



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 3 No: 4 November 1999

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter for hermits and those interested in the eremitical life published Paul and Karen Fredette. This newsletter seeks to affirm and support this way of life. ***Raven's Bread*** is a collaborative effort and thus depends on the shared reflections, stories, news, notices, letters, and information from hermits themselves. The ***Raven's Bread*** Web page is an abbreviated version of our full newsletter, which also includes a Bulletin Board and Reader Forum.

Please send your written contributions, as well as address changes and subscriptions to:

Raven's Bread

P.O. Box 562

Hot Springs, NC 28743.

The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$8.00 in U.S. currency. (International money orders are the most convenient form of payment by foreign subscribers.) Any extra donations will be used to subsidize subscriptions for hermits who cannot afford the full cost.

To E-mail ***Raven's Bread*** directly click on this link: 103517.210@compuserve.com

Raven's Bread (formerly ***Marabou***) derives its name from the experience of Elijah, the prophet, in 1 Kgs.17: 1-6. A raven, sent by God, nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (the Cutting Place).

Thoughts in Solitude

By: Richard Rohr, ofm, Albuquerque, NM

(Excerpted by permission from "The Clandestine Christian", published in Radical Grace, Vol. 12, #4)

I spent last Lent in hermitage - looking until my eyes were filled and thinking escaped me. Then at last, I knew by not knowing. And I knew Him. And "I" was of no concern.

It was good, for a change, to be "a clandestine Christian" - to return to the One Mirror, where all is mirrored in truth and compassion, without all the distortions of group think and group identity and group polarizations. I wonder if this is not the way through our present morass within the churches and in our cultural hall of mirrors. What else will clean the mirror?

It seems that it is the things we cannot do anything *with*, the useless things, and the things we cannot do anything *about*, the necessary things, which change us and transform us. They do something with *us* instead of us doing something with them! We are freed from the tyranny and illusion of control. It is often people outside of denominations and ideologies who are most free to be guided by these "agendas from God." Perhaps because they have no other choice.

There has to be some degree of withdrawal from the revolving hall of mirrors in order to find oneself primarily mirrored by God. This is an urgent need, not just for me personally, but also for a culture that seems lost in monthly media dramas, projections and conversations that merely fill up the time and temporarily assuage the loneliness. We feel socially contagious today, and no one is benefiting from it. We tend to mirror group feelings instead of knowing who we really are.

I wrote in my hermitage journal: "The self that begins the journey is not the self that arrives at the Gospel. The self that begins is the self that we think ourselves to be, the superior self we want to be. This is the self that dies along the way - until 'no one' is left. This 'no one' is the true self that all Great Religions talk about, *the self bigger than death yet born of death*, a different self than the private I, a self transformed by God and transformed in God.

The one lasting thing that silence has taught me is: *our lives are usable for God. We need not be effective, but only transparent and vulnerable.* God takes it all from there, and there is not much point in comparing who is better, right, higher or lower, or supposedly saved. We are all partial images slowly coming into focus, to the degree we allow and filter the Light and Love of God.

Let me share a quote from a Moslem mystic that delighted me for days on end while in hermitage. "God sighs to become known in us. God is delivered from solitude by the people in whom God reveals himself. The sorrow of the unknown God is softened through and in us" (Ibn al-Arabi, 1165-1240).

That's enough work for all of our remaining years. All we can be is transparent and vulnerable. Our authority will be the authority of those have passed through - and come out on the other side - dead *and* alive.

A Word

From

Still Wood

Thunk! Rattle! Bonk! This year's abundant yield of black walnuts, some the size of tennis balls, is peppering our deck and yard as I write this crispy fall morning. The squirrels and bears are delighted. But we must wear hard hats outdoors to avoid some painful bruising of our (thick) skulls! The harvest is abundant; the laborers are ducking and dodging as they garner.

What a vivid parable of our life here at (not so) Still Wood this year! Trees we have not planted nor tended are producing a prodigious amount of fruit to nourish all the furry creatures that share our mountain. *Raven's Bread* seems to be doing the same - spreading, growing, developing rich fruits that nourish Paul and I in ways we never imagined when we took on the ministry of *Marabou*, already planted and watered by Fr. Bede Jagoe, OP. The mailing list has more than doubled since then, and so has the generosity of our readers who make **RB** the enriching and thought-provoking newsletter it is. We wish it were possible to share with you ALL the spiritual riches that come our way through correspondence with so many of our subscribers, both new and old. Our life has been profoundly influenced and, yes, changed, by this continual exchange of spiritual resources and insights.

The same is true for our newest venture, *Raven's Rest*, which has proven popular far beyond our hopes when we first announced it last spring. To actually meet and share face to face with others dedicated to silence, solitude and contemplative awareness confirms and strengthens us in our chosen way of life and in this ministry.

Approaching a new millenium at the end of this war-racked century, Paul and I invite you to share in our Prayer Vigil on New Year's Eve during which we shall be remembering all of you whom "*Raven*" has gathered in a community of solitude that knows no walls, no boundaries, no separation of time or space. From 11:30 PM, Dec. 31, 1999 to 12:30 AM January 1, 2000, let us remember one another. Our fellowship stretches around the globe, from Iceland to Australia; from Ireland to Alaska. Hermits, solitaries and all you lovers of solitude, let us embrace one another and our world in compassionate prayer. Who knows - we may have soon to shout: "Don your hard hats - the Gifts of God are showering down upon us!"

With Grateful
love,

Karen
&
Paul

~~~~~*Sounding Solitude*~~~~~

By: David Budbill, Northern Vermont

(Excerpted from "Shambhala Sun Vol. 7, #3)

Prayer and contemplation as the path to selflessness isn't exactly the first social and political prescription people think of these days. "Let us start from one admitted fact," writes Merton: "If prayer, meditation and contemplation were once taken for granted as central realities of human life everywhere, they are so no longer. They are regarded, even by believers, as somehow marginal and secondary: what counts is getting things done."

How then does the hermit, the one in the wilderness, relate his or her contemplative efforts to a world interested only in action and results?

Bill Porter, in his book *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*, wrote of his search for Taoist hermits in the mountains of northern China. He was told they were wiped out but finally found someone who said, "Of course there are still hermits in China. But when you meet them, you won't know them. You won't find them unless they want to be found."

Slowly Porter discovered them (or they him). These recluses shared with the Desert Fathers - and all hermits everywhere - the qualities of simplicity, lack of artifice, common sense, good will, ordinariness and delightful good humor. Their goal in life was to reduce desire and lead quiet lives: not a bad idea in this mad, mad, materialist world. As one of the hermits said, "You can't be in a hurry. You have to be prepared to devote your whole life to your practice. This is what's meant by religion. It's not a matter of spending money. You have to spend your life."

Traditionally such hermits or shamans are regarded as defenders of society against darkness. The hermit is actually the protector of the society he *doesn't* live within. Imagine a society where hermits, recluses and contemplatives are valued and supported as important members of society. Yet I hear Americans, myself included, asking, "How can someone who eats and sleeps and sits there all day be any good to society?"

A partial answer comes from an ancient Chinese model. Throughout Chinese history there has been a dialectic between public service and withdrawal, between the hermit and the activist. "Seclusion and public service were seen as the dark and light of the moon, inseparable and complementary - Hermits and officials were often the same people at different times of their lives. And officials who never experienced tranquillity and concentration of spirit in pursuits other than fame or fortune were not esteemed in China" (Porter, *ibid*).

The aim of this dialectic between public service and withdrawal was always the application of the principles of the Tao in human affairs. The conflicting pulls I have felt throughout my life between "getting things done" and the urge to withdraw have been seen by some societies not as contradictory but complementary.

To see the hermit and the activist as different parts of the same person's movement back and forth from personal to social should be easy for well-intentioned Americans with some sense of public good. But to see the hermit as an activist, his or her withdrawal and passivity as activity, requires a leap of mind and faith altogether radical.

My reading and contemplation over the years have convinced me that there must be a place for the life of the total recluse, the hermit who gets nothing done. This kind of total withdrawal is unappreciated, even hated, by Americans. As a people we are still too empirical, too practical. We are all yin and no yang. We need to work our way toward an understand that contemplatives, although we never see them and they never "do" anything at all, can become the defenders of the society in which they don't live, the guardians and protectors of the public good.

This is a very old idea; so old, in fact, that it is new.

Out of Silence, Love is Born

A Call to a Novena of Silence

The Foundation, "A Call to Silence" has since 1995 invited people of all traditions, cultures and religions to take part in a network of meditation, and together meditate for peace on earth and the healing of our planet. A week of silence is celebrated every year during the first week of May. During this week people from all over the world are connected to this network of meditation.

Now the Foundation invites everyone to close the year 1999 and the 20th century with a Novena of Silence, and so to enter in silence a new millennium, a new era. This silence will be our contribution to that colorful symphony of sounds that will no doubt accompany the turn of the century.

Silence at the Start of the New Millennium

We have become people of the clock. In the past we found it sufficient when the clock tower struck the hour and the half-hour. These days we measure time in nanoseconds. We live our lives in a fine pressurized container of count and measure. This pressure box, in which we suffocate, is of our own making. We are lucky that there are moments when we can still escape from this "time box." At these times we give ourselves permission to dwell, to be quiet, and to step out of that wheel of turning time. This novena gives us the space to move out of time and enables us to concentrate and meditate on the reasons why we live, on life itself, and our connection to the other forms of life. We realize that we are just mortals for we see our place in history in perspective. In a novena, we can also ask for special favors, for asking declares what we consider important at the start of a new era.

The Novena of Silence will be held from

December 22nd through December 31st, 1999.

Participation as an individual is possible but also by organizing a meditation group or by bringing the novena to the attention of meditation centers, church groups, institutions etc and interesting them in taking part in it. Anyone can find a form to celebrate this Novena of Silence. For some, it will consist of a period of time daily spent in silence and solitude. One group that holds meditation evenings once a month has planned to start the novena with a Light Celebration that will include music, singing, dance, contemplation and silence. During the novena there will be evenings of meditation at homes of the members. The novena will close with a 24-hour Light-Watch starting on December 31, 1999 at twelve noon and ending on January 1, 2000 at twelve noon.

One may also celebrate a novena on one's own by burning a candle in the window every evening and spiritually connecting with all the people who are involved with the novena throughout the world.

For information about the Novena of Silence, contact:

A Call to Silence Foundation

De Haar 144

NL 2261 ZA Leidschendam, The Netherlands

Phone/Fax" +31 70 301 00 69

email: <http://members.aol.com/actsilence>

Then Silence

**will gather all the words within itself,
the waves will return in the ocean of eternity.**

And every word that has been spoken

about peace and love

will be recognized like a bright light

by that spirit that has come to rest.

(Marcel Messing)

Topic for February 2000 Issue:

In seeking a life of solitude, what has been your most difficult issue?

Deadline: January 4, 2000

Resources Available from *Raven's Bread*

Readings in Spirituality - Annotated Bibliography by Sharon Jeanne Smith **31pp. \$10.00**

Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$8.00**

Commentary on Canon 603 from "The Law of Consecrated Life" by Jean Beyer SJ, 1988 Translated from the French by W. Becker, 1992 **10pp. \$3.00**

Hermits: The Juridical Implications of Canon 603 by Helen L. Macdonald, Researcher Novalis: St. Paul University, Ottawa, ONT **24pp. \$8.00**

Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$5.00**

Statutes for Hermits by The Bishops of France (1989) **12 pp. \$4.00**

Discernment Survey 1996 **6pp. \$2.00**

Raven's Rest

Retreatants welcome to schedule time after April 1, 2000 at **Raven's Rest** (a fully furnished apartment with private entrance) here at **Still Wood**. Offers opportunity to experience solitude and silence on a forested mountainside in the Smokies. Spiritual Direction available upon request. Suggested offering \$20.00 per day includes meals. For further information, contact:

Paul and Karen Fredette

P.O. Box 562 Hot Springs, NC 28743

Tel: 828-622-3750

BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Landscapes of the Soul, A Spirituality of Place by Robert M. Hamma. *A new awareness of place is growing in those who are serious about spiritual practice. This book helps us pay attention to how ordinary places shape and form our spiritual consciousness and to reflect on what they have to teach us.* Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN; 1999, Paper, 160 pp. \$9.95.

Living on the Border of the Holy - Renewing the Priesthood of all by L. William Countryman. *By "priest" I mean any person who lives in the dangerous, exhilarating, life-giving borderlands of human existence, where the everyday experience of life opens up to reveal glimpses of the HOLY - and not only lives there but comes to the aid of others who are living there. So begins this rich and provocative volume.* Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, PA; 1999, Paper, 205 pp. \$17.95.

Beyond Religion, 8 Alternative Paths to the Sacred by David N. Elkins, Ph.D. *An exceptional book that powerfully reveals that the true nature of spirituality is a pervasive, relentless river alive within the human spirit and expressed with unlimited variety in the world.* Quest Books, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL. 1998, Paper, 304 pp. \$16.95

Being Priest to One Another by Michael Dwinell. *In a series of provocative meditations, Dwinell interprets 24 startling images of "being priest".* Triumph Books, Ligouri, MO, 1993. Paper, 198 pp. \$10.95

Basking in His Presence, A Call to the Prayer of Silence by Bill Volkman. *"A call to practice contemplative prayer, to be still, to turn within, to come home."* Dickinson Press, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, Paper, 152 pp.



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