



Streams in the Wasteland: Finding Spiritual Renewal with the Desert Fathers and Mothers

Andrew Arndt

NavPress (Sep 13, 2022)

Softcover \$16.99 (224pp)

978-1-64158-451-7

Marked by hope, Andrew Arndt's *Streams in the Wasteland* concerns drawing on one's hidden desires for God to lead a life that hearkens back to the great spiritual traditions of the desert fathers and mothers.

With frequent references to early monks—who renounced the world in response to the holiness and goodness of God, and who sought spiritual renewal this way—this is a book filled with wisdom that has echoed through the ages. Its rigorous “desert spirituality” comes alive through monastic stories and advice for discerning the will of God.

Thinkers like Thomas Merton drew on the example of the desert fathers and mothers; Merton also saw the desert everywhere in contemporary life. Here, the “misidentification of spiritual desire combined with a staggering lack of practical knowledge” leads to the “madness of our time,” which results in personal relationship problems, social abuses of power, and the world-destroying impulses leading to our collective climate disasters. The desert solution is to retreat to our collective cells and contemplate God.

Arndt, a pastor, humanizes his material by explaining his own personal faith struggles. These add emotional weight to his efforts to connect ancient streams of Christian thought together. In the sayings of the desert fathers and mothers, he finds hope. They escaped into the wilderness and developed new understandings of the world and of God, becoming decidedly “odd” by the world's terms. Arndt also suggests that real freedom comes through “the Great Renunciation,” or rejecting sin and the evil of the world before seeking repentance.

Closing with the image of a renewed church, led by a spirit of vulnerability and sacrifice, *Streams in the Wasteland* is rich with the wisdom of early Christianity, which is expanded upon to help contemporary believers face their own challenges.

JEREMIAH ROOD (July / August 2022)

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