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## Desert Fathers and Other Barren Wastelands The Origins of the Spiritual Formation Movement

by Gary E. Gilley

For several years various articles in *The Quarterly Journal* have touched upon a range of issues of the Spiritual Formation Movement.<sup>1</sup> And while we have examined the genesis of this modern movement as well as its key beliefs, leaders, and teachers, both past and present, it is helpful to turn our attention to their ancient roots. It is also valuable to discuss the attraction of the movement, especially for Evangelicals. In previous articles we documented the serious errors in doctrine and practice of the movement, and why so many Evangelicals embrace its disciplines and look to the so-called "spiritual masters" for guidance. These issues of origin and attraction overlap, but we will look at them separately for clarity's sake.

### PROBLEMATIC ROOTS

All trees are sustained by a root system and, while there are many

roots of various sizes within the system, there is usually a main root or two from which other roots sprout. There are two ancient main roots of spiritual formation that need exploring: The theological root and the experiential root.

**Theological root:** Even a casual reading of the New Testament reveals that the Church struggled with doctrinal errors and heresies. Virtually all the Epistles, with the possible exception of the short and personal letter to Philemon, addressed one or more theological concerns which run all the way from the person of Christ to the Gospel message (continues on page 16)



### Inside this Issue:

WHERE IS THE EMERGING CHURCH HIDING? .....	PAGE 2
CONCERN EXPRESSED OVER VATICAN PRAYER MEETING .....	PAGE 3
OBSESSED WITH DEMONS .....	PAGE 4