

# *HOLY FIRE*

## ANCIENT WISDOM FOR FUTURE WORSHIP

ALAN RATHE / IWS ALUMNI SEMINAR 2024



6 December 1273

“

*All that I have  
**written** appears to  
be as so much straw  
after the things that  
have been revealed  
to me.”*



“ALL STRAW”

*“all that I have written”*



THEOLOGY

???

LITURGY



*“the contemplative life”*

*“final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else but the vision of the Divine Essence.”*

*( ST, I-II, Question 2, Art. 8)*

*“owing to an abundance of divine love, the whole man burns up into God.”*

*( Super Rom. 12, lec. 2, §988 )*



"ALL STRAW"



**THEOLOGY**

*(scholars)*

~MIND

"spiritual (trans)formation"  
"seeking the face of God"  
"growing in grace"  
"the Christian mystical trad'n"

**SPIRITUALITY**

*(monastics)*

*via contemplativa*      *via activa*  
~HEART      ~STRENGTH

**LITURGY**

*(clergy)*

~SOUL

Where are we headed  
with all of this?

(Neoplatonism)  
PHILO

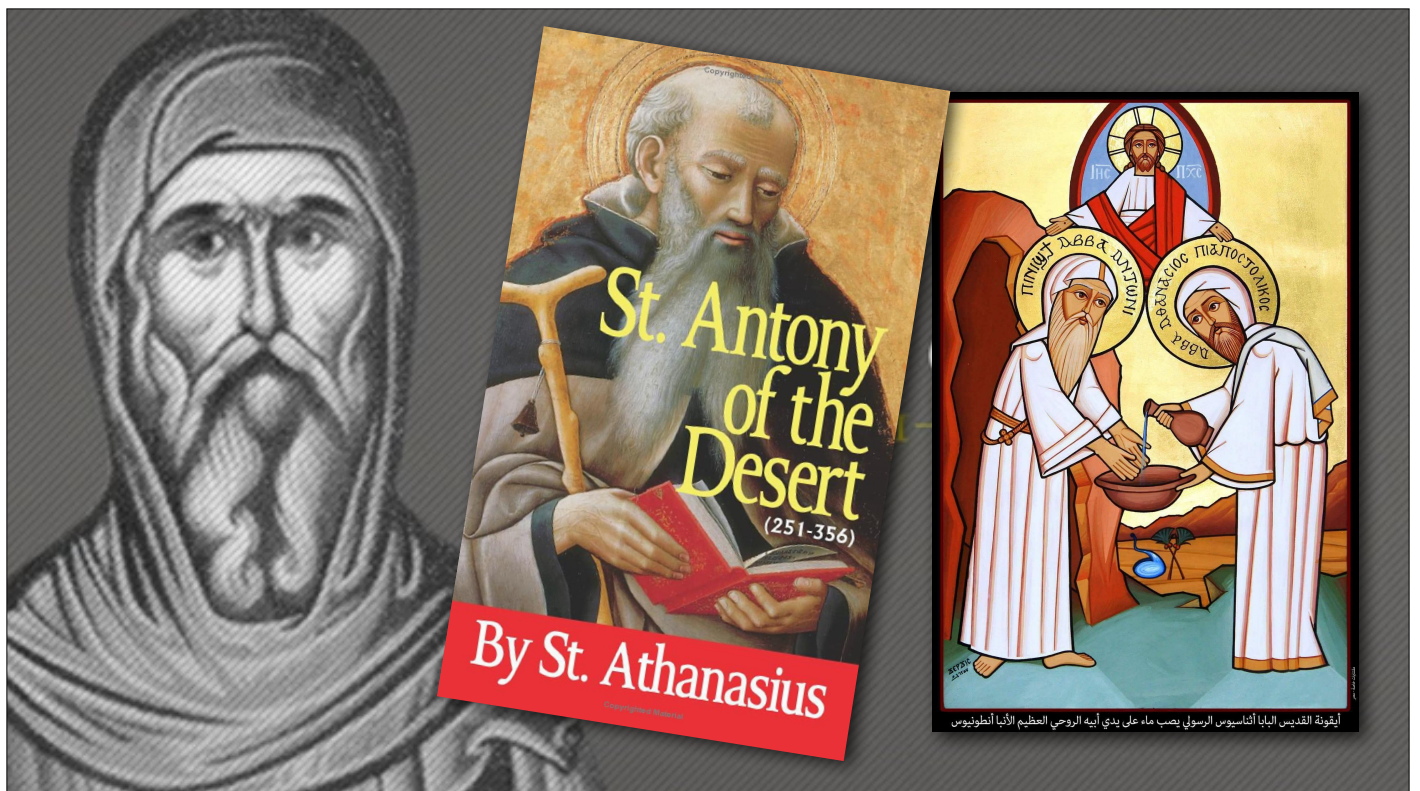
## THE CONTEMPLATIVE TRADITION

- ORIGEN (185-253)
- **DESERT FATHERS/MOTHERS** (3rd/4th c)
- **EVAGRIUS** (345-399)
- GREGORY OF NYSSA (335-394)
- JOHN CASSIAN (360-435)
- AUGUSTINE (354-430)
- PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS (5th/6th c)
- GREGORY THE GREAT (540-604)
- MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR (7th c)
- BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX (12th c)



THE DESERT FATHERS (BIRTH OF MONASTICISM)

OUT IN THE DESERT...  
BUT NOT OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM!



➤ DESERT FATHERS/MOTHERS (3rd/4th c) .....ANTONY

➤ EVAGRIUS (345-399)

➤ ATHANASIUS

➤ JOHN CASSIAN (360-435)

➤ AUGUSTINE (354-430)

➤ BENEDICT (5th/6th c)

Western Monasticism

*Strong influences on  
prayer and liturgy*

Eastern Orthodox  
spirituality



THE DESERT FATHERS (BIRTH OF MONASTICISM)



“Abba Lot went to Abba Joseph and said to him, ‘Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?’ Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands toward heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, “If you will, you can become **all flame**.”

*(Benedicta Ward, The Sayings of the Desert Fathers - Cistercian Publications )*



ALL FLAME



*John Cassian*

## "FIERY PRAYER"

( SEE JOHN CASSIAN,  
CONFERENCES 9 & 10 )



*Hesychios*

"SNOW CAN NEVER  
EMIT FLAME.  
WATER CAN NEVER  
ISSUE FIRE..."

( HESYCHIOS, 5TH/6TH C. )



“Abba Pambo asked Abba Anthony, ‘What ought I to do?’ and the old man said to him, ‘Do not trust in your own righteousness, do not worry about the past, but control your tongue and your stomach.’”

(Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* - Cistercian Publications)

## DESERT FATHERS — TIMELINE

(Excerpted and adapted from “Christian History Timeline: Antony and the Desert Fathers”)

### PIONEER YEARS

**249-251 Decian persecution;** many in Egypt flee to desert

c **251 Paul of Thebes** > desert

**Antony** born;

c **271 Antony** takes up “the discipline,” learning from Egyptian hermits

**286-306 Antony** in fort

**311 Antony** visits Alexandria to comfort persecuted Christians

### EXPLOSIVE GROWTH

**313 Edict of Milan** (official toleration); **Antony** withdraws to Inner Mountain, near Red Sea

**320 Pachomius** founds first monastic community, at Tabennesi

**330 Athanasius** flees authorities, hiding with monks in the Thebaid; **Amoun** moves to **Nitria**; **Macarius the Great** starts monastery in **Scetis** (grows!); monasteries ++ in **Palestine**

**340 Athanasius** visits Rome with a monastic ‘entourage’... monastic ideal spreads in West

**356 Antony** dies

**357 Athanasius** writes his *Life of Antony*; becomes ‘best seller’

# DESERT FATHERS — TIMELINE

(Excerpted and adapted from "Christian History Timeline: Antony and the Desert Fathers")

## SECOND GENERATION

358 **Basil the Great**; founds his first monastery (in Cappadocia)

360 **Martin of Tours** (in Gaul) takes up monastic life, soon helps establish a hermitage

383 **Evagrius** moves to Nitria

385 **Jerome** (and companions) found monastery near Bethlehem;  
**Cassian and Germanus** arrive in Egypt

386 **Augustine** converts after hearing about Antony

## MOVEMENT MEMORIALIZED

404 **Jerome** translates Pachomian Rule into Latin

405-10 ***The History of the Monk of Egypt*** (based on a journey in 394) is completed

419-20 **Palladius** writes *Lausiac History* (key source for this era)

420 **Cassian** begins writing *Institutes and Conferences*

c500 **Benedict of Nursia** withdraws to cave, begins monastic life



“Palladius, who visited Egypt toward the end of the fourth century, reported 2,000 monks living in the monasteries around Alexandria and 5,000 in Nitria... In Athanasius’s famous words, ‘The desert was made a city by monks who left their own people and enrolled for citizenship in heaven.’”

( James E. Goehring, “Alone in the Desert?” *Christian History* #64 )

“

The early Christian monks formed an international society that flourished in all the Greek territories of the late Roman Empire, as well as in Syria and Persia, in Egypt gathered around the Nile, and as far into Africa as Nubia (modern Sudan) and the highlands of Ethiopia. They inhabited the rocky and desert terrain of Sinai, Palestine, Arabia, and Turkey (ancient Cappadocia); and in the great capital of the late Roman Empire, Constantinople, they became almost a civil service, so great were their numbers, with many dedicated scholars and aristocrats among them.



John McGuckin

( John McGuckin, *The Mystical Chapters* )





THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES



THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

FLAME AND  
FAITHFULNESS



## THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

### FLAME & FAITHFULNESS

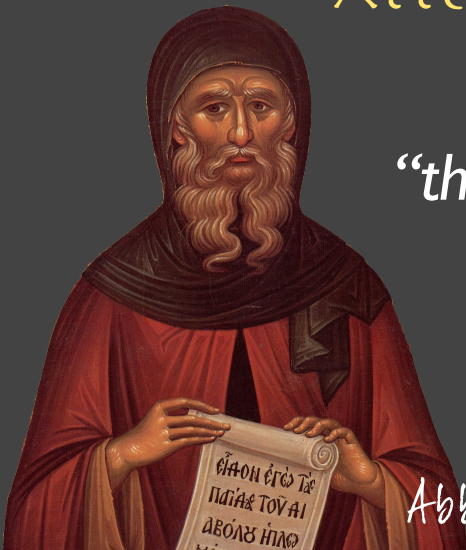


“A ‘long [slow] obedience’  
in a glorious direction,  
perhaps with moments  
of ecstasy along the way”



## THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

### ATTENDING TO ONE'S HEART



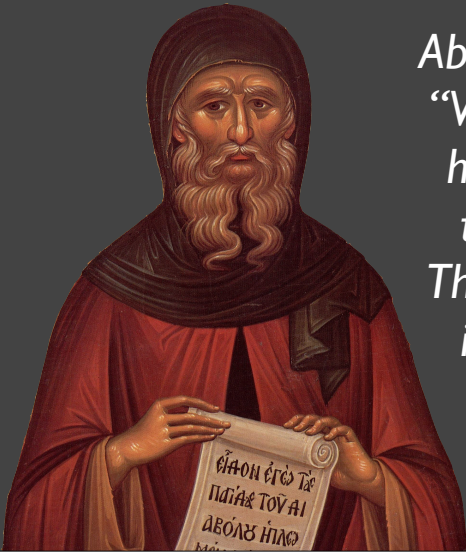
*Abba Antony*

“the battle for your own **heart**”



## THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

### ATTENDING TO ONE'S HEART



Abba Antony said,  
“Whoever sits in solitude and is quiet  
has escaped from three wars:  
those of hearing, speaking, and seeing.  
Then there is only one war left  
in which to fight—and that is the  
battle for your own heart.”

*( John McGuckin, The Mystical Chapters )*



## THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

### ATTENDING TO ONE'S HEART



Hesychios

“Watch your heart always.”



## THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

### PRACTICES

- *Reciting Scripture (psalmody)*
- *Prayer*
- *Reflection / meletê*
- *Charity / hospitality*
- *Asceticism*



## THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

### ASCETICISM

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| ✦ <i>Balance of isolation and community</i><br>- <i>eremitic / cenobitic</i> | ✦ <i>Celibacy / chastity</i>  |
| ✦ <i>Times of silence</i>  | ✦ <i>Deprivation of sleep</i> |
| ✦ <i>Fasting</i>   | ✦ <i>Menial / manual work</i> |
|  | ✦ <i>Staying in place</i>     |



## THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

### STAYING IN PLACE



“Go and sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.” ( ABBA MOSES )

“Now, then, give yourself to the grace of the cell. All healing will take place for you there.” ( PAUL OF TAMMA )



## THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

### RADICAL HUMILITY

✦ *Leaning against pride*

- Here in desert because I'm not strong!

✦ *Deflecting attention*

✦ *Owning one's own sinfulness*



“A brother at Scetis committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited, but he refused to go to it. Then the priest sent someone to say to him, ‘Come, for everyone is waiting for you.’ So, he got up and went. He took a leaking jug, filled it with water, and carried it with him. The others came out to meet him and said to him, ‘What is this, Father?’ The old man said to them, ‘My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the errors of another.’ When they heard that, they said no more to the brother but forgave him.”

(Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* - Cistercian Publications)



THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

# INTEGRATION

WITH OTHER DIMENSIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

✦ **LITURGY** (irreducibility of Eucharist, etc.)



“

*Paphnutius: "I said to [Abba Onnophrius, living alone in the desert], 'My holy father, where do you go for the Eucharist on the Sabbath and the Lord's day? He said to me: 'My holy father, an angel of God comes and gives me the Eucharist on the Sabbath and the Lord's day; and to everyone in the desert who lives there on account of God and sees no human being, the angel comes and gives the Eucharist and comforts them. What's more, if they desire to see anyone, they are taken up into the heavenly places where they see all the saints and greet them, and their hearts are filled with light; they rejoice and are glad with God in these good things.*

Paphnutius: Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt and the Life of Onnophrius, trans. Tim Vivian. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1993.



THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

# INTEGRATION

WITH OTHER DIMENSIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

✦ **THEOLOGY** ( concern with orthodoxy )



“

*And [Anthony] was altogether wonderful in faith and religious, for he never held communion with the... schismatics, knowing their wickedness and apostacy from the beginning... For he thought and asserted that intercourse with these was harmful and destructive to the soul... And once when certain Arian madmen came to him, when he had questioned them and learned their impiety, he drove them from the mountain, saying that their words were worse than the poison of serpents.*

Life of Anthony, Athanasius (Newadvent.org)



“

*[A man] taught that there is no Holy Spirit, and many were deceived by his sayings. Abba Bishoy heard about him, and he went to him and he had with him a weaved basket with three ears. The old man and his followers asked him about the reason for making three ears for the basket. He answered, 'I have a Trinity, and everything I do, is like the Trinity'... Then he started to explain to them from the Holy Scriptures... He indicated to them that the Holy Spirit is One of the three Persons of the Trinity. He convinced them, and they returned to the true faith. Then he returned to his monastery in the wilderness of Scete.*

Coptic story

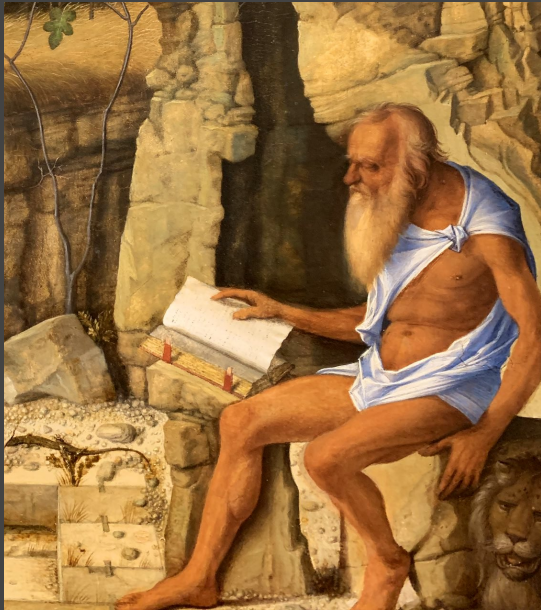


## THE DESERT FATHERS : THEMES

SPIRITUAL  
WARFARE  
(!!!)



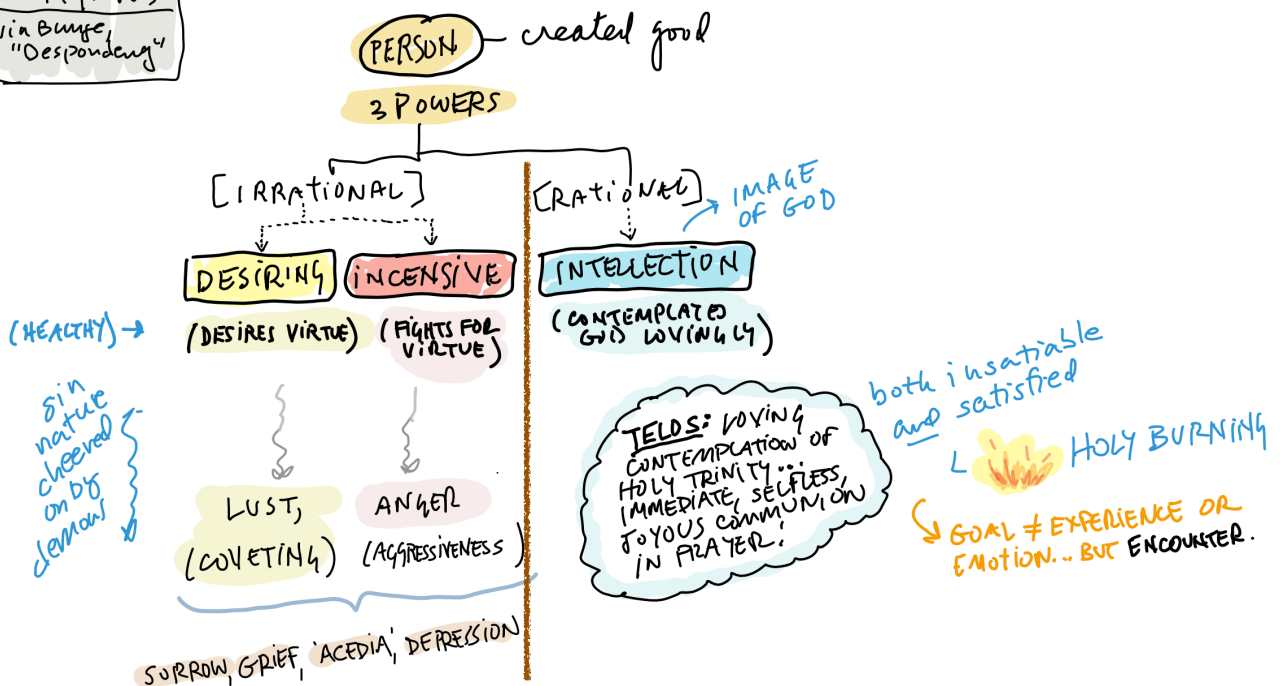
THE DESERT FATHERS (BIRTH OF MONASTICISM)

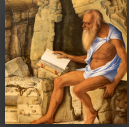


## Evagrius of Ponticus ( 345-399 )

EVAGRIUS  
via Bufo,  
"Despondency"

( EVAGRIUS' ANTHROPOLOGY )





THREE 'STAGES'

*Colossians 3:1-17?*

	ΕΥΑΓΓΙΙΣ	COMMON	PSEUDO DIONYSIUS
I	PRAKTIKE	PRAKTIKE	PURGATION
II	PHYSIKE	THEORETIKE	ILLUMINATION
III	THEORETIKE	GNOSTIKE	UNION

→ *"Divine Ascent"*

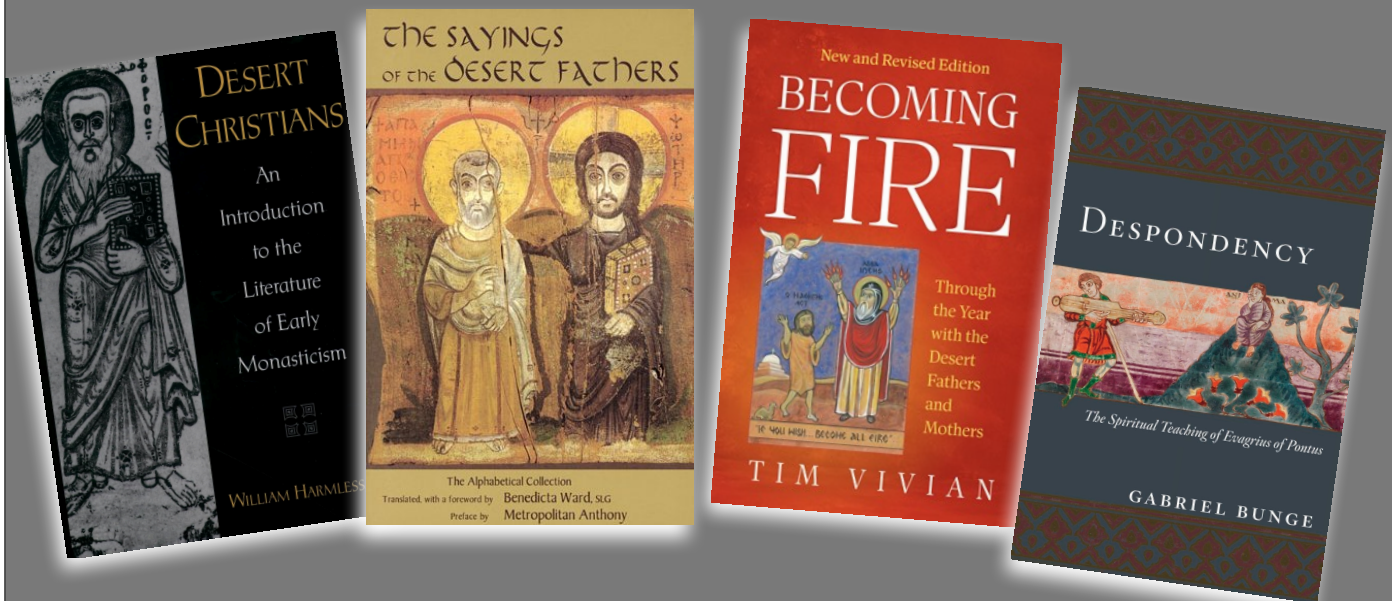
*Song of Songs*



ORIGEN (3rd c.) ..... BERNARD (12th c.)

# SO? *(How then shall we worship?)*

- ❖ If we were to pay attention to how the early ‘monastics’ approached “seeking God’s face” — how might that affect the way we understand worship and leading worship?



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ANCIENT WISDOM  
FOR FUTURE WORSHIP

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