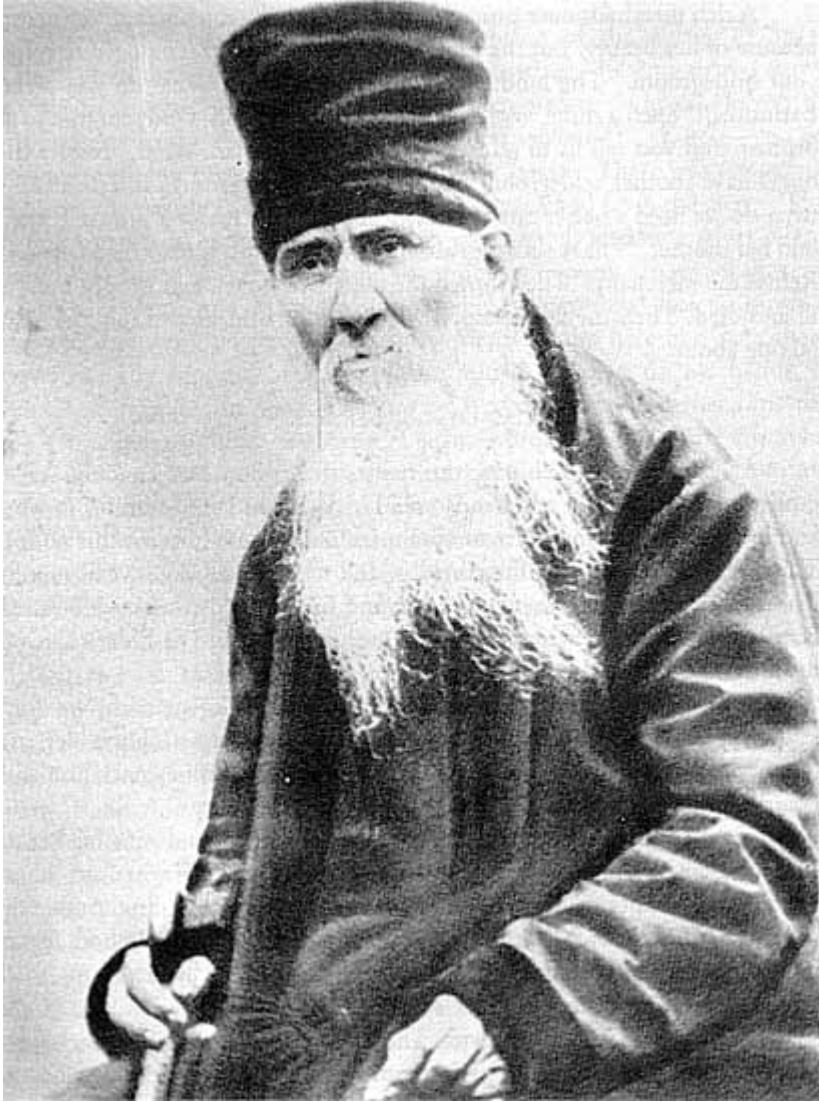


What is an Elder?

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St. Ambrose of Optina

The elder or «old man», known in Greek as Geron and in Russian as Starets, need not necessarily be old in years, but he is wise in his experience of divine truth, and blessed with the grace of «fatherhood in the spirit», with the charisma of guiding others on the Way. What he offers to his spiritual children is not primarily moral instruction or a rule of life, but a personal relationship. «A starets» says Dostoevsky, «is one who takes your soul, your will, into his soul and his will.» Fr. Zachariah's disciples used to say about him, «It is as though he bore our hearts in his hands.» [\(περισσότερα...\)](#)