by more serious disputes. The monk was still silent. Finally, when I began to speak in a sermonizing tone in an effort to stop the inappropriate polemics, our guest broke his silence. Partly out of curiosity, partly out of politeness, all our group stopped arguing and listened attentively to the modest, simple words of the monk. He spoke adequately, then, after taking his leave from us, he left us and went into the room that had been assigned him. After an hour, each of us went away with thoughts quite different from those everyone had at the beginning of the evening.

The next day the monk left, having received an adequate offering from us.

At breakfast, we gathered in the same group as the day before, but the conversation was not cohesive, and it flagged. Our conscience wouldn't give us any peace, having been awak-

ened by the simple yet powerful words of the monk; what had seemed to us before to be empty and meaningless now stood out before our newly opened inner eyes—at least, that was how I felt. It was still a long way from a struggle with sin, but a consciousness of my own depravity had already appeared. My way of life went on as before, but my peace of mind had already been broken.

## 2. FIRST VISIT TO OPTINA

The following year, the same Fr. K. visited us again. We were as glad to see him as if he were an old acquaintance, and we begged him to spend the entire day with us. We didn't even feel time passing that day, which was wonderful for us. It was so delightful to listen to the words of a man so imbued with the spiritual wisdom of experienced ascetics of the spiritual life. It was very natural that my wife and I wanted to visit the Optina Monastery and become acquainted with the ascetics of that place, especially with the Elders—Hieromonk Leonid (Leo) and Hieromonk Macarius, about whom Fr. K. had told us many interesting things. However, at that time our plan remained only a plan. It was already the next year when my wife and I fulfilled our sincere wish and went to the Optina Monastery, as I recall, at the end of September.

While staying in the Monastery's guesthouse, we sent for our friend, Fr. K. He appeared immediately and, having met us, went and fetched Fr. Macarius.

Our first meeting with the Elder, contrary to our expectations, was nothing special. Considering what Fr. K. had told us, we thought we would meet an ascetic with a special expression on his face, with a special manner. However, it turned out that he was a simple, ordinary monk, extraordinarily modest, not very talkative, and besides, he had a speech impediment. I was



## REMINISCENCES OF A SPIRITUAL SON

positively disappointed, but my wife, despite her worldly vivacity, felt from the first visit some unaccountable fear, mixed with reverence, and during subsequent visits she became attached to him with her whole soul.

Having gone to confession and partaken of the Holy Mysteries, we returned to the village and, after a short time, departed for St. Petersburg.

This was the time—or, as they say, the season—of social entertainment. Plays, balls, masquerades and parties gave no rest to high society folk. While we didn't go every day, we still visited the theaters and attended balls; only, it was a strange thing how our conscience was somehow not at rest. The chime of a bell, calling us to church for Vespers, awoke in our souls feelings akin to shame and remorse when, as it happened, we had already decided to go to the ballet or the opera. Breaking the fast also stopped seeming like an unimportant matter to us. We began to understand that we weren't living as the Orthodox Church required us to live. Before the alarmed eyes of our soul, the Elder stood irresistibly, with his quiet, peaceful gaze and imploring words....

### 3. WORDS OF LIFE

The following autumn we visited the Optina Monastery again. Fr. Macarius was already more amiable and candid with us. He made detailed inquiries about our lifestyle, and spoke about St. Petersburg and the temptations found there at every step. When I made my confession about the confusion that had so persistently haunted me amidst the capital's amusements, Fr. Macarius spoke out in a way he had never spoken to us before. We greedily seized the ascetic's every word, and we competed with each other in writing down the miraculous words of the Elder of God.

“Every man,” said Fr. Macarius, “was created in order to glorify God during his life. He was created good; but, after the passage of time, carried away by bodily passions, he fell into a sinful state. However, it’s never too late for any sinner to try to turn back to his original state.”

“Repentance and an effort to fulfill the commandments of God—this is the surest path for everyone to the merciful Lord.”

“It is mandatory for a Christian to turn to God at all times and to start reforming his spiritual life.”

“No one has to be embarrassed over his sinful state. ‘There is no man who, while living, does not sin,’ and the more sinful the man, the stronger will be God’s help in leading him out of his sinful mire. But the help of God comes only when the sinner repents with heartfelt contrition and has the will to reform. Not seeing in himself enough strength of soul to break away from sinful deeds, he asks for God’s help. This is where the mercy of God, Who does not wish the death of a sinner but wants him to be converted and live, is often evident. One should, however, by no means postpone the beginning of one’s conversion. If the voice of conscience awakens in us a feeling of remorse or repentance, then we must pray fervently to the Guardian Angel of our human existence that he may keep us from corrupt downfalls and help us ‘serve God with fear and trembling.’”

How human words lose their power when they are placed in measured lines and the conditional symbols which are called letters! We can still feel in our hearts that inexpressible sweetness, that invincible strength of the words of Fr. Macarius, with which he shook our entire being.... The banality of worldly life stood out before us in all its ugliness; our chests became tight with accumulated tears, which flowed in unrestrainable streams from our eyes. Yes, we wept! And sweet were those tears of deep repentance for our sins! Fr. Macarius comforted us with the words of Holy Scripture and the Patristic writings. My God!

How much healing balm those words contained, and what a miraculous dawn of the eternal day of Christ appeared out of the clouds of our sinful souls!

Fr. Macarius advised us to confess and receive Communion, and, having blessed us, he went to other rooms of the guesthouse for the edification and instruction of visitors thirsting for his inspiring words. We saw for ourselves how they met him in the yard of the guesthouse—they made prostrations to him and crowded around to receive his blessing, crossing themselves with joy after receiving it.

During the whole time of our preparation for confession and Holy Communion, the Elder called upon us daily for spiritual instruction. We laid out all our thoughts before him.... One time, the subject of fasting came up. I must admit that I was afraid to tell him of our lack of adherence to the fast, being afraid of hearing a stern reprimand for having broken the decrees of the Church. It did not turn out that way at all. Fr. Macarius meekly reminded us that this was bad, not good, that all sorts of rules exist in the Church so that we, as Her children, should observe them with all strictness; that they are obligatory for everyone, regardless of the circumstances of their daily lives. He said all these things so softly and tenderly that I got up the courage to ask him, "But is it possible to allow oneself the forbidden foods in a situation of need, as for example, on the road, or as a guest, or in general when it is not easy to find Lenten foods?"

Smiling, Fr. Macarius responded thus: "Can I, as a hieromonk, permit what the Church has forbidden? No. I would ask you, if only out of love for me, to begin observing the fasts."

We decided to obey. It was a little hard at the beginning, but then we got used to it; and now, thank God, we don't feel it difficult at all.

#### 4. THE PASSIONS

Conversing with Fr. Macarius, I happened to tell him that living in society, it happens that for no particular reason some girl will strike one's fancy. One word follows another, and one becomes so attached to her that afterwards one finds it necessary, out of fear of jealousy, to hide it from one's wife. Even at prayer and in the church of God, one is always thinking of her. Of course, with the passage of time this attachment passes all by itself and is forgotten, but still....

"Yes," said Fr. Macarius with a sigh, "to you people of high society, such frivolity seems nothing, insignificant. But all the same, a terrible evil is hidden in it, causing an abyss of troubles and misfortunes and robbing your spiritual treasury. The Savior plainly says, *Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart* (Matt. 5:28). You see—you only looked lustfully, and the sin has already been committed and the commandment of God broken. Even from a worldly point of view, how many bitter sorrows are caused by such predilections! Here, as I see it, you are now living happily and peacefully with your family. You love your wife and she loves you. You are candid with her, and have in her a friend who participates wholeheartedly in your sorrows and joys. But as soon as the thought of faithlessness enters your heart, the tempter will seize upon it right away and draw you with such strength that it will already be difficult for you to stop yourself and return to your sacred duty. From here it is not very far to a fall, and, if you commit it, everything is upset. In your wife, if she is faithful to you, you will have an enemy instead of a friend; you will begin to feel hatred towards her instead of love. Instead of comfort, you will see in her a hindrance to the satisfaction of

your crude and inhuman passion, and you will not even notice that you have become a lawless enemy to your lawful spouse. What a bitter future there is in such a life! But that is just here—what will happen beyond the grave? Terrible... *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God*" (Heb. 10:31).

"Instruct me, then, Father," I said, "how to protect myself from the terrible temptation of passions in general, and from tempting thoughts while praying at home or even in church."

"The beginning of all these temptations," the Elder responded, "is pride. A man imagines that he is living piously, not judging his own sinfulness at all, but sometimes even judging others—then, the Lord allows the enemy to lay snares for him. Be attentive to your own way of life, check your conscience, and you will always come, however unwillingly, to the conviction that you have not yet fulfilled even one of the Lord's commandments as a Christian should. Reasoning in this way, you will clearly see your spiritual weaknesses, which cause fleshly falls. In order to deliver yourself from these falls, you must acquire humility. As far as the sinful thoughts at church or while praying at home are concerned, since they are not caused by you, but by the enemy, you don't have to be troubled. Try not to dwell on these thoughts, but turn to God instead with the prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!' Here is an example for you: when parents take their little children out for a walk, they usually let the children go ahead, not letting them out of their sight. Suddenly, from out of some corner, a dog runs out and jumps at the children. What do they do? They rush right over to their parents, crying 'Papa! Mama!' With childish simplicity and pure faith, they expect their parents to help them. The same goes for you on the path of your temporal life. If our tempter, the devil, even starts laying snares for you, don't be disturbed, and do not even think of

getting through it on your own, but with childlike simplicity hurry to the heavenly Father with the cry, 'Lord, I am Thy creation, have mercy on me!' Finally, I'll tell you that, in my opinion, it is hard to protect oneself from worldly temptations while living in big cities. How can a man who is still spiritually weak hold his ground against the temptations of the contemporary world? Take note that high society consists in part of people with other beliefs, and in part of Christians who, although Orthodox, have been so seduced by the customs of the world in their weakness, that they are Orthodox in name only, while in reality they have drifted far from true Orthodoxy. It's hard to fight the passions, but it is incomparably more difficult to withstand continuous temptations. Finally, luxury, the pursuit of fashion, the goals of this way of life—all of this is so expensive that no financial means would suffice to satisfy all the demands of high society.

"You have said yourself that your financial affairs are in disarray, but as you live longer in the village your financial situation will improve. Yes, and not only that! The human soul, as an immortal being, cannot remain in the same condition—it is either improving or deteriorating. It is no wonder that, by living a quiet country life, and of course with the help of God, your spiritual state should improve at least a little."

## 5. FIRST EFFORTS AT LEADING A SPIRITUAL LIFE

The wise Elder said many things that were engraved in my soul, which was thirsting for words of truth. Never in my life had I felt such sweet tranquility as during those unforgettable moments with the blessed ascetic. All my thoughts were directed to the same firm intention—to start living as an Orthodox Christian should. The words of the Elder fell like heavenly

dew upon the dry earth of my heart, which began to feel within it the germination of a grain of sweet hope that, even for me, the path to salvation, the path to a blessed life, was not closed—that even I could become a Christian, not in name only. I had the intention of completely cutting off my winter trips to the cities, because after these discussions the noisy city life repelled both my wife and me. It was as though we were seeing for the first time the simple truth that it would be much more sensible to put our affairs in order instead of spending a lot of money (and sometimes even running out of it) by living, for instance, in St. Petersburg, when we could live securely and even comfortably in the village.

In such a state of mind and feeling I went home, where I occupied myself wholeheartedly with my estate, and tried, as much as I was able, to live in accordance with the advice of Fr. Macarius.

The Nativity Fast drew near. I tried to keep the fast strictly, but alas! The lustful flesh, opposing the spirit, soon rebelled against the sacred decrees of the Church. At first I hesitated, then came various thoughts and reflections, and finally, even annoyance against the Elder of God, who, it seemed to me, had disturbed the peace of my conscience. All this definitely upset me.

In such an irritated state of soul, I told my wife rather abruptly that I was tired of living in the village and that, after saving some money, I had decided to go to St. Petersburg, where my relatives, in fact, were calling me. My wife listened to me quietly, but later she set about, little by little, to talk me out of the trip. She begged me to listen to the Elder just this time. But I, all the same, stood up for myself and said determinedly that I would be going to St. Petersburg in early December.

Five days remained before my departure. Somehow, I didn't feel well. Imagining to myself that this was from the

Lenten food, I ordered meals prepared with meat for myself. The first night after breaking the commandment, when everything in the house had quieted down, I stayed alone, feeling a certain anxiety which was more like remorse. The fact that I had arbitrarily indulged in forbidden food, and most of all, grumbled at Fr. Macarius and disobeyed his loving words, pursued me irresistibly. I didn't sleep for almost the entire night. In the morning I told my wife about it, and she again began trying to persuade me to postpone the trip. But fearing to appear weak, I wouldn't listen to her arguments. In the end, after long arguments, we decided to send a courier to Optina Monastery with a letter to Fr. Macarius, asking for his blessing for the trip to St. Petersburg and explaining the reason for it. I sat down to write, but strangely, instead of getting right to the matter, from some irrepressible feeling of guilt I wrote something altogether different from what I had thought of writing when I picked up the pen. Here is what I wrote:

"I have thought for a long time about how to begin my letter to you, the benefactor and protector of my soul, Fr. Macarius. It occurred to me to express myself vividly in high society prose, but I am incapable of expressing what I feel at this very moment. I beg you to accept and give your attention to my letter. I am guilty before you and guilty before the Lord. Forgive me, for the sake of Christian mercy! Freshly preserved in my memory are your blessed suggestions, but, alas, almost none of them have been fulfilled. It is very bitter for me and utterly embarrasses me that I have not followed your orders. I am fearfully deciding to write to you, but my letter consists of a truthful description of my sinful activities and thoughts. I decided to pursue my business in St. Petersburg without your blessing; I was annoyed with you because you did not recommend trips to big cities. First, I beg you to forgive me, the most sinful son of the Church. I confess to you that even now I am



## REMINISCENCES OF A SPIRITUAL SON

afraid to write about not fulfilling your advice. I even feel burdened by it, thinking, ‘You know I am not a monk, and I can’t leave the world.’ Finally, even now the thought won’t leave me that you forbade me trips to the capital cities and worldly entertainment. All I have described severely bothers my sinful soul, but I am even more afraid of hiding anything from you....”

My letter was soon transcribed and sent off.

### 6. FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

When the courier had left, I began to reread the draft of my letter, and went into an extraordinary state of confusion. I was so annoyed at myself, at my wife, and at Fr. Macarius, that I was ready to send another courier and turn him back, and did so, but the messenger came back with nothing. I was simply beside myself with annoyance. After I had calmed down, I received a letter in response from Fr. Macarius. Here it is:

“Deeply esteemed in the Lord!

“In your letter, you acknowledge some instances of not fulfilling what should be done, calling it my orders. But who am I? Can I order anyone? Yes, without being asked I cannot advise anyone of anything; but if someone asks me, then, praying, I call on God for help with what, to whom, and how I should speak—not to order, but to give advice, in accordance with the commandments of God and the decrees of the Church. I cannot demand an account of how it is fulfilled, or give a penance if it is not, because I am not just giving my own advice. Everyone must check his own conscience to see of what he is guilty before God, and to repent with the intention of beginning to improve. You were afraid to admit this to me, thinking that you are not a monk and not able to leave the

world, and that I would forbid you trips to the capital cities and worldly entertainments. How can this be? What right do I have to forbid you? However, I must cite the teaching of the Apostle, not as to a monk, but as to a Christian: *Friendship with the world is enmity with God* (James 4:4), and again, *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world* (I John 2:15-16). You see what the world is, friendship with which puts one in opposition to God; it is not people, but passions, which we assume in imitation of the world and society. Do not think that by writing this to you I am forbidding you to associate with the world; rather, I am only offering you the teaching of the Apostle as a precaution. You have free will, reason and moral law—can I judge free will, deliberation and will? You can choose whichever you want—the good, or its opposite.”

Having read the Elder’s letter several times, I did not know what to do. When my thoughts returned to a normal condition, however, my uneasy spirit calmed down, and I weighed the truths put forward by Fr. Macarius on the scales of my reason. What a sound, logical truth, that vain friendship with the world puts us in opposition to God!

It is very clear that it is not people, but our passions, to which we so easily submit in society, which unceasingly entice us to fall. After testing his conscience, which of us would not admit that it is very hard, if not altogether impossible, to resist imitating the not quite Orthodox customs of society! Is it possible to preserve a feeling of chastity at the seductively graceful ballet? Is a shrill opera conducive to contrition of spirit, or an amusing musical comedy to humility? ... Considering all this, I felt as though my heart was being pressed by a heavy burden. To my excited soul came the question of the hour of

death. Horror enveloped me, and *I waited for Him Who saveth me from faint-heartedness and tempests* (Ps. 54:8).

At this moment, I recalled the words of the Elder about the children walking under the supervision of their parents, and confused in spirit, I thought of turning to God with childlike simplicity to request His help. But where could I find the simplicity of a child? It is foreign to a corrupt human heart; it is suppressed by proud reason and unlimited self-love.... There was nothing left to do: we were left with turning to the humble wisdom of the Elder of God. And so we did: instead of going to St. Petersburg, we headed for the Optina Monastery.

## 7. A THIRD VISIT TO OPTINA

With my heart standing still, I drove into the yard of the Monastery guesthouse. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. Fr. Macarius, who was at the guesthouse at that time, came in to us just as soon as they had assigned us a room. Having blessed and welcomed us, he said in a joking tone:

"See how terrible I am! You are a sixty miles away, and yet you are afraid of me. And I, if truth be told, rejoice and thank God for you. Well, you are not afraid of me, but it upsets you that you are not living right. Do not be embarrassed over this, however; the Lord will help you. Lay the beginning of your conversion. Just have a good intention, and the Lord will arrange things for your salvation. If I am unskillful and incapable of teaching you in such a way that you will not be confused, then forgive me, for God's sake, and do not complain about me. You know, I also am a human being like everyone else, and even more sinful than many, very many. If you thought anything bad about me, or even said anything, then forget about it, and do not think of it. We are Christians; each of us is obliged to forgive each other and carry our brother's weakness, in the

words of the Apostle: *Bear each other's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ* (Gal. 6:2). Be at ease, I beg you, and be peaceful."

Having spoken a little more, Fr. Macarius went out. Left alone, I thought—what a miracle! For several weeks my soul had been in uninterrupted agitation, my thoughts unceasingly changing and giving rise to rage, vexation, sorrow and anxiety in my heart. And suddenly, after his kindly words, so full of Christian love, that whole spiritual storm had passed away. Could this be only my imagination? But how was it that no one else had ever influenced me like this simple monk? Indeed, it is no fairy tale that my soul had been sick, and I had had hardly one night of peaceful sleep for several weeks in a row before that—and now I felt as if I were newly born into the world. No, involuntarily I came to the conclusion that here was a divine blessing, "healing the weak," and it had healed me by the prayerful help of the Elder; he had brought me the omnipotent help of God, which had removed the sorrow from my soul. The heaviness of my heart was replaced by a kind of quiet ease, peace and calm that flowed through my entire being. No, Elder of God! I said determinedly, now I will not leave you. As much as my strength will suffice, I will fulfill all your instructions.

We spent several days at the Optina Monastery. Here is what stands out in my memory.

When mention was made of the Elder's last letter, which was the reason I had come to the Monastery, Fr. Macarius said: "Remember, I wrote to you that you have free will, reason and law. Judge it sensibly. You are given the freedom to live as you wish; to all of us is given the law of how we must live; finally, we are given reason with which to understand the law, and to see how to govern our will—that is, to see if our deeds, which we do according to our will, correspond with the law. What predominates in us: a firm intention to fulfill the commandments, or the attractive temptation of worldly delights? Who

can resist the enemy's temptations by himself? Who, sailing on the sea of this life, does not experience stormy misfortunes on its unstable waves? Meanwhile, each of us must aim towards a quiet haven, which will lead us out of corruption to the Lord, Who summons all who labor and are burdened, promising to grant them peace. Remember that we are all here temporarily, and no one knows when we will appear before the Lord of glory—but know that, as we are found to be, then so will we be judged. If we use our free will for evil, and do not subdue our rational will to the law, I repeat: it will be terrible for a sinner to fall into the hands of the Living God....

“Do not think that I was suggesting that you avoid contact with the world or acquaintance with kind and good people. No. Each person has to live where the Lord has placed him. You are a person of high society; you are a member of your society. Do not avoid it, but try to live piously, not judging anyone, loving all. In all worldly conflicts, blame yourself and try to forgive the other. If someone offends you in something, then think that God has allowed it in order to test your Christian patience. Think more often of the greatness of God and your own wretched nothingness. Be attentive to your own doings, and do not allow yourself thoughts of your own worth, like the Pharisee, but repeat more often the prayer of the Publican. Read spiritual books, and subscribe to spiritual magazines—this will keep you occupied, and will strengthen you in spiritual activity.”

### 8. SERVICE TO GOD AND NEIGHBOR

When I had been living for a while in the village and had grown more closely acquainted with my neighbors, there was a rumor that they wanted to appoint me to a public office. I strongly disliked the idea of enslaving myself for several years,

foreseeing in this only a hindrance to my life and a loss of freedom. While visiting Fr. Macarius, I asked him how he would advise me to proceed in this case.

“You do not have to seek or ask to be chosen for some duty or other,” he answered, “but you should on no account refuse. It is not quite honest to evade service to society—the more so as, if the lot of service falls on you, it of course did not happen without God’s Providence, to which each of us must humbly and lovingly submit himself. Finally, if no well-intentioned and capable people want to serve, inevitably the place will be taken by some ignorant person, or what is even worse, by a person with meager financial means, who might not have the strength to resist the monetary temptations which can be encountered in public service. The person you choose will start to take bribes and make biased decisions. You will come to scold him and judge him, even to get angry with him—but who is to be blamed? You yourself, because you were too lazy to serve, although you have all the means to resist any illegal income. Indeed, you are not tempted by corruption?” he asked, looking at me with kind eyes that penetrated my soul, “are you?”

“Of course not,” I replied. “For me personally there is no danger. I have been in the civil and military service, and have never taken illegal income. I am convinced I never would in the future.”

“Oh, how wrongly you speak!” the Elder broke in, almost angrily. “What prideful thoughts you have! How can you speak so self-assuredly? Don’t you know of examples of people whom social opinion called honest in the strongest sense? And that opinion was not mistaken—they really were irreproachably honest; but when trusted with the administration of large sums, the evil one confounded them. Proud self-love spoke, and a passionate attachment to worldly pleasures tempted their weak souls. Of course, it was not without difficulty or remorse that

they decided to bow to the golden calf to satisfy their passions. And they fell because their honesty was based solely on self-love; they were self-assuredly honest, and were afraid only of the world. They did not think of the life to come, or of their accountability to the All-Just Judge of the living and the dead....

"I advise you to judge yourself not with self-confidence, but with humility. It is understood that a hundred rubles, or a thousand, would not tempt you, because in your financial situation such a sum is not very important. So let us suppose even more than that: if an opportunity came up to obtain a million rubles, or a few million, and to obtain it with the hope that no one would find out, what would you do? I will answer you this way: if you turn to the Lord, He will help you and protect you from a shameful fall; but if you rely on yourself, it will be no wonder that you will fall into crime, from which may the Lord God and the Queen of Heaven preserve you!..."

One time I told Fr. Macarius that a monk had come to me to collect money for his Monastery and had behaved in a manner very unfitting for his calling. His manners were so unpleasant that I had become angry, and only with difficulty had restrained myself from reprimanding him about it. Fr. Macarius thought for a moment, and then said: "Our brother-monk dropped in on you and behaved unsuitably for his calling. That is a pity! Nevertheless, this did not happen without the Providence of God, which guides us all. How do you know? Maybe Providence brought him to you in order to measure your Christian love and indulgence towards a person fallen into temptation. Think carefully—is it your business to judge him? Of course not. Your obligation is to receive the stranger, give him rest, and as much money as you can. You know that if you receive one who comes to you in the name of a righteous man, you will receive the reward of a righteous man.

If he is a monk, bearing the angelic rank, then you must take him in, and for that also you will be rewarded. And if he does not bear his rank properly, you will not be responsible. Yes, besides, you see only how he sins, but do you know how he repents? Maybe even the Angels of God are rejoicing over his repentance....”

## 9. ON FORGIVENESS OF OFFENSES AND ON ANGER

At Optina Monastery, I became acquainted with one of Fr. Macarius’ spiritual children. One time he was passing through our region on some business trip, and he fell sick about eighteen miles from our estate. When I learned of this I immediately visited him and cared for him like a nursemaid—in a word, I helped him in every way I could. The sick man recovered very slowly—according to the doctor it was very likely he would not have recovered at all. But to everyone’s astonishment, he became well. Then he came to me and, instead of being grateful, said and did many unpleasant things to me! I grew terribly angry—if I did not answer him impudently, it was only out of decency and fear of causing some kind of scandal.

When I saw Fr. Macarius, I told him everything that had happened. I complained bitterly about my acquaintance, not holding back my anger very much. Fr. Macarius listened to everything silently. I began to feel annoyed, and also fell silent.

“Truly,” said Fr. Macarius with his usual modesty, “this person is a little thoughtless, even uncivil sometimes. But what can I do with him? You see what kind of spiritual children I have! I am also unhappy with him sometimes, and often scold him, even. And, well, he doesn’t always obey me. How many times have I reprimanded him for riding senselessly? Every year



he ruins or completely exhausts several horses. You see, that too is not very good. I tell him, but he contradicts me. Just wait; when he comes to see me I'll have a talk with him, and if the Lord helps me you will be reconciled. And as for you, I advise you to calm your anger and go to confession and Communion. That will be more beneficial for your soul."

I began to fast, and after a few days my acquaintance who had offended me arrived. When I came to Fr. Macarius to ask him for forgiveness and a blessing to go to confession, the Elder said: "Yes, you see, you still have something against a certain person. How can you approach the mystery of repentance and Communion without being reconciled with everyone? I beg you—prove to me right now that you desire to acquire humility. Humble yourself and ask forgiveness of the one who offended you."

It was difficult to master my offended self-love. I wavered for a few minutes, but then I saw that there was nothing else to do. I had to submit to the Elder. For the first time in my life, I went to ask forgiveness of a person who had offended me. But when I came up to him and bowed down, he became so uneasy that I began to feel sorry for him. We embraced and kissed each other with the kiss of peace. With unusual joy in my heart, I returned to Father.

"May the Lord save you for your obedience to me!" said the Elder when I had told him of all that had passed between us. "Here, now go to confession. God will bless you!"

After receiving the Holy Mysteries, I stayed on for a few more days at the Monastery. One day, during confession with Fr. Macarius, I asked him: "How is it, Father, that the time I complained about a certain man, you did not reproach me, but on the contrary took my side and judged him yourself?"

"Yes," replied the Elder, "I sinned in judging my brother. But what could I do? If I had begun to reproach you then you

would certainly have become upset with me. You see, you can't put out a fire with oil. When a person is excited, contradiction just irritates him. You have to give space to his anger. But when his stormy state quiets down, and peace begins to be re-established in his soul—then you can offer him advice, and it will be much more effective, and be received with much love. I would advise you, too, to be careful in such cases. Do not reproach a person when he is angry—do not accuse him and do not argue with him. It is better to leave him in peace. Only be attentive to yourself, so as not to fall into discord. When you feel that your heart is irritated, recall the Jesus Prayer to your thoughts, and try to set a guard before your lips.”

During the several years that I was in contact with Optina Monastery and under the guidance of Fr. Macarius, I both heard and carefully read many things from the Sacred Scriptures and the writings of the Elders. My natural self-love made me desire to conduct religious discussions with different kinds of people. Sometimes I would get into debates with them, wishing to win them over to my point of view, and when I met with opposition, I would get irritated and lose my temper. Once I talked about this to Fr. Macarius, and this was his reply:

“If you happen to get together with like-minded people, then why not talk about religious topics? Such conversation is incomparably better and more fitting for a Christian than idle or empty talk. Why not listen to the spiritually wise speech of a person who thinks rightly, or why not relate what you know yourself? But if an argument begins, it is much more sensible to escape it, according to the teaching of the Apostle which forbids disputations about words, because they serve no good, and can be the ruin of those who listen (cf. II Tim. 2:14). It is better in such a case to stop the discussion—but do that reasonably, too, with humble wisdom. Change the subject of the conversation, or gradually withdraw from it, but do not suddenly cut it off,

## REMINISCENCES OF A SPIRITUAL SON

because then your silence can make the others think that you look down at their way of thinking, or that you don't think them worthy of your conversation and do not want to talk with them. In any case, you have to try to appease every person, and not drag anyone into the passion of anger. *Know that instruction is wasted on a contradictory person, for instruction edifies only one who desires and seeks edification.*"

### 10. SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTIONS OF ELDER MACARIUS

I could share much more of the edifying words and instructions of Elder Macarius, reposed in God, but these are enough to show the spiritual wisdom and experience of this man of God.\*

I will try, as much as I can, to outline the general character of his instructions.

Whatever Fr. Macarius advised, he always put humility at the forefront of his counsels; from that virtue he brought forth all the subsequent virtues which make up the character of a true Christian. Here is the essence of the lessons Fr. Macarius taught to all who thirsted for his instructions and edification: to examine your conscience; to continually struggle with your passions; to cleanse your soul of sins; to love God in the simplicity of your heart; to believe in Him without calculating; to have unceasingly before you His limitless mercy, and with all the strength of your soul to praise and bless Him in all of life's unpleasant circumstances; to look for your own guilt, and forgive any trespass of your neighbor against you in order to

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\* This wisdom is set forth with special force in the letters of Elder Macarius to monastics and to laymen, published by Optina Monastery.

obtain God's forgiveness for your sins; to try to establish love for your neighbor in yourself; to preserve peace and tranquility in your family and acquaintances; to recall more often the commandments of God and to try to fulfill them, as well as the decrees of the Church; if possible, to go to confession and partake of the Holy Mysteries several times a year; to observe all four fast periods, as well as Wednesdays and Fridays; to attend Vigil and Liturgy on every feast day; to say morning and evening prayers and even a few psalms every day, and, if time allows, to read a chapter of the Gospels or the Epistles of the Apostle; to pray every morning and evening for the repose of the departed and the salvation of the living, and, at the beginning of this prayer, to pray with reverence for the Sovereign Tsar and all the Royal Family. If, under whatever circumstances, you cannot fulfill these obligations, then reproach yourself so as to sincerely repent, and make a firm resolve not to fail likewise in the future. Pray even for those against whom you bear some ill will, for this is the surest means towards reconciliation in Christ.

The distinctive feature of Fr. Macarius' character was ineffable love for his neighbor. When he heard that his neighbor had suffered some misfortune or grief, or some sinful fall, or a family argument, etc., no matter how the Elder tried to hide his feelings it was evident that he grieved along with the mourners and sympathized with his whole soul. With what pure love he rejoiced with anyone who had something worthy of spiritual joy!

One acquaintance of mine had lived apart from his wife for about twenty years; the hatred between the spouses was mutual. But by the admonitions of the Elder they came together, and now they are living in a way that may God lead everyone to live. With what delight Father told us about this—not, of course, ascribing the success of the affair to

himself, but to God, Who desires not the death of a sinner, and he sincerely praised Him.

The Elder's tranquility in his work of edification was amazing! He listened with the same patience to absurd superstition and irrational free-thinking, to the meaningless complaint of a peasant woman and the detailed inquisition of an emancipated noblewoman, to the artless tale of a simpleton and the cunningly crafted sentence. Nothing could upset his Christian patience and his spiritual tranquility; he subdued all by his deep humility. He was a true teacher of moral theology and spiritual activity. His lessons were not florid but his spirit was heard in them and warmth was felt, and the most hardened of hearts were softened.

On the sixth of September, the day before Fr. Macarius' death, my family and I received the honor of his last blessing. Our benefactor blessed us with icons. Here are his words to us, uttered in a manner barely audible: "Remember God and the hour of death; preserve peace and love among yourselves and towards all!"

Having been a personal witness of the blessed repose of the righteous one, I can only say this: May God grant everyone such a peaceful, calm passage from temporal life to the eternal!...

"This is something extraordinary," said Fr. Archimandrite Moses when the body of the deceased was transferred from the Skete's church to the Monastery. "I have lived eighty years on this earth, and I have never seen such a serene funeral. It is more like the translation of relics than a burial."

*The righteous live for evermore; their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them is with the Most High (Wisdom of Solomon 5:15).*

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## ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

May the blessing of God rest on the story of this good lay student and disciple of our great Elder, Fr. Macarius. May the Lord make him His salt, and may He salt the heart of the reader so that he might know the power of God which is demonstrated in our human weakness. Many, many crops are already turning white in the Lord's fields. May the Lord of the harvest send in His reapers! It is still day; although sunset is approaching, it is still daylight, and it is still possible to work for the glory of God and for the salvation of human souls. Soon night will come, when all activity will cease. *Bless, O Lord, Thy laborers of the eleventh hour!...*

## Epilogue

IN THE TWENTY YEARS which have elapsed from the publication of our Russian edition of 1975 until this present volume in the English language (the content of which has been enlarged twofold), not much new material on Elder Macarius' life has surfaced, except for the aforementioned new biography of the Elder prepared under the supervision of Elder Barsanuphius (who reposed in 1913). This biography is inaccessible to us at present. We hope that through it a deeper picture of the life of the holy Elder Macarius will emerge, so that we may all benefit by his *smirennomudrie*—humility of wisdom.

Recently, however, some new facts were brought to our attention concerning Elder Macarius *after* his repose, and revealing posthumous signs of his sanctity. This important material we present below:

### THE INCORRUPTION OF ELDER MACARIUS

Elder Macarius' body was incorrupt. When Elder Anatole the Younger (Potapov) died and was being buried next to the grave of Elder Macarius, the latter's grave accidentally was opened and a strong fragrance filled the air, and his holy body was seen to be incorrupt. But since that was in 1922 and during

A brand-new portrait of  
Elder Macarius, by an  
American teenager who  
just discovered Orthodox  
Christianity.



Communist times, they quickly buried him again until better times, when his relics would be officially revealed and thus universally glorified.

#### A VISION OF OPTINA ELDER NIKON

The last of the great Optina Elders, Fr. Nikon, who gloriously carried the Optina eldership ministry to the very end, was in spiritual “contact” with Elder Macarius, although their death dates are separated by 81 years. After Optina Monastery was closed and all its monks were banished as if they were first-class criminals, Fr. Nikon found himself in inhuman living conditions in the far North, in the arctic region. He was dying from severe malnutrition and disease, but mostly from a broken heart due to the Communist inhumanity. Four days before Fr. Nikon died (in 1931), Elder Macarius came to him in broad daylight



## EPILOGUE

“to confess” him. “Oh, what a visitation!” exclaimed the dying righteous Fr. Nikon in unearthly joy. They conversed for quite some time—as the astonished cell attendant, Nun Seraphima, related, although she herself was not vouchsafed to see the great Optina Elder Macarius. It was not a hallucination, nor a dream.

\* \* \*

A few years ago Elder Macarius, together with thirteen other Elders of Optina Monastery, was glorified outside of Russia as a saint. In Russia only Elder Ambrose was canonized during the celebration of the Millennium of Orthodoxy in Russia, while the other Elders, definite candidates for canonization, have not been glorified, and even in Optina Monastery itself they are not even called “Prepodobni” (a Slavonic term designating the sanctity of a monk), except for Elder Ambrose. There exists in the Slavonic language, as well as in English, a service to the whole Synaxis of Optina Elders.\* Also, there now exists at least one church service composed in honor of St. Macarius, still in manuscript form, by an American woman, a venerator of the Elder. It is quite possible that in time other liturgical hymns for each of the Elders will be composed in the form of poetic church services.

As indicated in the preface to *Elder Leonid of Optina*, volume one of this series, we hope to publish monographs dedicated to the other Elders, as well as other literature about Optina Monastery in general. But this will already be the work of the new generation, for this generation, fading away into the oblivion of time, is completing its earthly course. May God grant that they bravely face the future, standing firmly on the Rock of the Orthodox Faith. And may the young generation

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\* *Service to the Holy Elders Who Labored in the Optina Monastery*, Montreal: Monastery Press, 1990.

ELDER MACARIUS OF OPTINA

who struggled on this volume receive the due reward for their labors—beholding face to face these Elders in the Jerusalem above.

Abbot Herman  
Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, 1995.

*Holy Father Macarius, pray to God for us!*

# GLOSSARY

*Akathist*: a special, lively service to Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, or a saint during which one should stand; literally, “not sitting.”

*All-night Vigil*: a service sung on the eve of a special feast; it is usually comprised of Vespers, Matins, and the First Hour.

*analogion*: an icon stand or stand upon which the Book of the Holy Gospels is placed or read.

*antiphon*: a psalm or hymn sung in alternate parts. Also, a verse or verses sung as a prelude or conclusion to some part of the service.

*archimandrite*: the highest rank conferred upon a priest-monk.

*Canon*: a set of hymns and verses sung to a particular saint or in honor of a feast; a rule or decree of an historic church council.

*canonarch*: the person who during Divine Services chants out verses, one line at a time, which are then repeated by the choir.

*catholicon*: the main church of a monastery.

*cliros*: the place in church where the services are read and sung.

*dogmaticon*: sticheron or hymn addressed to the Theotokos and sung on Sundays and other festal services; see *Theotokion*.

*doxasticon*: sticheron or hymn composed in honor of a specific feast or saint and sung after chanting “Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.”

*epitrachelion*: a vestment that hangs from the neck of the priest and is the one indispensable vestment for all priestly ministrations.

*exapostilarion*: a hymn that follows the Canon at Matins, introducing the service’s concluding portion; the “hymn of light.”

*cell*: room or dwelling place of a monastic.

## GLOSSARY

- coenobitic monasticism*: the type of monasticism where a group of monks or nuns live a communal life under an abbot or abbess.
- hermitage*: a monastic dwelling, traditionally of a solitary monastic, but often used interchangeably with the word "monastery."
- hierodeacon*: a monk who is ordained a deacon.
- hieromonk*: a monk in priestly rank.
- hieroschemamonk*: a schemamonk in priestly rank.
- hesychasm*: an ascetic practice associated with the anchoretic way of life and involving mental stillness, inner spiritual concentration and unceasing prayer.
- iconostasis*: a screen partitioning the altar area from the nave of the church on which icons are placed; the "Holy Gates" and side doors allow the clergy and acolytes to enter or exit the altar.
- idiorrhythmic monasticism*: a type of monasticism in which there is no abbot and each of the monastics takes care of his own needs, i.e., meals, etc.
- irmos* (pl. *irmoi*): the opening stanza of each canticle of a Canon.
- klobuk*: head covering with a veil worn by monastics.
- kontakion* (pl. *kontakia*): a hymn used in the Divine Services in honor of a particular saint or feast.
- lampada*: an oil lamp hanging before an icon.
- lavra*: a large coenobitic monastery.
- Litia*: a procession and solemn intercession at Vespers for special feasts, taking place in the narthex of the church. Also, the shortened Office of the Dead.
- Matins*: one of the daily services which takes place late at night or early in the morning. (According to the daily cycle it is scheduled at 3:00 a.m.) This service is comprised chiefly of psalms and a Canon of hymns which differ from day to day.
- Moleben*: a prayer service in which the faithful ask for heavenly help or give thanks to God.

## GLOSSARY

*Obikhod*: a book containing musical notation and instructions for daily services.

*omophorion*: a stole worn by Orthodox hierarchs.

*obedience*: in addition to its ordinary meaning, it signifies a duty assigned and carried out as part of one's obedience to the superior or elder.

*Pannikhida*: a service of prayer for those who have reposed.

*Pascha*: the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Patristic*: of or relating to the Holy Fathers of the church.

*paraman*: a square piece of cloth with a cross and the words "I bear on my body the wounds of Jesus Christ" embroidered on it, worn by tonsured monks and nuns.

*Philokalia*: an anthology of classic ascetic writings compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Macarios of Corinth, inspired by and based upon the previous Patristic labors of St. Paisius Velichkovsky.

*podrasnik*: the basic cassock worn by all monastics, including novices.

*podvig*: an ascetic feat, spiritual labor or simply, Christian struggle.

*prelest*: spiritual deception or delusion; not seeing reality the way it is.

*prosphoron* (pl. *prosphora*): a small round loaf of bread prepared especially for the Divine Liturgy.

*riza*: a precious metal covering used to adorn an icon.

*ryassa*: the outer cassock worn by tonsured monastics.

*ryassaphore*: a monastic who wears a ryassa but has yet to be fully tonsured a monk or nun.

*schemamonk*: one who has taken on the highest and strictest monastic discipline, leading a life of seclusion and prayer. He wears the "schema," a special cowl and stole.

*semi-uncial script*: mixed upper-lower case script which employs a half cursive style, used for centuries in copying liturgical and Patristic books.

## GLOSSARY

*skete*: a small monastery; usually a close-knit “family” of up to twelve monastics with the abbot or abbess as their head.

*stavrophore*: a monastic who has been fully tonsured, and clothed in the monastic mantle.

*sticharion*: the inner liturgical garment worn by clergy and acolytes made of fine material of a color appropriate to the feast.

*sticheron* (pl. *stichera*): verses of liturgical poetry which are sung in the Divine Services.

*Symbol of Faith*: the credal statement of the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, also commonly referred to as the Nicene Creed.

*synaxis*: gathering, host or multitude, such as a gathering of saints.

*Theotokion*: a liturgical hymn to the Theotokos, one type of which is a *dogmaticon*.

*Theotokos*: the Greek word for the Mother of God; literally, “the God-birthgiver.”

*tonsure*: the rite whereby a novice is clothed in the monastic habit and becomes a monk or nun.

*trapeza*: the monastery refectory; also the communal meal in the refectory.

*troparion* (pl. *troparia*): a hymn used in the daily cycle of services and also at Divine Liturgy in honor of a particular saint or feast.

*Typica*: a service usually chanted in lieu of the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, consisting of the “Typical Psalms” (Psalms 33, 102, and 145, and the Beatitudes) with other hymns and prayers.

*typicon*: the rules and orders governing the daily cycle of services and how they are typically served during the commemoration of saints and feasts. Also, the rule of life in a monastery.

*Unction*: the Sacrament of anointing, usually for the sick or dying.

*xerophagy*: a fasting diet which allows for only “dry” or uncooked food.

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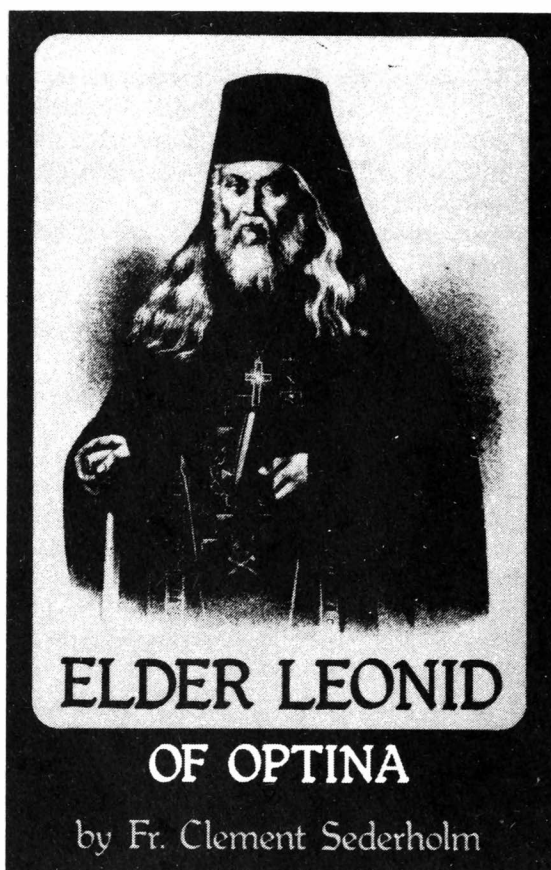
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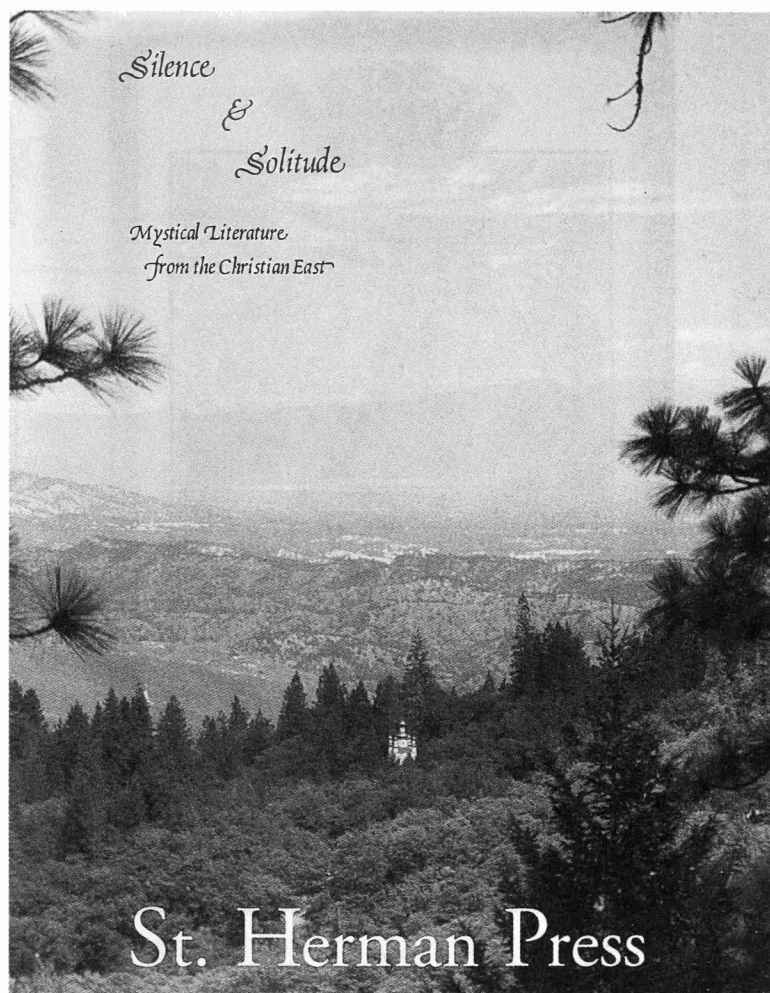
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