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CHRISTIAN EXISTENTIALISM ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN IN THE 14th CENTURY

Mount Athos was the most important centre of Eastern monastic life in the 14th century, the „spiritual home“ of the Balkan peoples and the most important spiritual, cultural and intellectual centre in the Orthodox East.

Great changes were taking place in the Christian West and East in the 14th century. The very foundations of the „Christian Universe“ were shaking. One world was disappearing and another was being born. It was then that the „Hesychast movement“ originated on Mount Athos. It had a long prehistory, which played a decisive role in all the spheres of life of the Balkan and other Eastern Christian peoples in „the centuries of enslavement“. The Athonite „Hesychasts“ and „Sinaite“ monks united the Orthodox peoples in those difficult and gloomy times. They were really „the elite of the Christian society“. The Athonite monasticism has preserved the Orthodox Church from numerous temptations: ethnophiletism, caesaropapism and secularism. What is most important, the „Hesychast movement“, which spread from Mount Athos to the entire Eastern Christendom, preserved, in the tragic times, the authentic early Christian tradition, the spiritual and existentialist experience, which is of importance and value to all men, and not only to monks. This is one of the reasons why „Hesychasm“ has recently

attracted the attention not only of scholars and intellectuals of various views and „professions“, but also of other people.

„Hesychasm“ was long regarded as a specific „technique“ of prayer. It was only recently that its anthropological, social, cultural and existential values have been fully recognized.