



Elder Ambrose of Optina

Sergius Chetverikov

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The Elders of Optina Monastery have had a tremendous impact on Russian society. During the course of a century, their prophecy and God-illuminated counsel attracted spiritual seekers from far and wide.

Elder Ambrose is considered the pinnacle of Eldership in Optina. He embodied the virtues of all the elders in the highest degree--divine humility, purity of mind and heart, overflowing love, and total self-sacrifice for the salvation of his fellow man. Because he had attained the depths of humility, the Lord blessed him with spiritual gifts by which to heal suffering souls. He read human hearts, was granted to know the past, present and future of people, and spoke to them the direct, revealed word of God. So great were his gifts that hundreds of people flocked daily to his humble cabin in central Russia. Among these were the writers Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Leontiev and Solovyev. Dostoyevsky was so moved by his pilgrimage to Optina and Elder Ambrose that he wrote his last and greatest novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, with the specific intention of depicting the spiritual image of Optina Monastery and the Elder. The well-known character of Elder Zosima in his book was modeled after Elder Ambrose, whose words of counsel Dostoyevsky put directly into the mouth of his unforgettable character.

This edition of Elder Ambrose's life is a faithful English translation of the original Optina edition, printed in Russia in 1912. Through its pages we enter the world of a heavenly man, an angel in the flesh who beheld the mysteries of the future age: the perfect love and silent oneness of immortal spirits.

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