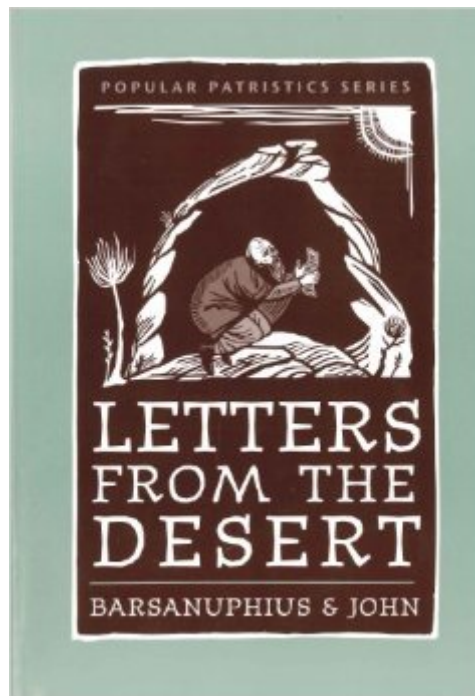


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Letters From The Desert: A Selection Of Questions And Responses (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press Popular Patristics Series)



Synopsis

Two monastic elders the 'Great Old Man' Barsanuphius, and the 'Other Old Man' John flourished in the southern region around Gaza in the early part of the sixth century. Maintaining strict seclusion within their cells, they spoke to others only through letters by way of Abba Seridos, the abbot of the monastic community in Gaza, where these two holy men lived in silence. The authority of John may be described as more institutional, responding as he does to problems of a practical nature; the authority of Barsanuphius is more inspirational, responding to principles of a spiritual nature. Thus, they complemented each other and together they maintained a harmonious 'authority-in-charity.' Rather than the Western emphasis on discipline, these two elders retained an emphasis on discernment, thus preserving the flexibility and fluidity of the Egyptian desert lifestyles (from whence Barsanuphius had been formed). Nevertheless, both men were highly educated and displayed a fine intellect, as is reflected in their writings. In the East, one sought out an elder, an Old Man (a geron in Greek or an abba, the Coptic word) as a spiritual director, and this was the chief role of monastic community to the surrounding community. These letters of the two Old Men were written to hermits, to monks in the community, to those in the choir, to priests, and to lay persons. Some were intended for advanced instruction, while others were intended for novices' according to the capacity of the inquirer. So one must not perceive as a general rule words spoken to souls at different spiritual levels. Still, these questions and answers evoke the image of the Christian tradition being passed from elder to disciple, and the contemporary reader will be able to appreciate the method and possibly be inspired to imitate the message.

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Customer Reviews

Barsanuphius was not lightly called "the Great". We just might owe this early Christian holy man an unfathomable debt, and I invite readers to search this book for themselves to find out why. In the search they will make acquaintance with two wonderful, loving men, ascetic teachers of ancient Palestine, whose knowledge and common sense about living the spiritual life come to us in their own words. This book contains treasure for those who are serious about Christian joy.

Only if one is reading these letters can understand the history of the Church. It is amazing how some people of the old understood the life because they perceived the reality as it is without media to confuse them. They raised generations of straight minded people too. The letters prove that in the East was not a period of darkness as it was in the West of Europe. I was glad to be able to have a collection of these letters because the extended version is a bit pricey.

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