



# Raven's Bread

*Food for Those in Solitude*

*Online Edition*

*February 2016*

## Thoughts In Solitude

Hermitage is the joy felt in aloneness, solitude, and self-containment. It is the inner directed heart and mind. It is not isolation or a shrinking away from relationship. In hermitage we are alone yet never alone because the sense of interconnection with "what is" is intense and intimate. Self-containment is contentment, and to be a hermit in the best sense is to be content with one's life by not looking outside of the present moment to find wholeness.

Hermitage is living the state or condition of contemplation. Contemplation is being with the basis of every unique thing that makes up our world. This goes by many different names depending on a person's spiritual orientation. Some might call this God. A contemplative is capable of relating with the **this and that** of the world of diverse phenomena but he or she has put that aside as a primary interest in this life in favor of one-pointed contemplation.

In the hermitage of non-duality, the solitary contemplative does not pit solitude and aloneness against the many things of this world. He knows that situations which may distract him and call for his attention are at root the same as his contemplation. He knows that the distinction between "real" and "unreal" is an artificial duality of thought. It is all the Real. Yet he also knows that actions and affinities have consequences and that some of these consequences serve a happy, meaningful life and some do not.

The practice of hermitage has much to offer an over-stimulated and overly social world. How much activity and need for interaction in a social context is really an attempt to escape from the pristine knowledge of who and what we are? How much of the desire for linkage and connectedness is really an escape from *what is*? We are already connected and related whether we know it or not through the mother essence that gives birth to all we see.

Every socially committed person will be strengthened in his or her social commitment if an active life is balanced with periods of solitary retreat. Stress related illness and eventual loss of good judgment, even in social or career endeavors close to an individual's heart, will be lessened if that person does occasional solo time. Solo time rejuvenates social commitment by providing a perspective that is impossible to come by in a life that never

takes a break. But it takes some skill to spend quality time alone. Who can teach that skill or provide support for occasional solo retreats? Well, a hermit can.

Hermitage offers community-centered individuals the quiet encouragement to face and meet themselves free of the complexity and challenge of social life. The practice of hermitage points out a simplicity that can be healing to the individual, and perhaps ironically, the very community that thrives on complication. Hermitage heals, because underneath it all, existence is simple, whole and uncomplicated.

Traditionally, across the world and across many diverse cultures, there have always been hermits. And just as traditionally, hermits have not been the recluses or isolates that modern stereotyping portrays. A careful reading of hermetic experience over both time and place will show that hermits were always in interaction with surrounding people or communities. Today, hermits live lives of service within cities or towns or they may live off in rural areas where they also have social involvements. People of community who wisely desire to nurture the hermetic parts of themselves do somehow find the hermits of their area and carry on an appropriate friendship. The hermit has something of offer the community, just as the community has something to offer the hermit.

The jewel at the core of hermitage may be expressed and shared with others in a social context. But that jewel will never be discovered when the mind is turned outward. It is always found in an auspicious moment when the mind is inner directed. Such solitude may be actual, or it may be a solitude of aloneness within social involvements. What is discovered in solitude has the power to create harmony and healing in social situations.

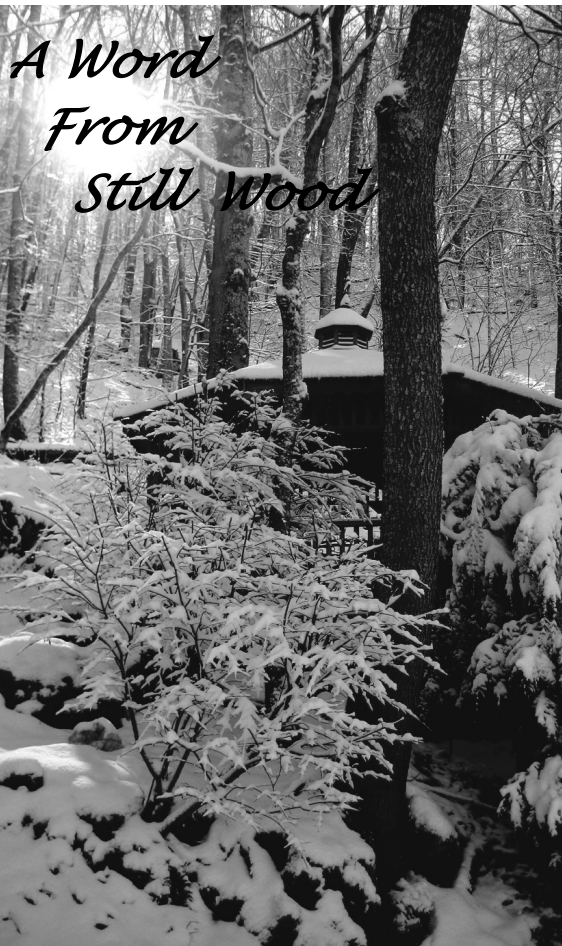


*Excerpted from:*

**Mountain Base Road**

**Exploring a Life of Engaged Hermitage and Contemplation**

*By Richard Simonelli, Nederland, CO*



*A Word  
From  
Still Wood*

As we compile this issue of *Raven's Bread*, the surrounding woods are layered white and the road is slick with black ice. We've just experienced a major snow "event" and anticipating another. All in all, a great day to settle into solitude and begin this sharing with all of you!

"Welcome!" to the extraordinary number of new readers who have joined us since the November issue...and thanks to all you longtime faithful for your continued support and encouragement. Some of you have been with us since before *RB* was lovingly transferred to us by Fr. Bede Jagoe, OP, way back in 1997! For those of you doing the math, yes, we are now in our 20th year... and we're as open as ever to ideas for commemorating this occasion. Please take note of the topic discussed in the **Forum** this issue...and send us your suggestions and opinions on it.

Speaking of responses, congratulations to all of you who sent to *RB* your haiku and poetry celebrating contemplative moments in your eremitical life. What wealth and beauty adorns this issue! Submissions are way up...we will try harder to include more poetry in future editions since we have more on hand, thanks to your generous contributions. We have tried to include at least one poem or haiku from each of you.

A number of you were impressed by the piece in the last issue entitled: "The Nadir of the Year, A Time Without Illusion" by Jean Schaefer. It is an example of a rare time when we publish something not written by our own readers. The article, which Paul had clipped and saved, appeared many years ago in a New England newspaper. We usually pull it out each November and re-read it. This past year it occurred to us that *RB* readers might appreciate Ms. Schaefer's reflection as well.

Like many who are forewarned of impending serious weather, we have been monitoring forecasts, as well as newscasts to see whether significant patterns should be taken into account. Naturally, we also wonder whether the "storms" will measure up to the hype! At the moment, there are no Winter Storm

Warnings in effect for the forecastable future, but the news portends some serious "election year storms" building wherever we look. Some days ago, our governor placed all of North Carolina under a State of Emergency, saying he would rather be "over-prepared and underwhelmed" than the opposite. We submit that this posture of preparedness applies especially to those of us who watch and wait in silence and solitude, "planted like sentinels on the world's frontier" (Merton). We live in ambivalence, "to care and not to care" (Thank you T.S. Eliot), but the cries of the forsaken and the shouts of the fear mongers cannot escape us, nor should they.

"Thank You!" to all who have been praying with us about Karen's visit from Sister Lymphoma. Nothing better than Raven prayer-care. We are pleased to announce that for the first time in over a year, the most recent biopsies are all **negative!** Bless all of you and let us celebrate God's grace!

*With our grateful love,  
Karen & Paul*

**Raven's Bread** is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in solitary life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. It affirms and encourages 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](mailto: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](mailto:pkfredette@frontier.com) and Blog for Lovers of Solitude: [www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog](http://www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog).

# Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate

By James Finley, Ph.D., Fr. Richard Rohr, ofm, and Cynthia Bourgeault

*DVD Set Reviewed by Anonymous Hermit, East Texas*

*(These thoughts emerge out of the silence and solitude of the eremitical life and were not specifically written as a review but reached **RB** via personal correspondence.)*

**O**ur hermit-friend began his contemplative God-search more than 50 years ago with the Trappists at the Abbey of Gethsemani, where Thomas Merton was his novice master. After six years in simple vows, he left the Abbey seeking more solitude as a Camaldolese hermit, where he was ordained. Later he became a diocesan hermit under Canon 603.

These thoughts on contemplation were inspired, not only by Merton, but also by another of Merton's former novices, James Finley. In his letter, our friend never tires of reminding us that, whether we are aware of it or not, God is pouring himself and his Love out unceasingly into our heart, even in the midst of our brokenness and weakness. God has a burning desire to wake us up to our unearned loveableness, just as we are, in our helplessness, with all our unfaithfulness. The greatest Saints knew that, although they were unfortunately "faithful to their unfaithfulness", they were infinitely loveable nonetheless. Unconditional Divine Love is different from human love that has to be *earned*. True "fear of God" is to be in awe of him, who loves so generously and freely that there is no need to earn his Love by our virtuousness. That doesn't mean we don't try to be virtuous. Rather God doesn't wait to love us *if* or *when* we transform our lives but so that we *can* transform our lives.

Ghandi reminds us that the most efficacious way to transform the world is to transform ourselves first of all. Everything begins at home within us. And when we try to transform ourselves, we realize it is impossible for us to change without our merciful, indwelling God moving us interiorly. He alone is the only source of our goodness.

We start behaving better when we accept how immensely loveable we are to our good God, even with our failings and helplessness. But we cannot merely tolerate our brokenness but must *love* ourselves in our brokenness like God already does. The "hurting place" wound within us that seems to separate us from our loving God can, in reality, be the reason we attract God's tender, compassionate and merciful heart. We are precious to God in our brokenness even as he *loves* our brokenness out of existence. Punishing wounds doesn't work. We only bleed more and try to put on band-aids to cover them up, even as we realize that they have no possibility of healing the gash of our wounded "egoitis" with its illusion of separateness. This false part of our ego has immense difficulty letting go of its programming and falling in love with our Whole or True Self, which includes our weakness and broken ego.

This ego is constantly trying to earn God's love, which is pure grace, a free gift of God, who is loving each of us into existence at this very moment. Although the false part of our ego is very sincere, it remains counterfeit and mistaken. It will be with us on our death bed but we have to keep trying to love it out of existence with mercy and compassion. Then we pass on that same mercy to the rest of the human family who don't yet have a clue of how loveable they are to God in their brokenness.

Unearned Love seems too good to be true for the false part of our ego, yet what is *unbelievable* is that we do not *believe* this beautiful Truth, so evident in scripture, that we are precious to God in our very brokenness. It is Christ's primary message when he identified himself with us and became human, so that we could become Divine. For you to live *is* Christ! (St Paul) We are already Oned with the Father as Christ is Oned with the Father. We only have to become awake to this intimate union. It is impossible for God NOT to love us because we are him "by participation" (St John of the Cross). This knowledge is what heals us. And in its ideal form, we call it Wisdom or experiential knowledge. It is another way to express *contemplation*, which is experiencing intuitively our intimate union and love relationship with God beyond our rational consciousness and empirical ego.

*To be continued in the May 2016 Issue*



## THE LONELINESS AND LONGING OF SAINT FRANCIS by Gerard Thomas Straub

*This modern pilgrimage along Francis' path takes us to tent cities, soup kitchens, chapels and hermitages, as author and filmmaker Gery Straub discovers what it might have meant for Francis to live among the impoverished of today's world. An inspiring, life-changing read*

304 pp. \$19.95 pbk; Published by Twenty-third Publications, 2014

ISBN-10: 1627850252; ISBN-13: 978-1627850254

## THE FRANCISCAN HEART OF THOMAS MERTON: A New Look at the Spiritual Inspiration of His Life, Thought, and Writing by Daniel P. Horan, OFM

*Horan masterfully presents the untold story of how the most popular saint in Christian history inspired the most popular spiritual writer of the twentieth century and how together they can inspire a new generation of Christians, not to mention hermits!*

288 pp.; \$16.95 pbk; Ave Maria Press, 2014

ISBN-10: 1594714223; ISBN-13: 978-1594714221.

## UNDER THE SPELL OF A PERSIAN NIGHTINGALE by Diana Woodcock (RB Reader)

*The desert narratives in this collection of poetry become scenes of lush lyricism, color and life bursting from the arid landscapes. This latest chapbook asserts that we must be 'shaken out of complacency' and look beyond a narrow, easy definition of home. With her, we 'Forget moon, sun, and stars' to revel in the desert's 'Shamul-driven grains of sand' and celebrate 'two hundred / million years of turtle life'.*

150 pp. \$22.00 Published by Word Press, 2015

ISBN 9781625491626

## Wood B. Hermit

### Needed: New Editor for On-Line Edition of The Good Retreat Guide

Requested by Br. Luc (Stafford Whiteaker):

"The 6th edition of *The Guide*, published by Hay House, will be the last as a printed book. However, the online edition [thegoodretreatguide.com](http://thegoodretreatguide.com) continues along with the Guide's Facebook page: [facebook/the good retreat guide](https://facebook/the good retreat guide).

I am looking to turn *The Guide* over to a new editor. The online edition takes about 6 hours per week of editorial work. The income is fluid but should produce at least \$5,000. annually and with very little effort at new listings could get to \$10,000. per year. This could be very helpful income for a solitary or religious hermit.

*The Guide* has always been open in its spirituality and therefore a new editor must be willing to maintain this openness. For more information, contact:

Stafford Whiteaker  
L'ermitage Saint-Bruno  
99 chemin gamoullia  
65700 Maubourguet, France



His ear listens still  
Hearing songs of summer from  
Leaves no longer there