

The Desert Fathers

Of great importance to the idea of The Desert is the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness. Here we get the two images of “journey” and “desert” together. The Desert Fathers sought solitude so that they may experience a fuller vision of God undistracted from business and temptations. Often people who were not ready for solitude found that they did not make progress but fell deeper into sin.

Cassian said that it was necessary to be prepared – to be perfect in fact – before going into the desert.

Two major players were Anthony (c.291–396 AD) described as the Father of Monks and Pachomius (ca. 290–346), a former soldier. The latter was a gifted administrator and organizer, and it was he who devised the structure which became the foundation for Monasticism.

An important event on the history of Desert Spirituality was the marriage of the Church to Rome, a consequence of the conversion of Constantine. Things became a bit too rosy for the church – obviously there were no longer any martyrdoms; Withdrawing from all that made life easy was seen as a type of martyrdom.

The main features of Desert Spirituality were withdrawal, silence and continuous prayer. Those that withdrew from the world did not abandon it, but sought to hold it up in their prayers.