



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 6 No: 1 February 2002

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in the eremitical life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. The 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
18065 Hwy 209
Hot Springs, NC 28743

The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$8.00 in USA and \$10.00 US currency for foreign subscriptions. (Drafts drawn on US banks 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: fredette@nclink.net

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).

zzzzzz Thoughts in Solitude zzzzzz

By: Santidhammo Bhikku, Woodenville, WA

In the Chinese tradition during times of great social and political upheaval, the fall of dynasties, military struggles and strife sometimes lasting for centuries, the Taoist and Buddhist monks withdrew into the mountain wilderness to preserve true values, in a protest against the corruption and brutality of their times.

A similar element of protest was involved in the formation of Christian monasticism in that the monastic impulse arose at the very moment that Christianity became identified with the state power under Emperor Constantine. To a certain degree, these Christians who fled to the deserts of Egypt and Syria to lead the monastic (and eremitic) life were protesting the corruption of Christianity merging with the state.

This "abandonment or rejection" of the world is not a condemnation of the world but is rather an act of compassion. The Mahayana Lotus Sutra compares the world to a burning house, and the Buddhist monk is compared to a loving father, calling his children out of the flaming house, trying to persuade them to escape before it's too late. The monk is living in such a way as to preserve and promote a more noble heritage of the human race.

Thomas Merton says "The desert is for those who have felt a salutary despair of accepted values, in order to hope in mercy and be themselves merciful men to whom mercy is promised." He adds: "Such men, out of pity for the universe, out of loyalty to humanity, and without a spirit of bitterness or resentment, withdraw into the healing silence of the wilderness, or of poverty, of obscurity, not in order to preach to others but to heal in themselves the wounds of the entire world."

In Buddhist tradition, monks (hermits) go to the forest, jungle, mountains and deserts to practice an alternative lifestyle rooted in primordial, prehistoric values and traditions.

Even today, this recluse/hermit tradition is alive and vital in the forests of Thailand, Burma, and the Himalayan mountain regions. In Vietnam, I met Zen monks who had withdrawn into seclusion in the forests. The Tibetans, particularly the Kagyu order, emphasize the element of withdrawal from society to live in solitude in mountain caves and remote places.

These forest hermits represent a resistance movement, a counter-cultural movement of rebellion and protest. They preserve and cultivate ancient wisdom. "Such messengers point to the true value of life, indicating the value of inwardness as much more important than wealth and power, that the life of tranquillity and material simplicity is more rewarding and fulfilling.... Such messages are especially revolutionary for a society blindly obsessed with impoverished values. To have forest monasteries amid, or elevated above lay society, is to have communities of resistance, that by their nature and very existence question the validity of popular values." (Phra Phonim Vesal - Sukato Forest Monastery)

The existence of the forest hermits "can convey, with insistence and innovation messages that create new values which can bring about cultural change on a fundamental level ." (ibid) Trappist Abbot Armaund Veilleux, head of Holy Spirit Monastery in Georgia, says: "Monks (hermits) are marginalized by choice but the marginality is in the service of prophecy, not of escapism. From the edges of the system there is a view of what the system does to those who are excluded. If contemplation fosters immediacy to God, marginality fosters immediacy to the oppressed. The monk (hermit) wants to be where the cry of the poor meets the ear of God. To feel the pathos of God is not a warm and comfortable religious experience; it is an experience of howling wilderness."

A Word from Still Wood

The "offices" of ***Raven's Bread*** share space in our loft with the studio of Faith Keeper Originals, our fabric art enterprise. A competition of sorts develops as little piles of two inch squares of fabric lay scattered about on larger piles of manuscript pages, like so many flower petals fluttering to rest in a leaf-strewn forest. (Neatness doesn't count when creative work is in progress!)

As we were keying in the text for this issue of ***RB***, the diversity of individual backgrounds, traditions and experiences represented in the material impressed us. Like the fabric mosaics that we assemble on our flannel-covered design boards, this issue is composed of various viewpoints which, when viewed as a whole, glow with the beauty of a stained glass window.

Eremitical life itself is a rich composition of many traditions, beliefs and practices. Meditation and contemplative prayer transcend denominational differences and become a focal point for people of diverse beliefs to meet in a shared experience. Many who live in solitude for an extended period gradually discover in themselves an internal freedom to embrace all individuals, no matter what their race, background or religious persuasion. We are pleased that ***Raven's Bread*** can represent both the unity and diversity of eremitical life; that it can be a forum for exchange in which readers can be enriched by the offerings of fellow lovers of solitude.

There is a Scripture passage that praises the variety of God's creation: "*How beautiful are all his works, even to the spark and the fleeting vision! The universe lives and abides forever; to meet each need, each creature is preserved. All of them differ, one from another, yet none of them has he made in vain. For each in turn, as it comes, is good: can one ever see enough of their splendor?*" (Sir. 42:23-25). Is not this a hymn for all solitary contemplatives who grow day by day into a spaciousness of heart that treasures all that exists?

We are grateful to all of you who have contributed your thoughts and insights either to this particular issue or to the Second Reflection Question of the 2001 Reader Survey that is summarized on pages four and five. We also thank all who have renewed their subscription for 2002. The "extra" that many of you tucked in helps to keep ***RB*** solvent and airborne to hermits whose slender means do not permit them to contribute dollars but whose prayers are equally necessary for ***Raven*** to continue its ministry and mission.

Recently, ***RB*** garnered some media attention which has brought in numerous new subscribers. You are warmly welcomed to a spiritual company that now numbers over 650 readers worldwide. Let us all continue to pray for one another as we build a spiritual network that can nourish, sustain and encourage all seekers in the Spirit.

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

The 2001 Survey of Raven's Bread Readers

Of the approximately 590 copies of the Survey mailed in May 2001, we received over 150 responses. This has been a truly gratifying experience. The volume of returns is a fantastic 25%!!! This says something wonderful about you who are cooperating in this project and making it reflective of what is truly happening re solitary lifestyles.

The current issue of **RB** features the results to the Second of Ten Reflection Questions: "*How did you come to recognize your call to religious / solitary / hermit life?*" We can still offer you the "big picture" from the eleven categories covered in the Survey's check-off section (Personal Information, Location, Religious Affiliation and Status, Lifestyle, Prayer Forms and Religious Practices, Financial Situation, Spiritual Direction, and Difficulties) which was published in the August 2001 Issue. In the months ahead, we will continue to review with our readers the material received in answer to the **10 Reflection Questions** and offer updates about any significant new data we receive. Eventually, a complete Report will be available from **RB RESOURCES**.

If you are interested in obtaining the **2001 Raven's Bread Survey Results**, these initial reports are available upon request to our online readers for \$5.00 each (U.S. currency):

By Mail:

Raven's Bread
18065 Hwy 209
Hot Springs, NC 28743

By Telephone: 1-828-622-3750

By E-Mail: fredette@nclink.net

**"Is there enough Silence
for the Word to be heard?"**

from: "Ash Wednesday"

This is the time of tension between dying and birth
The place of solitude where three dreams cross
Between blue rocks
But when the voices shaken from the yew-tree drift away
Let the other yew be shaken and reply.
Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the
garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care

Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, Mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee.

T. S. Eliot

Topic for May 2002 Issue:

"What books or authors have influenced your attraction to solitude and contemplative prayer? Which most nourish you now?"

Deadline: April 1, 2002

"Acquire the Spirit of Peace,
and thousands round you
will be saved."

St. Seraphim of Sarov

"A Suggestion"

Trying to get in touch with someone? Want someone to get in touch with you? Aware of opportunities of interest to solitaries? Have you a service to offer? Are you looking to locate or re-locate a hermitage? Why not place your message on the **Bulletin Board** of *Raven's Bread* (printed version). Requests are posted **free of charge** for our regular subscribers.

Resources Available from *Raven's Bread*

(all prices include postage)

Readings in Spirituality - Annotated Bibliography by Sharon Jeanne Smith **31pp. \$15.00**

Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$13.00**

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. \$12.00**

Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$7.50**

Statutes for Hermits by The Bishops of France (1989)
12 pp. \$6.00

Fellowship of Solitairies

Comprised of and open to religious solitairies of all stripes. The Fellowship is ecumenical and has no official connections with any church. People may join the Fellowship either as Members or as Associates. All receive a regular Newsletter and a List of Members, so that they may be prayerfully aware of each other in their different paths and to make contact with each other if they so wish.

Correspondent: Eve Baker, Coed Glas, Talgarth Road, Bronllys, Brecon, Powys, LD3 0HN

To email Fellowship of Solitairies directly click on this link:fos@btinternet.com

To access the website of Fellowship of Solitairies click on this link:<http://www.btinternet.com/~benedict.baker>

Inner Light Productions, Michael McClellan, Editor

Thoughts-of-the-Week from the Desert Fathers

To subscribe:

Send a blank e-mail to:thoughts-of-the-week-request@innerlightproductions.com

with this text in the body: subscribe thoughts-of-the-week

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from 11 categories (personal information, location, religious affiliation and status, lifestyle, prayer forms and religious practices, financial situation, spiritual direction, difficulties).

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.5 No.3. **2 pp. \$5.00**

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from First Reflection Question: "For me the grace and essence of solitary living is..."

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.5 No.4. **2 pp. \$5.00**

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from Second Reflection Question: "How did you come to recognize your call to religious / solitary / hermit life?"

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.6 No.1. **2 pp. \$5.00**

Raven's Rest

The Silence...The Solitude...The Solace of God...

Retreatants welcome to schedule time from March 25 through November 1, 2002 at **Raven's Rest** Hermitage (a fully furnished apartment with kitchenette & private entrance) here at **Still Wood**. Offers opportunity to experience solitude and silence on a forested mountainside of the Newfound Range in the rural Smokies, approximately 35 miles N.E. of the Great Smokies National Park and 35 miles N.W. of Asheville. Spiritual Direction available upon request. Suggested offering \$20.00 per day includes meals. For further information, contact:

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BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A Season in the Desert: Making Time Holy by W. Paul Jones. *This thought-*

provoking book explores the concept of time not only as a defining dimension of our existence but as the natural pulse of Christian spirituality. 2001. Hardback, 255 pp. Paraclete Press, P.O. Box 1568, Orleans, MA 02653. Tel: 800-451-5006. \$20.00

A Table in the Desrt: Making Space Holy by W. Paul Jones. *Father Jones shares how the sacredness of space shapes our very understanding of God, using powerful examples from his own life.* 2001. Hardback, 260 pp. Paraclete Press, P.O. Box 1568, Orleans, MA 02653. Tel: 800-451-5006. \$23.00



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