



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Volume 19, No. 1

February 2015

Thoughts In Solitude

On a recent morning while walking to the local post office here in Hollywood, located on one of our busiest streets, I passed a homeless woman leaning up against the wall of a very popular restaurant. I was initially taken aback by what I saw. Her pants were down around her ankles, leaving her half-naked and in full public view. While squatting thus, she held a large plastic soda cup under her, into which she was relieving herself. All of this she did in full view of countless passers-by.

Later I related this incident to a friend of mine. Who responded quite vehemently—as I suspect most people would, “Oh, how utterly disgusting! She should have gone into some alley or behind a dumpster or anywhere she wouldn’t be seen!” It was true righteous indignation from someone living in a very high end gated community here in Southern California, and who assures me that *his* city would never tolerate such people. He lives in a world that is very neat and totally under his control. As such, my friend is not so different from many of us.

Without skipping a beat, I then countered my friend’s response with an alternative point of view. “No,” I responded, I’m glad she did what she did. I should have applauded her. We all need to see something like this. We need to see what part of our world has become, what our culture has done and continues to do to so many. Less than four blocks from where this woman relieved herself in public are multi-million dollar mansions—mansions with high security and yet where human occupants are rarely seen.

As a society we often try to push the poor and homeless out of our sight and consciousness, afraid of what we may feel or think should they come too close. “No, my friend,” I replied, “we need to confront the full reality of our culture, the dehumanization it has caused in so many of our brothers and sisters.” When confronted with extreme situations like this one, we can either go deep into denial or be forced to come to grips with what is our re-

sponse to such inhumanity.

“But now, you readers of Raven’s Bread may ask, what does such an extreme story have to do with my call to the eremitical or contemplative life? “Plenty,” I say, Plenty!”

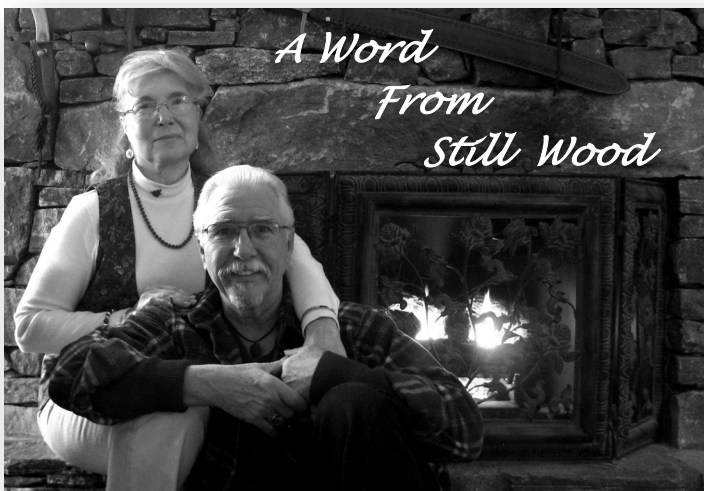
First of all, in creating and living our contemplative lifestyle, we need to be rigorously honest with ourselves. What are our real intentions for pursuing this radical life,—constantly subject, of course, to change and development? In our most basic of interior questioning, we need to constantly ask ourselves: “Am I running to the Divine or am I running from something within myself or in the larger world that I find too unpleasant to face? (Like the homeless woman in Hollywood I previously spoke of.)

For myself, this woman is tragically symbolic to me of both shadow within each of us and in our society as well—something that must be faced and dealt with both individually and collectively if we are to grow into the manifestations of the Divine we are called to become. This is neither easy nor pleasant. Hence a response like my friend’s is very easy to understand—but it is a response chosen at our own and society’s peril.

Sometimes the darkness or evil in our world (or in myself) is overwhelming, leading us often to a type of hopelessness or despair in being able to change it. What to do? Sometimes we can only do what Mary did at the foot of the Cross. We can choose not to run as Jesus’ apostles did. We can decide to simply be present to and a witness for the many crucified ones in our world who suffer such intense agony, crying out daily while feeling that no one hears their cry. We can often only stand and feel their pain along with our own horrible sense of powerlessness to remove the suffering.

As followers of Jesus and Mary, we need to listen to and not run from the cry of the poor; to respond to them

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Folks all around the world seem to be experiencing strange weather patterns and events this winter. The same is true on our mountain. Although it is January, generally our snowiest month of the year, the woods are brown with last autumn's leaves and the naked trees sway in the winter wind. The only color beside black and brown, is in the green moss clinging like fleece blankets to rocks and downed tree trunks. The roof of our gazebo/chapel is furred with yellow-green growth that reminds us of the poem "Usk" by T.S. Eliot:

"Seek only there
Where the grey light meets the green air
The hermit's chapel, the pilgrim's prayer."

Adding to the strange weather events, we are daily confronted in the news with violent encounters between various groups of people who seem bent on imposing their extreme views and religious intolerance on the rest of the world. As the violence in our world spreads, the need for gentle prayers becomes more urgent. No one may ever know for sure why an almost inevitable flare-up of violence was averted, or from whence came insight to a world leader to pull his/her country back from the brink of battle. We remain convinced that the quiet, faithful daily prayer life of thousands of hermits and solitaries can powerfully influence the direction that world politics takes.

At times we may be tempted to see only the violence; to wonder if our lives are spent in vain, imploring peace for a world that appears not to want it. We will never know how much worse things might have been, had the silent offerings not been made.

Raven's Bread Ministries benefits greatly from the prayers of our readers. The sustained growth in subscribers; the continued financial "health" of a ministry which depends entirely on donations; and the individual fidelity of hermits and solitaries could not be maintained if not for powerful prayers being offered daily for one another.

In the months since the last issue of **RB** went out, we (Paul & Karen) have experienced directly the benefits of the prayers of our readers. Though few of you knew of our great need of prayer support, we felt "upheld" as we faced one of life's greater challenges. In late October, following a routine colonoscopy/endoscopy, Karen was diagnosed with lymphoma in her duodenum and four related lymph nodes. There had been no symptoms; no indication that anything was awry.

Biopsies, scans; bloodwork; and bone marrow testing, confirmed the initial diagnosis. Still this was the "best of bad news," for lymphoma is a type of malignancy that need not be life-threatening if treated. Nearly four weeks of daily radiation were prescribed, the side effects of which were endured by the grace of God (and the prayers of many!). In early March, another PET scan and blood work will reveal how successful these treatments have been. At this time, everything indicates a positive outcome.

Your prayers can bring about healing, even when you are unaware of the need. We are deeply grateful for your fidelity that allows the healing grace of God to flow through you.

Another need we bring to you is that of our imprisoned **Raven's Bread** readers. One of them is due for a Parole Hearing in February; another is trying to get information about his estranged family. Let us keep unbroken the strong circle of loving prayer which is the main "work" of lovers of solitude. Prayer-care is the gift we can offer each other and the world each day.

*With our 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. It affirms and supports people living in solitude. As a collaborative effort, it is written for and by hermits themselves, delivered by postal mail or email. Please send your written contributions, address changes, and subscription donations to: pkfredette@frontier.com or **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.

An annual donation is appreciated, each giving according to their means. Please send payment in US dollars (PayPal converts foreign currency to US dollars). Anything extra goes into a fund to insure that all who want **Raven's Bread** can receive it.

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> ; email: pkfredette@frontier.com and Blog for Lovers of Solitude: www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog.



Raven's Forum



Dean Leh from Bronx, NY wrote this: I just finished your book: *Consider the Ravens*. I read it slowly over the past six weeks. This book was a gift for the year. I am a Western Orthodox priest, and I also serve as an administrator in a public school for at-risk kids. At the same time, I consider my little home as a hermitage, and your book and insights have been a wonderful blessing for me on many levels. Thank you.



Raven Wenner, Cheshire, UK shared with *Raven's Bread* that Brother David Butler, the recently vowed hermit living in a hermitage she was instrumental in rebuilding, will be ordained a priest in the UK Ordinariate (the part of the Anglican Church that has re-united with Rome). He will be the first hermit-priest ordained in the Ordinariate. Raven looks forward to "this blessing which can reasonably be supposed to advance his contemplative vocation quickly and bring about great if hidden graces of conversion."



Writing from N. Las Vegas, NM, Christopher Kronen tells *RB* about a group of contemplatives which may be of interest to some of our readers. The *International Fellowship of St. Bruno* is an internet group with particular interest in the Carthusians that can be found at www.yahoo.com. Those who seek closer ties can join the *Saint Bruno Lay Contemplatives* which is now actively seeking to establish a more official relationship (as in Church law) with the Carthusian order itself. You may be aware that 2014 marks the 500th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Bruno.

Christopher adds: In writing reviews on Amazon.com under the screen name of your alter ego "Wood B. Hermit", I have managed to reach a reviewer ranking of #147. Wood B. Hermit on his Amazon.com profile page always refers readers to *Raven's Bread Ministries* online. Perhaps this, too, has sent a few more hits to the Raven's Bread website? From my desert to yours — *Pax et Bonum!*



The editor of *Fellowship of Solitaries*, John Mullins from Northumberland, UK shares these thoughts: In the August *RB* newsletter, the untypical lack of contributions to the theme of "work" was so unusual that you yourselves called attention to this. Specifically, the theme for people to respond to was "Earning a living while safeguarding silence and solitude." So important is our choice of work and the way we work amidst the world—as a spiritual practice—that the Buddha included this in the Eightfold Path, as *Right Livelihood*.

So I wondered why this lack of response? Maybe it was just a "one off" glitch, but maybe not. Similar to the lack of *RB* contributors to the theme of work, the path of Right Livelihood is often overlooked by many Westerners, and rarely discussed. So many spiritual books and websites, etc. give us lots of pretty words and images about solitary prayer, meditation, silence, God's love, the wonders of Nature, etc.

Has it got anything to do with the fact that the hectic and tiresome demands of the world of work are the very thing that most people, whether "spiritual" or not, want to get away from? Like a longed-for holiday, we want to be in peaceful and natural settings to be alone with God, free of the mental clutter and deadline pressures of having to work for a living.

John of the Cross observed: "When there presents itself to them ... annihilation of sweetness in God, in aridity, distaste and trial, which is the true spiritual cross... they flee from it as from death."

If there is anything that brings about "annihilation of all sweetness in God", it is a difficult and stressful job! The best job description for most people I have ever come across was written by John of the Cross: "Strive always to prefer (i.e. to accept and welcome) not that which is easiest, but that which is most difficult; not that which is most delectable but that which is most unpleasing; not that which gives most pleasure but which gives least; not that which is restful but that which is wearisome; not that which is consolation but rather that which is dis-consolation; not that which is greatest but that which is least; not that which is loftiest and most precious but that which is lowest and most despised; not that which is a desire for anything but that which is a desire for nothing. Strive to go about seeking not the best of temporal things but the worst. Strive thus to desire to enter into complete detachment and emptiness and poverty, with respect to everything that is in the world (for your client's sake, for your

Raven's Forum...continued.

customer's sake, for your student's, your patient's, your colleague's, your neighbor's sake) for Christ's sake."

This is our *raven's bread*! We are so busy rushing to meet deadline after deadline amidst a punitive blame culture that we don't have time to be "thinking" about God. We aren't surrounded by the beauties of Nature but stuck in some crowded office, the phones ringing nonstop; or working in a busy hospital, in a deafening factory, on a construction site, driving a lorry, or running around impoverished, unsafe neighborhoods visiting the needy, the troubled, the sick, the homeless, etc. We aren't quietly basking in God's love but trying to keep our head above water, half-drowning in "that which is most ...unpleasing... wearisome...lowest and most despised.

And then we come home after work to our families, late again as usual, dispirited and too tired to summon any energy for our spouse and children who are probably in bed by the time we get home. So on weekends (if we are not working) we try to cram in some "quality time" with our family, trying to make up for being an absent father or mother during the week. But children aren't always grateful for our parental efforts, and often our well-intentioned plans with them go wrong. Soon it's Monday morning and back to the slog of "earning a living."

Recently retired as a child protection worker (i.e. I simply walked out of the office one day and never came back), I met up with my former colleagues last week. All were grossly overworked; some had burst into tears at their desks; others had exploded in bouts of rage; a colleague had been killed in a car crash rushing around for her job; one had a stress-related heart attack; a respected senior manager had walked out of his job just like me; others had left for less pressured jobs. It is a tale of never ending pressure. This is the work reality for many people.

When Eve Baker introduced me to the Fellowship of Solitaries, what she wrote was quite relevant to your theme of "work". She said: "The important thing for me is that the person we have been offered is a layman, involved in the world of work and in all the problems faced by those of us who try to live a Christian life in the middle of the hurly-burly, with all the problems of today's world and the moral choices forced upon us. To do this, of course, means that we have to search for where God may be found in our everyday life, not in a special religious sphere. The choices are ours alone to make. We have to

wait upon God to see what is given and where the truth may be found."

This is our "raven's bread"! Trungpa emphasized. "*This is a key point because wisdom cannot be born from theory, it must be born from your actual state of mind, which is the working basis for all spiritual practice.*"

"Earning a living while safeguarding silence and solitude." Only two, and then a third person in the following newsletter, out of 1200 membership responded to this vital spiritual truth. Given that many people spend far more of their lives working than any other aspect of their life, including time with their families and sleep, this lack of response concerned me. Such a fertile source for contributions—yet almost nothing about their actual state of mind during work, "while safeguarding silence and solitude."

My limited understanding of the spiritual life is guided by four principles:

- 1) "The abyss of faith" as taught by John of the Cross
- 2) One of his most prominent themes is self-deception. Why? Because it is so prevalent in spiritual seekers, then as now.
- 3) The second Buddhist vow of refuge is: "I take refuge in the dharma, the law of existence, life as it is.
- 4) Merton (inspired by John of the Cross) said that "solitude...simply is. It not only does not attract attention, or desire it, but it remains, for the most part, completely invisible... Especially to ourselves! Because "contemplation is secret and hidden from the very person that experiences it."

None of these four principles leaves any room for a special spiritual identity. As Eve Baker said, "Humility is the first, last and only lesson." **(To be continued)**



From **Three Rivers, MI, Nancy Bell** asks: Re (Brother) Father Bede, would it be possible to compile the issues of *Marabou* together so we could (all who desire) have the complete collection? I'm sure there must be others like me who are deeply indebted to Fr. Bede and Thomas Merton. They sure helped this solitary lamb find her way into the hermits' fold.

RB note: We do have copies of all the issues of *Marabou* and will be pleased to send them on request.

BULLETIN***** *****BOARD

AN ON-LINE 46 DAY RETREAT

Wondering how to best observe Lent in your hermitage this year? Consider this specially designed retreat starting Ash Wednesday, Feb. 18th and running through Holy Saturday, April 4th, 2015.

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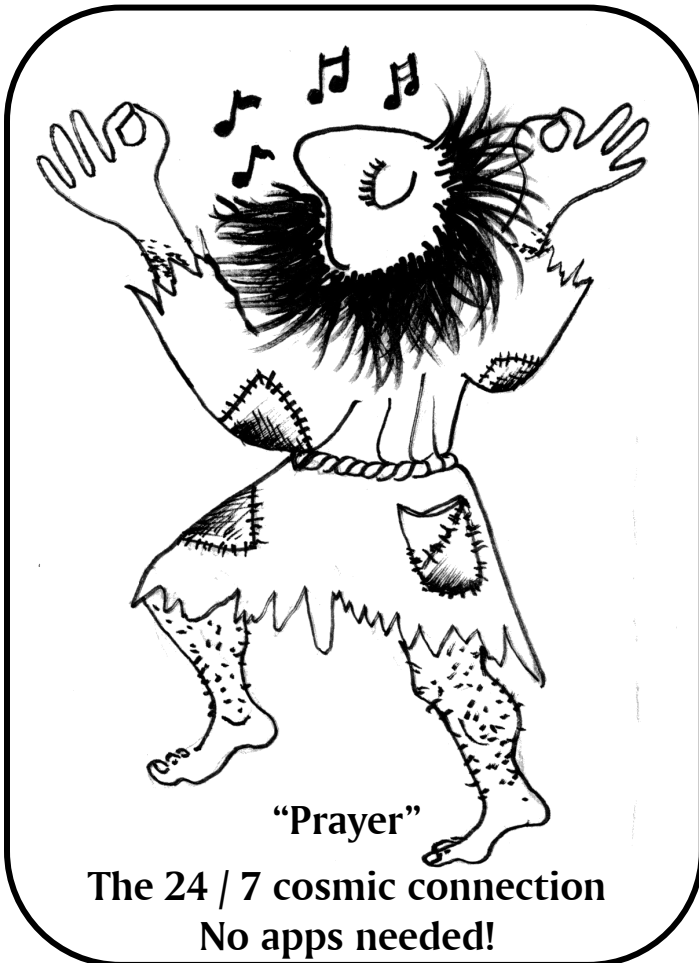
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Wood B. Hermit



LOOKING FOR A PEN PALS

I have been living the hermit life for nearly two years. After six months of living in silence and solitude in the desert, I now live in a small casita in New Mexico, where I pray, write, and take pleasure in simple home-making tasks. I would be grateful to engage in letter writing correspondence with others who live a life of simplicity, solitude, and silence.

Please email: kateinthequiet@gmail.com

so we can exchange postal addresses via email.

(REV.) CHARLES W. BRICKNER, OBL.O.S.B.CAM.

I am interested in communicating with others living in solitude. I wish to know how they spend the day, do they have a vehicle, type of meals, recreation, family visits?? CONTACT: Tepeyac Hermitage, 2991 Floyd Pike, Hillsville, VA 24343

Thoughts In Solitude.....Continued from p. 1

in a way that is uniquely ours. It is also, I believe, important for we who are committed to silence, to become also in some way, a Voice for the voiceless.

This openness to the cry of the poor and a willingness to be led where we might rather not go (as Jesus challenged Peter) can sometimes be at odds with a desire to live a very ordered, structured life that promotes our contemplative quest. We may often unconsciously try to control all aspects of our lives, keeping it neat and well-ordered, and thereby avoiding God's call to a more radical surrender and openness that we may like. Strict adherence to schedules and programs may sometimes deafen us to calls from God that may come in very surprising fashion and at most inappropriate times, especially calls and cries from the poor and destitute.

Yes, we do need structure and order to our lives to avoid total chaos, but we also need to avoid making "gods" of our rules and schedules. We need an openness and flexibility to hear God's calls that may not neatly fit into our schedules or programs. To live in this way is to live in creative tension. It is about balance.

This tension is reflected in the need to constantly question myself: am I trying to build my own kingdom over which I can rule supreme, and in which I can also keep out the very painful and unpleasant cries of the poor? Or am I working to build up the Kingdom of God

in a world of incredible poverty and injustice? Do we believe that our withdrawal from society and many of its ignoble pursuits relieves us of our duty to care for that very same world and the suffering Christ in its midst? When we pray for our world, is this not one way of asking God for the strength to respond to its needs and its pains as best we can, not expecting God to do what we won't?

In the end, no matter what be one's lifestyle or spirituality, no matter what be our belief system, our place in God's kingdom is not determined by any of these. According to Jesus, our ultimate Lord and very best Friend, our place at the Banquet in his Kingdom is ultimately determined by how we respond to "the least of our brothers and sisters" suffering daily in our world (MT 25:31-46). Did we allow our ears to be open to the heart-wrenching cries of the poor? How did we respond to the countless numbers of homeless and hungry, of those sick and thirsty, of those in prison or strangers in our land? Did we recognize Jesus there and what did we do?

This article was written as a follow-up to my earlier one on "using religion to avoid the divine" (See RB May 2014,p.7). As always I invite responses to these ideas either through Raven's Bread or directly to me at:

David Innocenti
1826 N. Harvard Blvd. #21
Los Angeles, CA 90027; (323) 460-4071



Hermits ask...✦✦✦✦✦✦✦✦...and Respond Continued from page 5.

world where violence, death, destruction is occurring, and pray for God's healing grace to be received, accepted and operative there. I lift this global prayer to the Cosmic Christ both in and beyond this universal space, in joy and hope. The globe is then prayerfully placed into a bust of the Father's hands, and released to God's creative power far beyond my knowing. This is my graced part offered to God here and now as a person of prayer in this hermit life.

Mary Jean Wethington
Aurora, IN

The culture in this hermitage/house and community is rich. Humans have long resided here, and the very land speaks of sanctuary, a desire for peace on earth, good will to all. Five retreat centers flourish nearby. Musicians, artists, authors and libraries abound within a radius of one mile. This is a "thin

place" and veils between spaces, centuries, ages and years move aside from time to time, inviting silence, communion and an opportunity to learn "how to live and be" within the fullness of life.

Images that are closest: The Good Shepherd guides and sustains the animals and me as we go about our days and nights. Our neighborhood seems to me to be gathering within the no longer slowly emerging Divine Feminine. I'm very aware of the hem of her garment which is upturned and from the seeds deposited grow beautiful flowers.

Scattered between the retreat centers are private homes. Within the community I feel a love of and a connection to the land and to one another. My great hope for our Beloved Planet is that the many pockets of good will around the world may transform the specter of the "grim reaper" haunting earth so prevalent in the news to that of St. Francis' "Sister Death." When it comes to individuals of

various species, may we all be in Karios, (when the time is right). Then we may experience the lovely Buddhist prayer:

May all beings be safe,
may all beings be well,
may all beings be happy.

Let this become that toward which humanity strives, rather than an impossible dream.

Nancy Bell,
Three Rivers, MI

DISCUSSION TOPIC FOR MAY 2015

How do you articulate your purpose in living hermit life? Has your vision changed over the years? How?

SUBMIT BY APRIL 1, 2015
(Limit to 300 Words, please)



BOOK NOTES AND REVIEWS



BOOKS BY RAVEN'S BREAD READERS!

SONG OF A CHRISTIAN SUFI (A SPIRITUAL MEMOIR)

by Marietta Bahri Della Penna

A well-written account demonstrating once again that there is no such thing as an "ordinary" life when there is extraordinary spiritual yearning as its foundation. Grace and grit have truly met and embraced in the author's unflinchingly honest and compassionate account of her lifelong journey as a spiritual seeker. (Cynthia Bourgeault).

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Paperback. **ISBN: 978-1-937211-76-9**; ebook. **ISBN: 978-1-937211-77-6**

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by Leila F. J. Gill

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