



# Raven's Bread

*Food for Those in Solitude*

*Online Edition*

*February 2011*

## Thoughts On Solitude

Let us consider the most intimate form of community: the community of two. Ever since St. Paul provided mentoring to his young assistant, St. Timothy, Christianity has recognized the power of personal guidance as a tool for helping believers grow in their faith. This has also been true among mystics and contemplatives. Mentoring and guidance were important elements in the spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers; in fact, one of the founders of European monasticism, John Cassian, made the arduous (and dangerous) trip from Gaul (now France) to the deserts of Egypt to receive mentoring from the Desert Fathers.

*The Cloud of Unknowing*, a fourteenth century manual on contemplation, was written by a spiritual director for his young directee. Margery Kempe, writing in the early fifteenth century, described how she received spiritual direction from the reclusive Julian of Norwich. In sixteenth century Spain, Teresa of Avila provided spiritual guidance to John of the Cross, both of whom are now recognized as among the greatest of Christian mystics. In twentieth century England, Evelyn Underhill received mentoring from Friedrich von Hugel, well known for his writings on mysticism.

The ability to turn to an elder for advice and guidance has, unfortunately, not always been readily available to ordinary Christians – for many centuries, serious spiritual guidance was usually available only to clergy, nuns, or monks. But beginning in the mid-twentieth century, interest in spiritual formation among lay Christians has increased, as more and more people have sought spiritual mentoring, not only from clergy, monks, and nuns, but also from other laypersons. (This also marks the time when eremitical life began its remarkable revival). Thus, increasing numbers of Christians, both clergy and lay persons, are taking on the role of spiritual mentor and providing guidance to those who are interested in a deeper life of prayer.

Of course, full-time priests and ministers who have also been professionally trained (and who work full time for their churches) often provide spiritual mentoring to those who seek it. But not all priests and ministers have the time or the interest in such one-on-one guidance. Thus, personal spiritual mentoring is something that can also happen in the most informal of ways, and some of the best spiritual directors may not necessarily have any official training at all. Whenever two people with a shared interest in the spiritual life come together for

mutual support and encouragement, one-on-one spiritual guidance can occur. At its most informal, such personalized spiritual support can even be shared between friends who are willing to listen to one another and respond to each other's spiritual journey with thoughtfulness and care.

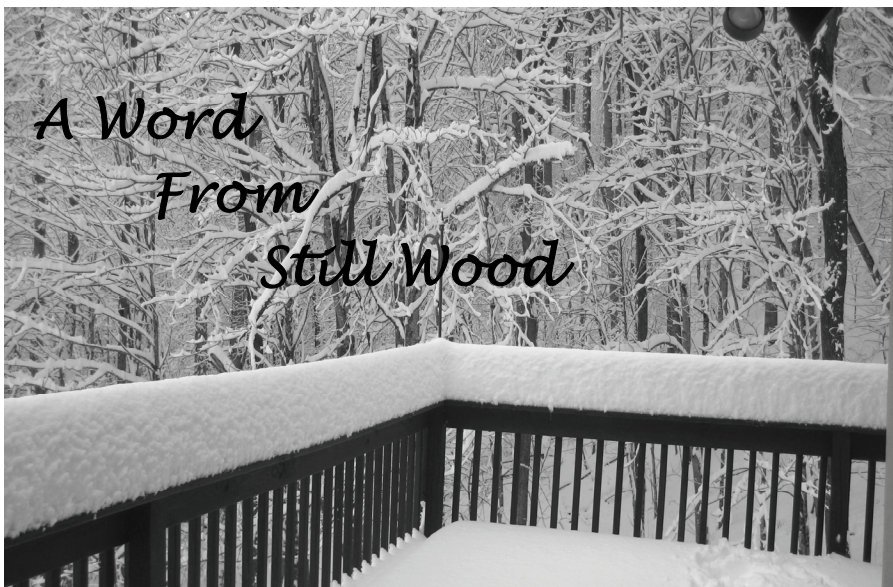
In other words, spiritual *friendship*, regardless of how casual and informal it may be, can be just as valuable as a more formal mentoring or guidance relationship. The Celtic Christians had a special word to describe the beauty of this type of spiritual relationship: *anamchara*, meaning "soul-friend."

For anyone interested in the Christian contemplative life, working with a spiritual director or cultivating a close relationship with a soul friend can be an integral part of one's spiritual journey. As beneficial as reading the writings of the great mystics or participating in group prayer may be, there are clear advantages to working with a wise mentor who can answer your particular questions and point out specific areas where your practice needs attention. A gifted spiritual director can be especially helpful in supporting a contemplative practice and helping one in any aspects of the spiritual life, including discerning God's will or call in life. A mentor can help you navigate the challenges of church membership and examine practical ways to integrate spirituality into the mundane aspects of your life. If you're serious about pursuing contemplative spirituality, try to find a trusted spiritual guide or soul friend...

When you embed your contemplative walk in a community setting, you are far less likely to relate to God as merely as merely a source of spiritual entertainment. A community and a soul friend or spiritual director, can help keep you honest and provide you with the support you need to remain focused on the true heart of Christian mysticism—learning to become a living manifestation of the love of God.



Excerpted from  
***The Big Book of Christian Mysticism:  
The Essential Guide to Contemplative Spirituality***  
Pp. 153-155  
By **Carl McColman**



## A Word From Still Wood

While keying in the submissions to this February issue of **Raven's Bread**, I became aware of the wonderful quietness surrounding me. Snow blanketed the mountain and seemed to absorb all sound. Even the birds were quieter for only sporadic cheeps and chirps were heard from among the hemlock branches which sheltered them. I recognized January as one of the *Still Times* of the year, ideal for letting go and letting be.

The question of "inner balance" comes up in this issue. One of the keys to maintaining our equilibrium is to not let time become a tyrant. Quite simply, there are two kinds of time – *chronos* (clock time) and *kairos* (God time). As hermits, we are called to live in the rhythm of *kairos*, not the rigidity of *chronos*. We set ourselves up for "dis-equilibrium" if we plan our day by the clock and impose arbitrary goals or deadlines on ourselves.

Many hermits have told us that early in their eremitic life, they had a daily plan scheduling every hour, assigning time-slots for prayer, labor, meals, reading, and personal care. Very neat... and quite unrealistic. Only after

finding themselves full of anger, impatience, even desperation, as life (God?) frustrated their regimen over and over, did they begin to "get it".

In their efforts to have a place for everything and everything in its place, they had set themselves up for frustration. Their peace was dependent on following their routine and when it was interrupted, even slightly, the whole day was out of whack. Life is like that – it seldom happens according to our schedule. Only after they let go of excessive planning and looked at their daily life in terms of a rhythm, did they begin to experience that liberty which is one of the special charisms of eremitic life. As hermits we should be free

to follow the Spirit whenever S/He breaks into our life. Only when we choose to forget time – and all our plans arranged in *chronos* – can we enter the dance with God in the divine rhythm – *kairos*. Forgetting to watch the clock and just flowing from one task to another liberates us and enfolds our spirit in peace. We are here to join in the great dance that is going on all around and within us. Such a dance definitely has a rhythm but it is not constrained by time. Why should we be?

A reader recently shared this: "Mr. Mike's Little Rule of Life". Less than a page and a-half, it has a luminous subtitle: "*Life (read God) will fill in the details.*" We have never seen a Rule for a solitary that is more sensible or contemplative. All that is required is listening to God, loving what is heard, and dancing off to respond to whomever or whatever is calling! Following this Choreographer ensures that we shall always be well balanced, inwardly and outwardly.

*With grateful love,  
Karen & Paul*

**Raven's Bread** is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in eremitical life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. This newsletter seeks to affirm and support people living in solitude. Raven's Bread is a collaborative effort and thus depends on the shared reflections, stories, news, notices, letters and information from hermits themselves.

Please send your written contributions, address changes, and subscription donations to: **Raven's Bread Ministries**, 18065 NC 209 Hwy, Hot Springs, NC 28743 or via Paypal at our website.\*

Our phone number is: 828 622 3750, The annual donation is \$10.00 in the USA or \$12.00 US for readers outside the States. Please send payment in US funds (PayPal can convert foreign currency to US dollars.) Any extra donations will be used to subsidize subscriptions for hermits who cannot afford the full cost.

Raven's Bread derives its name from the experience of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17: 1-6. where a raven sent by God nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (The Cutting Place).

\*Our website is :[Http://www.ravensbreadministries.com](http://www.ravensbreadministries.com)



**WANT TO LIVE RENT-FREE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD?** There are empty homes in every state and country, and property owners are looking for trustworthy people to live in them as caretakers and house-sitters! The Caretaker Gazette lists these caretaking/ house-sitting openings in all 50 states and foreign countries. Published since 1983, subscribers receive 1,000+ property caretaking listings each year, worldwide. Some of these caretaking and house-sitting openings also offer compensation in addition to the free housing provided. Short, medium and long-term property caretaking assignments are in every issue. Postal subscriptions are \$34.95/year. The Caretaker Gazette, 3 Estancia Lane, Boerne, TX 78006. (830) 755-2300. [www.caretaker.org](http://www.caretaker.org)



**Special Offer  
For  
Raven's Bread Readers!**

First edition, autographed copies of

**CONSIDER THE RAVENS,  
ON CONTEMPORARY HERMIT LIFE  
By Paul A. & Karen Karper Fredette**

**Reduced from \$20.95 to \$15.95**  
Please add \$3.00 for P & H

**Purchase direct from:**

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

**CONGRATULATIONS! SARAH SEYMOUR-WINFIELD** of Fairborn, OH, announces that, after twenty years of intensive work, her book, **Images, Old and New** about mystical evolution is finally finished and is due to be published in April/May 2011. Five people have critiqued it recently, two Catholic priests, one educated in the Vatican, one Protestant clergyman and two others. Each reported that he had a profound spiritual experience while reading it. It is being endorsed by the Rev. Dr. Thomas E. Boomershine, internationally respected Scripture scholar and multi-published author. She is uncertain of the exact cost but the 400 page volume should run between \$22 and \$30 in soft cover. Sarah says: "It was challenging to write and is challenging to read. If anyone is curious and would like to reserve a copy, please notify me at the following address. Those hermits, anchorites and possibly prisoners, who cannot afford such a lengthy work, may contact me directly and I will make arrangements with each personally. Sarah Seymour-Winfield, #308, 1209 East Dayton Yellow Springs Road, Fairborn, OH 45324 **See Book Notices below.**



**BOOK AND WEBSITE REVIEWS**



Visit David Tetrault's Blog: [www.silentiumaltum.blogspot.com](http://www.silentiumaltum.blogspot.com) where he reflects about the inner changes he experiences as his walk with God becomes more silent and solitary. Other websites of interest include: [www.fatherlouie.blogspot.com](http://www.fatherlouie.blogspot.com); and *Raven's Bread* poet Robert Trabold's site: [www.bobtrabold.com](http://www.bobtrabold.com)

**New books BY Raven's Bread Readers:**

**IMAGES OLD AND NEW** by Sarah L. Seymour-Winfield This volume, a work of love, is a dramatic *tour de force*, tracing mystical evolution through images drawn from Old and New Testaments, enriched by stories from world literature, as well as Greek and Roman mythology. The author's gift for poetry and poetic prose helps the reader to enter into the mysteries of which she writes. She also employs the writings of Meister Eckhart, St. Symeon the New Theologian, John of the Cross, and Soren Kierkegaard to flesh out the development of Christian mysticism through the ages and foreshadowing the future evolution of the Church and Christianity. It is a dense book, well worth the challenge of reading it. (See *Raven's Forum* for purchase information)

**INVITATION TO WONDER, a journey through the seasons** by Elizabeth Ayres. Anyone who wishes to see nature with new eyes should read this gentle, sensual and surprising volume of reflections on the world around the Chesapeake Bay. One's vision is doubled as Ayres' poetic prose pierces surface images to smell, hear, taste, and feel the "wonders" within whatever touches her eyes and wakens her spirit. Also available in a 5-part audio series, as well as Kindle format. Order from Amazon.com or [invitationtowonder.com](http://invitationtowonder.com)

**WONDROUS ENCOUNTERS, Scripture for Lent** by Richard Rohr. Fresh meditations on daily Scripture readings for Lent. Following each is a Starter Prayer inviting one to self-disclosure with the God of one's heart. Order online at [www.WondrousEncountersBook.com](http://www.WondrousEncountersBook.com) or call (505) 247-1737.