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**Elder Joseph the Hesychast (1897-1959)**  
*Life and Teachings*

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**Key words:** Joseph, Abbot/ Elder, Mount Athos, obedience, Christology, anthropology, vigil, Jesus Prayer, grace, temptations, passions, Divine Liturgy, deception, monasticism, Mother of God, patristic tradition, spiritual father.

## SUMMARY

The athonite monasticism of the early twentieth century is best known for St. Silouan (+1938), which is, in his turn, known through his disciple, Venerable Sophronius Sakharov (+1993). A similar route can be identified in the case of Elder Joseph the Hesychasts, contemporary with the two, whose spiritual personality was made all worth due to his disciples by editing some of the correspondence (some letters) and of several editions and versions of his life.

While not enjoying (yet) the (official) veneration of the Russian Saint, he is still known and appreciated by a relatively large number of clerics, monks and laymen, especially because his work has known a wider spread by translating it in many modern languages.

The Romanian people is a privileged one in this regard as it could find the spiritual impressive universe of Blessed Joseph for more than 20 years, through the translation of his letters (1993) and, subsequently, all his published work, as well as of the most writings dedicated and that make direct reference to the person and personality of the Elder.

However, until now there is no academic paper in Romanian<sup>1</sup> about the life, work and teachings of the so-called the Hesychast, reason for which we started drafting this doctoral thesis with the hope to put in order all the events related to his becoming a charismatic, but especially to capture unitarily the rich spiritual teachings (ascetic and contemplative) and the influence exercised by them and the degree of perception in the Orthodox environment (both monastic and lay).

Being thus a pioneering work, we are aware of the difficulties inherent in such an approach, but it had to be done sooner or later, given that we talk about a leading spiritual personality that contributed greatly to the spiritual revival of the Holy Mount in the second half of the twentieth century.

The plan of the paper is divided into five distinct parts, and it aims to capture all important aspects (intellectual, moral, spiritual, theological etc) of the Blessed, both in relation to himself, with his contemporaries, and also with posterity.

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<sup>1</sup> Except for two degree papers, one presented in 2010 and another one being drafted in Bucharest, as well as the two articles in *The Orthodoxy* (no. 3/2011; no. 1/2012).

## Chapter I

We started writing this work by analyzing chronologically the life of Elder Joseph from birth to his pious asleep in August 15/28, 1959. What should have been a simple sequence of facts and events turned out to be a whole (complicated and complex) historical approach, due to quite numerous information, yet contrary and confusing, given by his direct disciples. We clarified, for example, with certainty, based on solid arguments the date of birth of the Blessed (2/ 14.11.1897), although this ambiguity/ mistake will be found (hopefully temporarily) both in the pages of some editions related to the life and teachings of the Elder Joseph (sometimes both – the right and wrong date – being found simultaneously in the same work) and in its perennial form (the stone from his grave at Nea Skiti). The next step was to put in order (all due to the earlier signaled) all the important events in life, irrespective of the stage considered. We think thus we now have the most compact, secure and clear speech in this direction, not excluding any enrichment of it as new data may arise in time.

We then described the family environment and the one in which he was found in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, characterized on the one hand by a deep reverence and respect for the sacred (as a result of the spiritual and missionary activity carried out in those parts by St. Arsenius the Athonite, and continued by the village priest, George Aspropoulos), and on the other hand by a cruel poverty that will cause the young Francis (baptismal name of the Elder), at the urging of his mother, to leave his native town (Levskes village in Paros island) in an attempt to achieve a prosperous life (in Athens) both for him and for those left behind.

We followed then retrospectively (obviously, briefly) the historical context, both the great turmoil and related changes that occurred in the first half of the last century (the war of “*30 days*” with the Ottomans, the Balkan Wars, the First and Second World Wars), and the one relating to the spiritual life of the Athonite monasticism in the same period of time (liberation from Ottoman rule), showing to what extent it influenced the young man (enlistment in the Navy, delaying the departure to the Holy Mountain), and then the monk Joseph (hardships, troubles, falls, but also joys experienced in the Garden of the Theotokos).

As with the decision to dedicate his entire life to serving God, manifested through the entrance to the Holy Mountain (1921), we found it appropriate to split into two distinct stages the life of the Elder, analyzing in the first part the birth, his childhood and youth until the remembered decisive moment (I.1.), and in the second showing how he put into practice the decision by living for more than 38 years in various places of Athos (I.2.).

We could not overlook the direct (visions) and indirect modes (events, people) through which God has guarded Francisc’ path, from infancy to the stature of the perfect man in Christ

(Ephesians 4, 13), without this meaning a destiny determined before or a special caring towards him, but they represent only the concrete way (sometimes more spectacular than the majority) in which the Creator guides the one who wishes to acquire His likeness. The path the Elder walked, being attracted by the love of God, was not an easy one, so we can say that, in the description of his life, sufferings (related to fire, evil of the devil or exercised through certain people) predominate over moments of peace and joy, the two states crossing each other until the last moment of his life (different being only the intensity of the two). The first step was therefore made by God himself, but the road traveled up to the personal encounter with This would be a lengthy process, sometimes sprinkled with manifestations, more or less concrete, of His presence.

The discrepancy between the angelic experience described by St. Nicodemus in the “*New Martyrdom*” and the reality revealed by the entry into the Holy Mountain did not discourage the young ascetic, who has made a goal in finding at any price at least an elder that would live according to the principles he read in the book of the Athonite monk. His liveliness has started from the desire to respond to God’s call to serve Him, by entering the monastic life, recognized as being like that of the angels.

At that time the Holy Mountain seemed to revive, with reference to the large number of monks (five thousand), but this “*blooming*” would be an apparent and short one, reaching to the point that in 1963, when celebrating 1000 years since the foundation of the first monastery from Mount Athos (Great Lavra) by St. Athanasius the Athonite, to discuss the celebration of “*the burial*” of the monasticism in the peninsula. Things will take a totally different way, this time due to several factors (see further Chapter V), which together have competed in a true “*recovery*” of it, this time, not taking into account the number of monks (much smaller in the early twentieth century – less than 1000), but the spiritual element that stood and still stands behind this revival<sup>2</sup>.

The decay of which we talk was due to the limitation of strictly fulfilling a rule, which did not search “the ignition” of the spirit, but merely the spiritual comfort that the monk’s specific duty was fulfilled, plus the exacerbation of the physical work, most often to the detriment of inner work. This situation has determined Francis not to enter as brother in any convent (monastery or hermitage), nor in obedience to any “*elder*”, until he was convinced that person was a spiritual man, from whom he could learn the art of salvation by saying incessantly Jesus Prayer and of a hesychast life style that would enable this work, preferring *ad litteram* application and alone (in various caves) of those read.

At last, Francis would meet those people (elder Daniel Katunakiot and especially monk Daniel of St. Peter’s Hermitage) that would mark him decisively in his choice of ascetic way of life

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2 <http://www.pemptousia.ro/2012/10/importanta-monahismului-aghiorit-pentru-viata-bisericii/>

for fully acquiring God. They could advise him but a short period of time (1929), after which, having already the experience of divine grace, he led a grueling battle for its preservation and subsequent for transmitting to his apprentices. Throughout this itinerary he had as ascetic brother the older monk Arsenios (1886-1983); this work together proved to be a fruitful one spiritually, equally protecting them from falling into deceit.

It is important to remember a quite important detail, that Francis was a layman at that time, while Arsenios had 12 years of experience; this not prevented the latter, shortly after their accompaniment in ascetic life, noting that his younger brother in Christ is much more enhanced in his mind (both smartness but, especially, as inner work), to persuade him to accept the position of elder (i.e. mentor). This had consequences, Arsenios testifying repeatedly the benefit gained as a result of obedience made to Francis (being a monk by the name of Joseph – 1925). But obedience was not always an easy thing to accomplish, the monk Arsenios being forced by circumstances to meet the specific requirements of Elder Joseph, which the reader might receive with indignation (to eat moldy bread crumbs, and sometimes food with worms, to walk barefoot in winter, to keep harsh successive fasts, etc). All these, however, are nothing but personal trials of the two (the elder was always the one who decided for one or other in struggles mentioned above) to find the most specific and appropriate methods to humble through the body, and subsequently abandoned with the acquisition of the charism of discernment.

This chapter describes successively the stages of the formation of a small community, first at St. Basil (1928-1938), and then at St. Anne (1938-1953), the congregation formed here moving finally, towards the end of life of the Elder, to the New Skete (1953-1959). Biographers of the Elder (Joseph of Vatopedi and particularly Ephraim of Philotheou) shows through several examples, the concrete way in which they held hesychastic life together and under the direct and strict guidance of Blessed Joseph. We note however that the congregation was never large owing to the harsh place of ascetic life doubled by the requirement of the Elder, who wanted at all costs to make them (and with the most he succeeded) “*partakers to the divine nature*” (II Petru 1, 4). All the elements of this ascetic program were pointed out only in this first chapter, being then discussed in separate chapters and subchapters.

Following the events, the earthly end of the Elder could only be but a venerable one, fact strengthened by the wonders that have started to be recorded not only by the disciples (the presence of his relics, the wonderful revelations, etc.), but also by many others, monks and laymen alike. We note that those who were busy drafting the Elder’s life, did not focus on the miracles performed (by God through) his remains, but invited the reader to follow its teachings, applying them as genuine spiritual principle of life, which meant to lead the one who did so to the acquisition of Christ in a (more or less) similar way to that of the Elder.

## Chapter II

Elder Joseph's work (II.1.) is not extensive, and not even complete<sup>3</sup>. We benefit from a relatively large number (82+28) of letters (Elder's responses to various questions written by different recipients – monks/ nuns and lay people) that facilitates the access to his spiritual universe. They complement and are in their turn supplemented by the biographies of the two disciples (Joseph of Vatopedi and Ephraim Katunakiot), giving us a rich picture of the thinking and practice of the charismatic mentor. We do not know if the questions expressed in writing from the correspondents were kept, but it would have been a special occasion to be able to compare the questions and answers given.

Unfortunately, this study can not determine the chronological order of the letters published, because we did not have access to the originals, they being kept jealously at Filotheu Monastery of the Holy Mountain. This step is a prerequisite to better understand the evolution and spiritual thinking of the Elder. In the absence of such an investigation/ analysis, we could still identify certain characteristics that arise from carefully studying his work. Thus, we found that Elder Joseph proceeded to answer in writing only at the express request of such a work by a particular correspondent. He does not compose writings for the sake of sharing his experience, but makes use of it (if necessary) just to give more weight to his words in the answer given, in writing, to the one who wanted to clarify some practical spiritual issues. And only for such problems he made time to answer.

This spiritual connection established (or continued) through writing (as the most of them he knew from personal encounters taken on different occasions) lasted until solving the problem, after which the Elder limited to remembrance of those persons in his personal prayers, for full sanctification of life and achieving salvation. Moreover, the prayer was considered by him as the main tool to solve all problems, both personal ones and of those who requested his advice and help. This was dictated by the conscience of the Elder that assured him that the grace of the Holy Spirit is the one that illuminates man, both the one who advises (to choose right) and the one who receives the advice (to receive confidently the words of the spiritual Father). Moreover, the Elder never wrote an answer without first praying (meaning by this both the prayer within the night vigil, or the one dictated by the specific circumstances).

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<sup>3</sup> We know that some letters have never come to be published; they were destroyed before the possibility of printing. See Elder Ephraim, *My Elder: Joseph the Hesychast and Cave-dweller*, Saint Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, Florence, Arizona, 2013, p. 577.

The way of expression is personal and betrays, through the formulations, the lack of school education, but reveals a genuine philokalic father through the discourse, based almost exclusively on his own experience, which gives more power and credibility to his (written) words.

Through them, including the correspondents, we can say that his congregation gets much larger, and this spiritual family continues to grow by joining of those reading these advice, and assimilating them. The validity of this is supported by the testamentary character of his writings stated in some letters. He does not forget to point out that the fulfillment of such a goal is not for everyone, because it requires much effort, courage and self-denial.

A special paper is the writing “*Ten spiritual trumpets*” (II.1.2.2.)/ “*The Trumpet with 10 Voices*” (Philotheu Monastery, 1992), that we found it to be (almost) identical to that published as the “*Letter to a Hesychast Hermit*” (Vatopedi Monastery, 1985). From our analysis it appears that the latter (II.1.2.1.) is nothing more than a compilation/ further processing of the first. It was composed in the period in which the Elder was living in his cell of St. Basil (no later than 1937), being addressed to an eager for hesychia, with whom apparently he had a long correspondence. During of 10/12 (+1) chapters, the Elder exposes a way of hesychast living based on his own observations arising from personal experience. We also note that this hesychia manual was written before being recognized as Elder in the true sense of the word (1937), but impresses the accuracy with which he presents the stages of hesychastic living, both in terms of bodily order and especially spiritual experiences (and, related to this, he reminds the inherent dangers that can derail the ascetic, engaged in such a living, from the aim – the deification). Are is worth to be noted the precepts expressed here (about abstinence, the way of reporting to the self and to God, avoiding excesses of any kind), since they can be applied to average layman, but taking into account the specificities of social life. The central idea is that one can not get to know God without prior knowledge of his own helplessness; this does not mean simply a rational perception or a dull confession of it. but full awareness of it and living every moment of this state. To this knowledge no one can get without the grace of God which, through its various modes of expression (research, withdrawal), discovers to man his true value (that of being nothing) and equally the great mercy of God towards such a creature.

The poetic work (II.1.3.) of the Elder is the least known and appreciated. The nine poems kept and edited are not of tremendous value, but rather some attempts to express in lyrics of certain states, desires, ideas and feelings of his. It is perhaps the reason why they have not been translated into Romanian (except the verses at the end of the writing “*Ten spiritual trumpets*”).

We mentioned in a short chapter (II.1.3.) about his desire to write three books with different content. The first was to address the issue of to man nothingness, the second would be described the encompassing glory of God, and the third would have insisted on the importance of

patience in the spiritual struggle. We found out during the writing of this paper that all these themes, particularly cherished by Elder Joseph, are present both in his letters (remembering them in certain circumstances, detailing them when appropriate) and the memories written down by disciples. They are often dealt with separately, but they have an intrinsic connection, since only the humble (who considers himself to be nothing) continually rises prayers of thanksgiving and praise to God the One worshiped into Trinity, which leads to living this glory in the spirit. Finally, once he has tasted this sharing of grace, he shall endure gladly to the end any trouble, tribulation or temptation, for the sake of the Heavenly Bridegroom.

Biographical accounts of the monk Joseph of Vatopedi and Ephraim of Philotheou on the Blessed Joseph are subject to a special section (II.2.1). The two are the only direct disciples who had found their way to the chronological drafting, more (Ephraim) or less (Joseph) detailed, of the main events in the life of their elder. Others (Efrem Katunakiot, Haralambos, Arsenios) were limited to oral teaching about their experience with the Elder, being subsequently written down by some of those who were part of their own gatherings (II.2.2). We can not say that one of them is the most accurate, since even the most comprehensive writing on this subject (the Archimandrite Ephraim of Philotheou) has already suffered corrections at the second edition, to which we would add our own conclusions and findings, aimed at clarifying and improving certain strictly chronological aspects. Among the laymen who knew personally the Elder and wrote about the importance of this event and impressions about this, we noted the works of the renowned Byzantinologist Constantine Cavarnos (who has dedicated the end of his life to God at the *Monastery of Saint Anthony* from Arizona, entering into obedience at the Archimandrite Ephraim of Philotheou).

To all these, in section II, devoted to the writings of Elder Joseph, we mentioned (II.2.3.) the works of the two International symposiums devoted to the life, work and teaching of Elder Joseph the Hesychast, in Athens (2004) and Limassol (2005), which were edited together in the volume cared for by Vatopedi Monastery in Mount Athos. We correlated the main themes of this work (life, work, personality, spiritual teaching, his influence in the contemporary monasticism) with the papers included in the volume recalled, following that during the debate to point systematically the conclusions of the lectures held by bishops, abbots, (iero)monks, priests, lay people (professors, scholars, specialists), of different nationalities (Greek, American, British, French, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Syrian).

We then followed the route and the impact (reception) had at European and worldwide level of the life and work of the Elder, in the Orthodox space and beyond (II.2.4)<sup>4</sup>. Of all the the

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4 Through their translation into a modern language, was offered the possibility of learning about him and his whole spiritual universe, and hence the wealth and beauty of Orthodoxy, also by the non-Orthodox.

writings about the person and his teachings, the most widespread are the 82 letters edited by Filotheu Monastery, these being translated into seven languages (some of them in several editions), followed by the developed version of the life of Elder Joseph written by the monk Joseph of Vatopedi (in five languages). Archimandrite Ephrem's version was translated only in English and Romanian, and the 28 letters edited by Vatopedi Monastery are currently found only in a Romanian translation.

We notice that the most great openness to the teachings of the Elder (beyond the Greek environment) was made on the Romanian territory, that does not mean necessarily a widespread perception of it. We can consider, however, a gain that is meant to be assumed through this thesis also.

### Chapter III

The information provided by the works indicated in Chapter II, gave us the possibility to analyze the spiritual personality of the Blessed from the perspective of man, of the Elder and the Saint. Such review was to identify and analyze equally the pros (qualities) and cons (defects, decreases) of these issues.

Regarding the man Joseph the Hesychasts (III.1) we approached separately his intellectual, moral and physical qualities. We found thus a man gifted with a sharp mind, but who could not enjoy an intellectual education (secular) on the extent of his ability, but this quality has proven to be beneficial / useful both in early life (as a merchant) and in the spiritual advancement through the work of prayer all the time. He was always aware of the handicap represented by the lack of an adequate education, but this did not prevent him to dedicate himself to a sustained study (daily reading) of the works of some of the Fathers and to have a rich correspondence activity. This also shows tenacity, willingness and ability to work to overcome this disadvantage, but also to achieve the wishes that filled his mind and heart (as a young merchant, the idea of enrichment, and as a monk, that of acquiring the Holy Spirit). To this is added the fact that he read and sang in a way appreciated by others. Compared with other people, we remember the fact that he was a man always leaned toward other's needs, honest, very fair, but equally with a fiery temper, passion of which he would very hard eliminate. The devotion for the holy he inherited from his parents, with a native inclination towards sapience/ purity (of body) and self-blame, which helped him in acquiring ceaseless prayer.

It should not be overlooked the enviable physical qualities due to which he managed to carry out a very harsh ascesis and for an extended period of time. These were coupled with courage

and boldness in the fight against passions and (physical) with the demons, also being relentless in compliance with the ascetic program, regardless of the circumstances. Nevertheless the Elder was cheerful but equally secluded and very serious in everything he did.

Since most of his monastic living he spent it as spiritual father (although he was a simple a monk, refusing ordination) and mentor for a small community, as elder, we caught in a few pages (III.2) the personal manner of manifestation from this position. His area of spiritual exhortation contained both monks (the congregation but also others) and laity, men and women alike.

We noted that this outlined whenever the occasion presented itself the sole reason for accepting this burden, and the mere desire to be helpful to his neighbor, thereby fulfilling the great commandment of the Gospel. This approach was necessary because there were enough people who defamed him, claiming that he actually sought a material benefit. And this was false, because he was not the one in search of disciples but people (of different ages and intellectual preparation) strongly sought him to submit to a true Abba.

Spiritual fatherhood was accepted only to the extent that the apprentice/ correspondent was willing to unconditional obedience. It was the ultimate test that had to be passed by all those interested on such a guidance, especially when finding the working methods of the Elder, based primarily on the care of God (in response to the love and prayers of the Elder for his spiritual children ) with respect to the human logic.

Moreover, the prayer and word (doubled by personal example) were his main weapons in this respect, the word (written or spoken) as a direct result of prayer, this being the characteristic way to solve any problem.

The relation persisted as long as the other was willing to put into practice what he received from the Elder as revelation, but the guidance did not stop even when the apprentice, disregarding his advice, fell into sin, on the contrary he engaged himself in much more prayer and ascetic exercises designed to determine the outpouring of mercy and divine aid on his spiritual son. The care for those entrusted to him by God took also the form of personal care of those in distress, irrespective of the danger he had to face, as in the case of tuberculosis.

But we noticed a double standard in the behavior and action based on those interested. If compared with those in his own community was very strict and harsh in expression (clarifying them this attitude that was always for their benefit in the evening at the moment dedicated to the confession of thoughts) towards those with whom he corresponded in writing he was much more attentive when choosing the words. We understand this attitude (which ultimately aimed the same thing – salvation of the neighbor) considering the fact that it was much easier to follow the reaction of those who were close to him (to whom he clarified his attitude in the evening, at the moment dedicated to the confession of thoughts, showing them concretely why such behavior was for their

benefit) and avoided some deviations and misunderstandings, correcting to the blood any deviation from the assumed throughout versus those living at (large) (physical) distance from him and who would have been more vulnerable to a more aggressive, but always trenchant attitude, not on the person itself, but on the sin committed by that person.

On the other hand, we did not overlook his falls referring to the exaggerations arising from too much zeal (regarding food, sleep, medical science, etc), and how he corrected them along the way acquiring in time the charism of discernment, through which he knew how to sympathize in certain respects (food, physical labor), but also unwavering in others (allnight vigil, unceasing prayer, silence, unconditional obedience, etc).

The strictness in respecting completely the requirements of hesychastic living (materialized in the famous program for visit) made the congregation to always remain insignificant numerically, but it bore in spirit true spiritual fathers, which led to an explosion in the number of apprentices after his pious asleep, until today, requiring it to posterity as undeceived and experienced adviser in the things of the Spirit.

This trait, as man of God, we highlighted it in a special chapter (III.3), as it was manifested in various forms recorded by those who knew him directly or indirectly.

The charisms acquired during his monastic life, are nothing but the manifestation of God's love over His obedient and zealous monk, for the benefit of others. Except unceasing prayer, that he wanted explicitly, all other spiritual gifts were received providentially (knowledge of thoughts, the foresight, the clairvoyance), putting them at the service and for the benefit of others. Some of them (such as the charism of discernment, of the righteousness) perfected the experience gained with great pains and passing through many temptations and troubles, sometimes even falls. To these are added some personal experiences (visions of the Saviour, of the Virgin, of Saints, angels), falling all in the manifestations of divine Providence, as they occur in key moments of the tumultuous anchoritic life of Blessed, and always at the exclusive decision/ desire of God.

Impressive are the episodes that describe the audacity of the Elder towards God (as a result of perfected love expressed through a pious living) which gives him the power to pass on (to the disciples) the gift of the Holy Spirit, at the moment he decided, in the form of divine research during personal prayer from the cell.

Another proof of his life pleasing to God, and how He knows to reward it, is the way and the time (the day of the Assumption) when his pious his asleep happened, and the miracles related to his holy relics, which have experienced a perpetual manifestation until today.

We believe, however, that the greatest proof of his holiness is the fruit (Matthew 7, 16) embodied in the further development of the community. The growing number of spiritual

grandchildren and great-grandchildren certifies the permanent transmission, through his writings, related to his life and teaching, of the life in Christ.

Finally, we underline once again the presentation so naturally and without compromise of the two disciples (Joseph and Ephraim) that do not hide any weaknesses, helplessness, or falls in him; therefore the reader is drawn to follow him in spirit, receiving the entrusting that, just as the Elder, as fallible man and having some setbacks, managed with the help of grace to overcome the condition of human nature and reach perfection, so he could.

## Chapter IV

The largest (as number of pages) and most dense (as subchapters) chapter is dedicated to the spiritual teachings of Elder Joseph, the Hesychast. The first things considered followed the identifying of the elements of ascetic Anthropology from his teachings, focusing only on those aspects that are directly related to the ascetic and spiritual life.

We began from the fact that man is God's creation from love and to receive love, but he interrupted the exchange, violating the unique requirement (commandment) received, with the well known consequences. Therefore, the whole fight, which is bound to lead each man seeks to restore the relationship through obedience, which inevitably requires knowledge of his own existence and the purpose for which he was created.

This knowledge is related to how man was made, particularly with reference to the body (IV.1.1) as one that was created the first from a trivial matter (soil). This act of creation gives the opportunity to the Elder to emphasize the true value of man (nothingness), identical to the reality of which he was made. Knowing and recognizing this truth absolutely attract the grace of God, being a hindrance in judging the neighbor (as one that belongs to the same category).

The body is seen as support for the soul, having though a well-defined role, but in obedience report to it, especially since it "*will taste*" death, returning to the state from which it was taken. However, given that it is called to become a partaker of the same glory with the soul (the second Advent), the Elder recommends its proper appreciation, avoiding the excesses of any kind.

By contrast, the soul (IV.1.2) is called the "*the breath of God*" that gives life to the body. Regarding the "*image*" of God in man, the Elder identifies it with the spiritual virtues, "*likeness*" being understood still in connection with the rational soul, as the place of union of man with God, being created (for this purpose) immortal and eternal. The difference that exists between people in terms of qualities, especially intellectual (talents) he relates to the wisdom of God, Who will hold accountable each of us, according only to what we have received as given from above.

When speaking of the constituent elements of the soul, he has a dichotomous discourse (mind and heart). The mind is called the steward of the soul and the heart as the center of spiritual power and, at the same time, the throne of the mind. By contrast the affects (anger, lust) are considered normal, and their use (good or bad) is what brings a correct perception/ reporting or blaming.

The correct or incorrect way in which man uses these elements is the subject of another subchapter (IV.1.3), which is based on identifying of the three enemies (demons, each own nature and habit) responsible for permanent triggering of the war that man has in the foreground.

In describing this whole psycho-somatic process, the Elder is quite clear. Everything starts from the understanding of the importance of the thought in the spiritual life. It is described as “*the gateway*” used by demons, as some spirits that are akin to us. Once overcome this barrier (by receiving and escorting the sinful thought/ image) the mind is taken captive. Moreover, it transfers to the heart all that it hears, sees or feels, process through which takes place the total defilement of man, expressed through thoughts, words and deeds of dishonesty. Therefore, the Elder insists that the first step to be taken in restoring the spiritual health, is to re-place the mind in its place set by God (through prayer, spiritual study, etc) and, for the safety of the achievement, is mandatory and indispensable obeying God through the unconditional obedience given to the Elder/ spiritual father (because the mind, being sick and defiled by lust, can not clean itself). The devil will try to stop this process, through the state of despair caused on the ascetic (overwhelming him with the multitude of sins committed by him, or trying to downplay the importance of his ascetic effort), following eventually cessation of prayer, i.e. the direct and immediate relationship with God. That is why it is important to remember that repentance needs work facing the future, as sin does not cancel God’s love, but we must not forget that, although through the Sacrament of Holy Confession is received the forgiveness of sins (on the measure of repentance), man is supposed to bear their effects throughout his life. The body takes also part to this, because it affects the soul and vice versa.

Virtue, however, is the opposite of sin, and its work should not discourage anyone considering the fact that God’s power is infinitely superior to the wickedness of the devil. Man is called to be laborer together with God, but the beginning, the support and the crowning of the shunning of passions process belong to Him. The starting point is the (re)cognition of our own helplessness, and this is not done perfectly but through direct and constant intervention of God, manifested (surprisingly) by innumerable temptations and troubles, meant to reveal man his entire helplessness and complete dependence on the Creator. The battle must be fought until the end, but it has to be closely monitored by the Elder/ spiritual father to avoid extremes. This will correct the disciple’s behavior (starting from the way of thinking) with gentleness and love, teaching him to learn the art of salvation, what involves stopping the attack from the first bait, channeling anger

over the devil and his passions and not the neighbor, and the lust/ the desire directed towards God, using a certain ordinance of fasting, vigil, prayer, and (some) deprivations. Man must be careful to his own cleaning and, according to it, may be useful to others (as far as the Lord will ordain).

Strictly related to this topic, we discussed his teaching about the three conditions of man, and their connection with the divine grace (IV.1.4). Man has acquired the current state (according to the nature) after the transgression of God's commandment of our first parents and their expulsion from Heaven, characterized by the loss of God's grace (of its conscious and continuous work) and of the un-wickedness. The second, beyond nature (which, chronologically, is actually the first), is identified with the one appointed by God for every man, of which Adam enjoyed in Paradise. Finally, the third condition is called contrary to nature, designating the man found "*outside the law of God*".

With regard to the stages of spiritual life (IV.2), we showed first of all the terms used (praxis and theoria) and especially the meaning given to them by the Elder (IV.2.1). The deeds (praxis) are thus the first step in the spiritual life embodied, in the active part, through the ascetic exercises, and, in the passive, through the patience, work sustained by grace, as one that makes the beginning and guides man (most often from the shadows) to acquiring the highest aims. This stage is mandatory since the intensity (and success) of the second depends on the basis provided in this first phase, in which the body takes part to a great extent. Not being a purpose in itself (thus having a limited role as one that hits above), it represents, ultimately, the constant struggle with the self to the end, process within which one can restrict/ enhance the work of grace through the availability (zeal) manifested. With the advancement in those spiritual the role of the body decreases (without ceasing) having priority the mind (nous) as one that is the concrete manifestation of grace. Specifically, this stage of theoria/ the divine sight (encompassing both the stage illumination and that of perfection) is characterized by the work initiated and fully manifested by the grace of God, through the prayer of mind (subsequently made also in the heart, united with it).

These states correspond to certain spiritual stages (IV.2.2): the first (praxis) corresponds to the step of purification and repentance; the second (theoria) including both the step of illumination (which really marks the birth of the new Adam, i.e. Jesus) and that of perfection. Each of them has the characteristic elements (duration, intensity, dangers and remedies, etc.) that we have mentioned at the relevant time. Since their entire deployment is strictly related to the presence and the work of grace, we returned to this issue also in subchapter IV.7.

The base and the opportunity of all these are given by the Christological character of the living spiritual (IV.2.3), as the possibility of participation of human nature to divinity is due to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. We described the process that begins at Baptism, and gradually perfects itself through the commandments, taking into account not only the fact that "*Christ is*

*hidden in His commandments*”<sup>5</sup>, but also the reality that, by assuming the human nature, He is the closest to man, therefore, as He overcame the devil and death, He also gives us the same possibility, but more than that, the ultimate goal taken into account by Christ, with regard to people, is to (re)become His brothers and, thus, sons of the Heavenly Father.

Being a meeting/ personal relationship (thus having in the center the Person), it can not be known/ cleaved by techniques, therefore, participating in the Resurrection and the Ascension can not be achieved but through similarity of Passion. This road was opened by Christ Himself, Him being equally the reward. This *“theology of the gift”* is found in the teaching of the Elder, showing that man owes, to properly harness his labors (bodily and spiritual), to always recognize (at any time and in any circumstance of life) the Giver of all his spiritual achievements (That reveals Himself to be both the cause and the object/ subject of them) and equally Sustainer of asceticism/ his struggle, which will lead to proper use of things and their meanings. God is Love and what a person does is nothing more than the same response, materialized in the pure way of life and in the manifestation of compassion for our neighbor.

Assuming the previously mentioned can be achieved only through obedience (IV.2.4), which represents the resumption and fulfillment to the end of the primordial commandment God gave to Adam in Paradise, whose purpose is the cleansing of passion and the goal – restoring the Kingdom of God. This theme is a natural continuation of the previous one, taking into account that the perfect obedience paradigm is the Lord Jesus Christ (Him being the first man who carried out the its fulfillment), reason why, says St. Joseph, and we ought to walk on His footsteps.

In the most concrete way, obedience is strictly related to the monastic living, being its foundation, without which all other ascetic exercises are emptied of content; we cannot talk about any virtue in its absence. It is manifested through the obedience of the disciple towards the elder/ his confessor, to whom he relates as to God, because he is the embodiment (image, icon) of God, being ordained by Him in His place. Blessed Joseph often insists on this point, which he defines as “resting” of the Elder treated and understood in direct relation with God (which is why we find here the same giving and receiving relationship).

Therefore, the sole purpose of obedience can only be the birth, growth and spiritual perfection of the disciple in Christ, through the Elder, which is able to be achieved only in case of unconditional obedience. This apparent contradiction between the freedom with which man was endowed and the total dependence to a man finds the answer in the statement that *“to be free one must first be a servant”*. Being a decisive step, the Elder urges caution in choosing the person that one wants to obey, because, once made this choice, there is no longer (theoretically, *o.u.*) way back,

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5 St. Mark the Ascetic, *“Despre legea duhovnicească, în 200 de capete”* (*“On Spiritual Law, in 200 Chapters”*) (190), in *Philokalia*, 1<sup>st</sup> volume, translation from Greek, introduction and notes by Fr.Prof.PhD. Dumitru Stăniloae, Publishing House of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 2008, p. 298.

understanding by this that there are no limits of obedience (except heresy), because it is based first of all (and exclusively) on faith/ total trust and not on logic.

This chapter deals afterwards with the manifestation of this spiritual fatherhood, insisting on the one hand on the Elder's qualities and duties (embodied in personal example, prayer and word of guidance) but equally, also on apprentice's duties (total submission, systematic and complete confession of any passionate thought, and its manifestation in word and deed), and reminding the two types of confession, of their characteristics and the importance of confessing the thoughts (or the opposite effects produced by its lack/ avoidance).

From the analysis of this personal relation appears the primacy/ superiority of obedience over all other virtues (as one that shields the ascetic of any cheating, offering in equal measure the possibility of recovery in case of falling), and the need/ requirement of an experienced guide.

Considering the fact that the way of life chosen by Elder Joseph was a hesychast one, we identified and marked the specific stages of hesychastic life (IV.2.5), relying mainly on his writing addressed to a monk who enjoys such an experience. The Elder believes that this way of living is the highest spiritually, within the Orthodox monasticism, being a special call of God and a revelation of His. If "*between the ordinary Orthodox monk and the hermit there never was a difference but in the intensity of the religious experience*"<sup>6</sup>, however, the hesychastic living has certain peculiarities, resulting both in bodily ordinance (food) and especially in the spiritual one (ascetic program). It is these qualities (focusing primarily on the steps to be followed, and the dangers to be avoided) that were the subject of our debate.

The analysis continued with the presentation of the deeds (IV.3), i.e. the ascetic and spiritual program structure followed and transmitted by Elder Joseph, especially since this was the main reason why some monks or laymen considered him deceived, since it was not a common/ ordinary one, and not representing any new invention (or innovation). After a brief statement of the normal program of living of the Elder in the wilderness of Mount Athos (IV.3.1), in which we identified its constituents, we began their phased analysis.

The most important part of this program is the vigil (IV.3.2) of (all) night, i.e. the time between sunset until the morning. In its turn it was divided into several phases, each with its specific and duration. Vigil was the defining element of hesychastic living having a binding nature, regardless of place or time, since from it he experienced the biggest spiritual rewards, its purpose being to attract the grace of God through the availability manifested. For this, the entire program during the day (especially the obedience) was so appointed to provide adequate preparation both to the soul (withdrawal, silence, uttering ceaselessly Jesus Prayer, etc) as well as to the body (the rest

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<sup>6</sup> Alexandru Surdu, *Filosofia pentadica I. Problema Transcendentei*, Editura Herald & Editura Academiei Romane, Colectia Cogito, Bucuresti, 2012, p. 213.

necessary to sustain the night effort). Noteworthy is the Elder's urge that this work to be practiced (existing such a possibility, if there is desire and zeal from the man) both by those living in monasteries (in hermitages or communities) and by laity (while maintaining the principles, but adapting them to the realities of personal living).

We then proceeded to detail the constituent elements, bodily and spiritual, of the vigil, which are closely connected with the whole hesychastic program of living, in general, as vigil is nothing but the culmination of it, and it should not be treated independently of it. Regarding the ascetic elements related to the body we highlighted the teaching of the Elder about fasting and/ or abstinence (IV.3.3), relating it to his conception on man composition (previously stated), showing the way to acquiring a balanced position towards it. In the same register and the same note falls the bodily bad suffering and we dealt with its purpose in a subsequent subchapter (Philoponia – IV.3.3.1).

It was also interesting to follow the importance (and therefore mandatory) awarded by a monk with little book knowledge (but enlightened to the mind) the to spiritual study (IV.3.4), to the extent that it became a defining element of the program practiced by to spiritual Father (and of course, by all his disciples), even though its scope was limited by the small number of spiritual deeds to which he had access (mainly due to pecuniary shortage). The study (united with meditation) was practiced without exception in relation to prayer, the Elder recommending them together (although the time allocated to each was different), as two that support, but also verify each other. Since “*without the work of the mind it is least the benefit to outsiders*”, we insisted on the importance the Elder has granted it, characterized by both the mental exercise (and spiritual/ theological) remembered, but especially by saying as often as possible the Jesus Prayer.

Although treated separately, we saw how the ascetic exercises of body and soul are interdependent (eg. silence and prayer), but having each its definite place and purpose, but all revolve around prayer (supporting it) both the personal (as ordinance of the cell) and in community (through participation to the Divine Liturgy in order to receive, without exception, the Holy Body and Blood of Christ).

Prayer (IV.3.5) is thus the defining element of the monastic living of hesychastic type of the Elder, dedicating to “it most of the time (both during the day and during the night vigil). When speaking of prayer, the Elder has particular regard to “*Jesus Prayer*”, and thanks to its overwhelming proportion, we researched the subject from several points of view (IV.3.5.1.1 – 5), not before stating that this was not the only way to ask for the mercy of God, the Elder having the habit to address the persons of the Trinity (and in this case, to the Virgin and Saints) including through his own words, arising from a deep sense of sinfulness (this method being practiced as an introduction to the Vigil).

Considering the entire process through which the Elder acquired, preserved and multiplied the charism of unceasing prayer, we pointed out here the practical steps of the Prayer (with the mouth, with the mind, with the mind in the heart), emphasizing the characteristics, purpose, duration, threats and positive/ charismatic effects of each, observing how closely the Elder avoids technicization of such a practice, putting the result in the hands of God (without diminishing in any way man's contribution through the desire and zeal manifested in its utterance). Important to him is the personal encounter with God through the intercession of grace, as a result of the call and insistent demand through prayer and not craving for visions or other beyond nature events (which often are actually delusions, especially when man did not acquire full cleaning), which, anyway, will come (this time as a result of God's mercy, on His own initiative and only in/ for periods of time appointed by Him). In the same chapter we addressed the connection between this practice and the process of shunning of passions, showing that, according to the teachings of Elder Joseph the Hesychast the prayer is the one that actually/ practically triggers it and, at the same time, completes, leading man (God, through it) to unsuffering.

Since this is a hesychast/ retired way of life, when we related Jesus Prayer and church life, we found the practical way in which to achieve this (replacing/ committing of Lauds and of the Monastic Canon by saying a certain number of times "Lord Jesus ...") and that the Elder was not against the usual liturgical ordinance of the Church, but he used it to the extent that the place and rule of the program of living allowed it. Instead, we notice the opening (declared in written and oral) for the practice of Jesus Prayer also by laity, on the same principles and the same purpose, only the time dedicated to her being regulated by the environment (work, family, etc.) in which they live.

A special topic was the way of reporting of the Blessed to the Divine Liturgy (IV.3.6) and its status towards the prayer (and vice versa). We noticed here too the discernment of the Elder and his anchoring in the authentic Orthodox tradition when regarding the relationship between personal asceticism and its valorisation/ verification within the Eucharistic communion. It is appreciated that he did not preferentially chose either of the two realities, but always sought their meeting, because they are mutually supportive. That is why planning/ building a church was an essential feature of the Elder, especially since the serving (participating in) the Divine Liturgy was the culmination of the effort made during the night vigil. In fact he was convinced that there is no authentic spiritual life without the Divine Liturgy, alternating also (undissociating, therefore) the remembrance of those who asked for help through the prayer from his cell with the one done by the priest during Proskomidi.

The following nine chapters treat different striking aspects of the teaching of the Elder Joseph. They were not presented as such by him (in writings devoted exclusively to them), but they

are subject to his turmoil, decisions and convictions, so that their writing was required in the specified format.

The first theme relates to the understanding, treating and explaining the unseen war according to the spiritual law (IV.4), with direct reference to Epistle to the Romans of Apostle Paul (7, 14), and especially its practical transposition conducted by Mark the Ascetic in his 200 chapters. Given this, the Elder does not do an exhaustive description of it, but limits himself in pointing out roughly only those things that interested the interlocutor/ recipient, and especially the practical proof (based on his own experience) of the truth of what was stated. The best-known aspects of it are those concerning the relationship between pleasure and pain, the charismatic report between the elder/ spiritual father and disciple, the importance of the thought in spiritual life, the benefit, purpose and limits of ascetic exercises etc.

A second theme considered concerns delusion (“*πλάνη*” – IV.5) as inherent danger in the process of shunning of passions, the Elder Joseph identifying through this term the errors (understood as delusions, deceptions, errors) that occur in the relationship of man with the world, with God, with the neighbor, and even with himself. Related to this but with the necessary distinctions (which also have been cast), we detailed the teaching of the Blessed and the particular importance shown and given by him to temptation (“*πειρασμός*” – IV.6). Temptations are considered to be a necessary good, without which man could never reach perfection, the Elder calling them “*medicine and healing herbs that heal our visible passions and our invisible wounds*”. However, the temptation is still just a test / challenge to which man can respond positively or negatively. It is true that some temptations/ trials can not be avoided, but those strictly related to the self can be rejected since if man is the cause of them, he (with the help of divine grace) is bound and has the power from God to avoid them, to the extent that he does not comply with impure thoughts, therefore it is said that the size of temptation is directly consistent with the patience of each. Temptation is considered the preferred tool of the devil in its attempt to discourage man, thus breaking any connection with God (equivalent to stopping the utterance of the Prayer). That is why the same monk notes that accepting them testifies man’s love for Christ, in response to the love that He carries for us. Moreover, the temptations are better than personal asceticism, especially since they are not accompanied by pride.

Going further along the same red line, we approached inevitably the teaching about grace (IV.7) called “*a gift greater or lesser of the divine endless fruitfulness that God, because He is Good, shares it from His infinite goodness*”. The work of grace is closely related to (and in some way dependent) patience of temptations (with a cyclic movement), and as the law stated by the Elder involves firstly the bearing of troubles and later expecting the comfort of God, we kept the same deployment/ sequence of events in exposing these topics.

The work of grace into man involves a gradual deployment in the human soul, the Elder identifying three categories/ states through which God's grace is manifested concretely: *purifying, illumining and perfecting*. These are analyzed in relation to the three spiritual states mentioned in section IV.1.4, to each of them corresponding a certain grace: against nature – the purifying grace, according to the nature – the illumining grace, and the beyond nature – the perfecting grace. This is the key in which must be understood the Elder's statement saying that no one should be regarded as human if that person did not acquire the grace of God.

He does not forget to also mention the role of the spiritual father in this arid battle (but with enough moments of comfort from God, His Mother, or of the Saints), being especially credible because most of the advice is backed by examples from own life.

The next step could only be related to the theme of repentance (IV.8), understood as the incessant struggle with passions, which is set out by God within the Church (the Sacrament of Holy Confession) and through the spiritual father/ the Elder (confession of thoughts). Repentance is, first, a gift / grace of God ("*Payment and divine retribution*" after the fall of the forefathers), being ordained according to the (different) gifts which bestowed upon humans. It essentially seeks to know and recognize the truth about our nature (as it is created out of love, and totally dependent on the Creator), and once aware of it, it turns into a constant desire for contentment and glory to Him Who is "*rich in mercy*". Although "*sin is separation from God*", repentance is valid and viable because He does not leave man permanently, but arranges things so that either willingly (search of the purifying grace), either required (allows temptations) man to (re)come to his senses (Luke 15, 17) and thus redeem himself, lowering himself by all evil (acquired voluntarily), (re)becoming Hristofor and son of the Heavenly Father. This is man's call, to for it was created by God, and the way that must be traveled to its realization is the one noted above. The path is accessible to all people, even as a form of it is divided into two ways of life: the family and the monastic life.

Living most of his life as (schema)monk (34 years), he devoted to this way of life numerous references, which are grouped and highlighted in a separate chapter (IV.9). When he approaches this theme, he mainly refers to the hesychast way of life, characterized by a special calling from God. In general, however, the monasticism (and especially with reference to the type of life noted) is described as an ordinance of God addressed to a limited number of people that overcome the desire to serve the world (and its desires), following the inner call to devote themselves fully and totally to God. If the monk is first and foremost "*fruit of the Holy Spirit*"<sup>7</sup>, means that not the clothes (schema) itself gives the desired result, but the correct way of life, which involves first of all taking the Cross of Christ, which translates into unconditional obedience. The

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7 Elder Joseph, *Mărturii din viața monahală (Testimonies from Monastic Life)*, translated by Fr.Prof.PhD. Constantin Coman, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Bizantină Publishing, Bucharest, 2003, Ep. 48, p. 233.

Elder does not speak systematically about the three monastic vows, but he supposes them to be undertaken by those who enlist in the elite army of Christ, focusing more on obedience and virginity. Once again he refers to the dependence towards the spiritual father, that must be chosen carefully, because once made, this choice is sealed from free votes made within the service of trimming into monasticism. The life of such a man will become “*a continuous martyrdom*” (but assumed voluntarily) in a constant struggle with himself, and the wickedness of the evil, failing to reach victorious if not devoting day and night to contemplation of God, and form the most practical form to its fulfillment is through Prayer.

Furthermore, the monk (and in general, any man engaged in such a process) is not alone, but he benefit from the felt/ concrete aid of Virgin Mary and of Saints (IV.10). Their role in the spiritual life of man is that of permanent help to overcome any obstacle, but only if the necessary dedication to which we referred earlier is found. So, this aid is somehow conditioned by the zeal shown by man to overcome his own weakness and his willingness to endure any trouble. Elder Joseph gives us enough good examples in this regard (especially apparitions/ visions) of the specific way in which Virgin Mary and / or the Saints have supported the exhausting road to perfection. Consequently, it is entirely justified his special piety, veneration and love towards the protector of the Holy Mountain, “*rewarded*” through his pious moving into eternity on the day of the Feast of the Assumption/ Dormition.

The last but one chapter (IV.11) confronts tradition the Elder's with the patristic teachings, the comparison highlighting the full line (spiritual one) between the writings of Church Fathers the Blessed and of the ancient (i.e. some parents included in the Philokalia: Callistus and Ignatius Xantopol, John Chrysostom, John of the Ladder, Hesychius, Teolipt of Philadelphia, Nicephorus of the Solitude, Symeon the New Theologian, Abba Philemon, Theognostus, Isaac the Syrian, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Sinai, John Carpathians, Mark the Ascetic, Peter of Damascus and Macarius of Egypt, St. Simeon Metaphrastes). The first attempt of this kind belongs to monk Joseph of Vatopedi, who published in 1997 the book “*Elder Joseph the Hesychast and the Patristic Tradition*”<sup>8</sup>, following through it exactly the above mentioned, for which we have used it, preserving and analyzing the themes chosen by the monk of Vatopedi (concerning the inward work of man, his way of relating to God and neighbor, understanding spiritual law through which is acquired the kingdom of God within man) and the restricted manner of his work (quoting only 25 letters). However, we were able to outline a clear image of the entire agreement at the level of spiritual perception and engagement between the monk of the twentieth century and the Orthodox tradition expressed in the Philokalia.

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8 Γέροντος Ιωσήφ Βατοπαιδινού, *Ο Γέρον Ιωσήφ ο Ησυχαστής και η Πατερική παράδοσις*, (Ψυχοφελή Βατοπαιδινά 5), 2004, 202 p.

Finally, the last theme that was imposed on debate was the calendar change-related events triggered by the adoption by the Greek government on January 18, 1923, for political reasons, of the new calendar for civil space of the Greek state, motion approved by the Ecumenical Patriarch Gregory VII, and, on his suggestion, adhering one by one other autocephalous local Churches, including the Autocephalous Church of Greece (IV.12). Beyond the historical aspect (but with repercussions in the liturgical, ecclesiastical and canonical space until today), we followed the attitude of Elder Joseph, presenting chronologically the transition from delusion (extremism/ schismatic) to a balanced position of most Athonite parents, change that occurred through the direct intervention of God (announcement made through a apparition/ vision), but only after a certain period of time. We understand from this episode that the absolution of any thorny issue of religious nature (dogmatic, canonical, liturgical) can be given only by God (not excluding the human factor that formulates/ implements these solutions, always having the awareness that expresses/ translates correctly the divine revelation) and the disunity is a direct result of disobedience, occurred as a result of the confidence exclusively in personal logic, by ignoring the will and the divine providence.

## Chapter V

The last chapter of this dissertation followed the influence/ contribution that the spiritual and charismatic personality of the Elder had regarding the contemporary Athonite monasticism revival (especially), but with repercussions on the pan-Orthodox level (in general). Of course he is not the only factor generating such extension, but he is, by mutual agreement, recognized as a leading spiritual personality with a major contribution to this complex process. Noteworthy is the fact that the mentioned effects have occurred (and continue to occur) several years after his death, being now known and appreciated by many more people (bishops, monks, lay) than during his life. This is due to both the editing of an important part of his work, and especially to the living example given by his direct disciples and the monastic communities led by them (work perpetuated on the same spiritual vein of grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the Spirit of the Elder), which are guided and live according to the framework set (and verified) by Elder Joseph.

The major gain of this action is that of restoring the hesychast character for the Cenobite monasticism, giving rise to holiness (as a possibility) and the 21<sup>st</sup> century monasticism.

In conclusion to all the above we can say that the Abbot/ Elder Joseph does not necessarily promote and bring new things (in terms of spiritual thinking and living) but provides a “re-

*actualization of some traditional forms*”<sup>9</sup>, forms that are full of Life, being living proof of how any man (each on his measure, depending on the qualities received as given by the Creator) can be purified, (i)lluminated and perfected through work together with the grace of God.

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<sup>9</sup> Hieromonk Macarius Simonopetra, “*Noua sinteza monastică athonită. Monahismul athonit astăzi*” (“*New Athonite Monastic Synthesis. Athonite Monasticism Today*”), on [http://www.nistea.com/monahismul\\_athonit.html](http://www.nistea.com/monahismul_athonit.html)