



# Raven's Bread

*Food for Those in Solitude*

*Online Edition*

*February 2019*

## Thoughts In Solitude

The vocation to solitude is at the same time a vocation to silence, poverty and emptiness. But the emptiness is for the sake of fullness: the purpose of the solitary life is, if you like, contemplation. But not contemplation in the pagan sense of an intellectual, esoteric enlightenment, achieved by ascetic technique. The contemplation of the Christian solitary is the awareness of the divine mercy transforming and elevating one's own emptiness and turning it into the presence of perfect love, perfect fullness.

Hence a Christian can turn his/her back on society—even on the society of other Christians—without necessarily hating society. It can be, in such a one, a sign of love for others to leave their company and live alone. This withdrawal should not be a rejection of others; but it may well be a quiet and perhaps almost despairing refusal to accept the myths and fictions with which social life is always full—and never more than today. But to despair in the lies with which a person surrounds him/herself is not to despair of the person. Perhaps, on the contrary, it is a sign of hope. For is not our involvement in fiction, especially political and demagogic fiction, an implicit confession of spiritual despair?

The Christian hope in God and in the 'world to come' is something drastically spiritual and pure, which jealously clings to its invisibility. To be sure, it must take on visible and symbolic forms, in order to communicate its message. But when these symbolic forms in turn become submerged in other secular symbols, and when the Christian message becomes involved in mundane hopes, then faith itself tends to be corrupted by these human fictions with which it has been confused. At such a time, some people will seek clarity in isolation and silence, not because they think they know better than the rest, but because they want to see life in a different perspective. They want to withdraw from the babel of confusion in order to listen more patiently to the

voice of their conscience and to the Holy Spirit. And by their prayers and their fidelity they will invisibly renew the life of the whole Church. This renewal will communicate itself to others who remain 'in the world' and will help them also to have a clearer vision, a sharper and more uncompromising appreciation of Christian truth. These will give themselves to apostolic work on a new level of seriousness and of faith, and will be able to discard fictitious gestures of zeal in favor of humble and patient labor.

So when, as in our time, the whole world seems to have become one immense and idiotic fiction, and when the virus of mendacity creeps into every vein and organ of the social body, it would be abnormal and immoral if there is no reaction. Solitude, in other words, is no refuge for the rebellious. And if there is an element of protest in the solitary vocation, that protest must be a matter of rigorous spirituality. It must be deep and interior, and intimately personal, so that the hermit is one who is critical, first of all, of oneself. The desert is for those who have felt a salutary despair of accepted values, in order to hope in mercy and to be themselves merciful to those to whom mercy is promised. Such solitaries know the evils that are in others because they experience these evils first in themselves.

Such persons, out of pity for the universe, out of loyalty to humanity, and without a spirit of bitterness or of resentment, withdraw into the healing silence of the wilderness, or of poverty, or of obscurity, not in order to preach to others but to heal in themselves the wounds of the entire world. For the mercy of God is not heard in words unless it is heard, both before and after the words are spoken, in silence.

**Excerpted from the Chapter: "The Solitary Life"  
In The Monastic Journey  
By Thomas Merton**

**Note: (Gender changes by RB Editors)**



When selecting the preceding article by Thomas Merton, we could not help but be amazed at how relevant for today are words he wrote in the mid-1960's! Has our world changed so little? Actually, our world has changed dramatically. What has *NOT* changed is human nature. We still struggle with our lust for power, for pleasure, for prestige, for wealth, recognition or popularity.

Even when we live alone, we want to know that our lives are worthwhile; that we count for something; that we are regarded with respect by others. Is this so bad? Only if, when we don't always *feel* this, we deem our lives a failure. No

sincere life is a loss if spent seeking the Holy. Only by shifting our focus from "others" to the Great Other who is also our truest Self, are we content to be nobodies in this world (for nobody is a no-body in God's sight).

Where we live, how we live, does not matter nearly so much as *why* we live as we do. We may live with neighbors who are only a plasterboard away from our apartment, or we may have to drive twenty miles to catch sight of another human dwelling. It is the silent awareness of the Holy permeating everything everywhere which gives our lives its meaning. Even as we age and discover increasing limitations of mind and body, this pervasive Love is all that truly matters.

None of us are exempt from aging, but this need not mean simply "getting old". It should also be a ripening and maturing of our will, and our spirits. Here at Still Wood, we realize that we cannot do all we once did when we moved here twenty-three years ago and took on the ministry of *Raven's Bread*. We are prioritizing differently and devoting our energies to what matters most. As a result, our ditches aren't cleared as often and dust tends to linger longer on shelves or desks so that the quarterly issues of Raven's Bread will be sent on time and our generous supporters will be acknowledged.

As many of you already know, *Raven's Rest*, the efficiency apartment on the lower level of our home, as been available over the years to individuals wanting to make a private retreat. Now, we are looking to invite long-term use by someone seeking a "permanent" hermitage in exchange for assistance with upkeep and maintenance around the property and household tasks. If anyone wishes to know more details about *Raven's Rest*, please feel free to get in touch via email (pkfredette@frontier.com) or by phone: 828-622-3750. Are the mountains calling you, or maybe someone you know? Let us continue to pray for one another!

*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 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).**

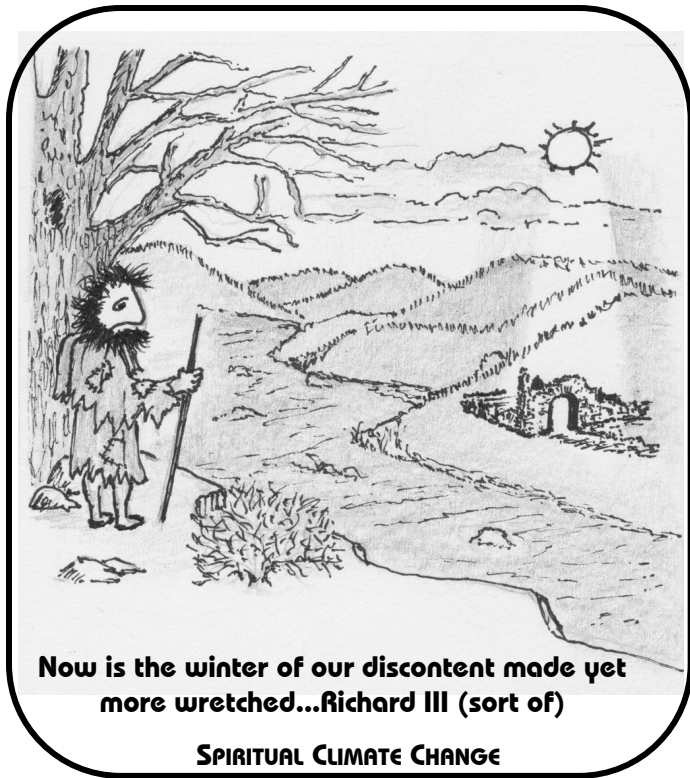
**\*Our website is: <http://www.ravensbreadministries.com>; our email: [pkfredette@frontier.com](mailto:pkfredette@frontier.com) and the Blog for Lovers of Solitude: [www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog](http://www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog).**

## A Recommended Thought from C. G. Jung

The fact that many a man who goes his own way ends in ruin means nothing... He must obey his own law, as if it were a demon whispering to him of new and wonderful paths... There are not a few who are called awake by the summons of the voice, whereupon they are at once set apart from the others, feeling themselves confronted with a problem about which the others know nothing. In most cases it is impossible to explain to the others what has happened, for any understanding is walled off by impenetrable prejudices; 'You are no different from anybody else,' they will chorus, or, 'There's no such thing,' and even if there is such a thing, it is immediately branded as 'morbid.'... He is at once set apart and isolated, as he has resolved to obey the law that commands him from within. 'His own law!' everybody will cry. But he knows better: it is The Law.... The only meaningful life is a life that strives for the individual realization—absolute and unconditional—of its own particular law ... To the extent that a man is untrue to the law of his being...he has failed to realize his life's meaning.

The undiscovered vein within us is a living part of the psyche; classical Chinese philosophy names this interior way, 'Tao,' and likens it to a flow of water that moves irresistibly towards its goal. To rest in Tao means fulfilment, wholeness, one's destination reached, one's mission done; the beginning, end, and perfect realization of the meaning of existence innate in all things.

### Wood B. Hermit



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by Fr. Jon-Julian, OJN (*Raven's Bread* reader)

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93 pp. \$7.99 pbk. Paraclete Press, Brewster, MA 2016

ISBN: 978-1-61261-686-5

**THE EGO, THE ID AND THE FOREST MONSTER: Finding Good News in the Tide of History**

by Robert Buchmeier (*Raven's Bread* Reader)

*There is a measure of hope if we are moving beyond reason-based cultures to cultures of Balance. In this little book, evidence of this movement is found by identifying the behavioral changes since the forefathers of the United States made the outlandish claim that "all men are created equal." Buchmeier first explores the deep psychological forces underlying these changes using the Native Alaskan myth of the Forest Monster. He then shows that we are seeking to ground our new relative cultures on authority coming from within. This grounding can only be done when we can tell authentic stories and so we each must face our forest monsters.*

160 pp. \$10.00 pbk. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform 2018

ISBN: 978-1-72222-538-4

