



The Robert E. Webber

Institute for Worship Studies

HOLY FIRE: Ancient Wisdom for Future Worship

IWS Alumni Seminar, June 2024 – Dr. Alan Rathe (alan.rathe@iws.edu)

Thanks so much for participating in this year's alumni workshops... what a great delight to be with you all! There are plenty of resources on the Desert Fathers and what some have called "the Christian mystical tradition." Here are just a few to get you started...

DESERT FATHERS/MOTHERS

REFERENCE MATERIAL

- **Harmless, William. *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Christian Monasticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.** This book is simply outstanding – clearly and engagingly written, methodically setting out the background, the history, and the lives and teachings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. A superb overview with much good detail.

SOURCE MATERIAL

- **Vivian, Tim. *Becoming Fire: Through the Year with the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008.** A wonderful, well-referenced set of daily devotions quoting the Desert Fathers and Mothers. An excellent way to steep yourself in the ethos of these saints. (NOTE: a new edition of this book is coming out in the Fall of 2024.)
- **Ward, Benedicta. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1984.** A classic collection of the sayings (*apophthegmata*) of the Fathers and Mothers. This collection is alphabetical by name; some other collections are thematic.

REFLECTION / APPLICATION

- **Nouwen, Henri. *The Way of the Heart: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. New York: HarperOne (Reprint Edition), 2001.** This volume of Nouwen's reflections has become a classic in its own right. A simple but profound read.
- **Arndt, Andrew. *Streams in the Wasteland: Finding Spiritual Renewal with the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. Carol Stream: NavPress, 2022.** An accessible book by a pastor who does a fine job of bridging the spirituality of the Desert Christians with contemporary life.

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EVAGRIUS (and CASSIAN)

- **Bunge, Gabriel. *Despondency: The Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius of Pontus*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012.** Bunge, who converted to Eastern Orthodoxy and became a sort of monastic himself, has written several excellent books rooted in the work of Evagrius. This one, a good introduction, specifically treats “acedia”—the spiritual listlessness in which Christians can become entrenched. Many important and helpful concepts here.
- **Cassian, John (Colm Luibheid, ed.). *Conferences (Classics of Western Spirituality)*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985.** The “conferences” of John Cassian, a disciple of Evagrius, are full of surprisingly accessible discussions and interviews about prayer and spiritual formation.
- **Cassian, John (Jamie Kreiner, ed.). *How to Focus: A Monastic Guide for an Age of Distraction (Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers)*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024.** Scholar Jamie Kreiner has done a fine job of providing fresh translations for sections of Cassian’s “conferences” – featuring passages angled toward the very timely question: how does one focus one’s attention (on God) in a world full of distractions?

THE CHRISTIAN MYSTICAL TRADITION

- **Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition (2nd ed.)*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.** Louth is a brilliant, incisive scholar, and this brief treatment of some of the major, early figures in the Christian contemplative (“mystical”) tradition is chock full of quotations from original sources. Very helpful.