



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

February 2024

Thoughts From Solitude

Ernest Shackleton was an Irish explorer of the early twentieth century whose passion was not the study of intriguing ruins in the British Isles, but rather the exploration of Antarctica, that formidable, unforgiving sterile wasteland whose geographical coordinates lie somewhere between blind terror and sheer insanity. This continent was the global extremity Shackleton deeply treasured, the ultimate desolation which to his heart was most dear. He and his crew embarked on a voyage south aboard their ship *Endurance*, an expedition which would ultimately enable them to walk across that continent directly through the South Pole. But when their ship was crushed by ice and sank before they had even reached land, the crew was stranded for sixteen months completely vulnerable in that region of Earth profoundly unnerving to every human sense and profoundly inhospitable and alien to Man. Shackleton and his men were forced to survive for nearly a year and a half on very little else but unshakable morale and unwavering trust. Of all the adventures of explorers throughout human history, the trial of the *Endurance* is arguably the most arduous *dark night of the soul* humanity has ever survived.

Near the end of their ordeal, Shackleton took two others and in desperation climbed a mountain range toward a small fishing village which long ago had given them up for dead. During this legendary thirty-six hour trek they scaled Mount Erebus, an active volcano named for the Greek protogod of sunless night, whose eternal darkness characterizes the road which leads mortals into Hell. These mere skeletons of men were nearly starved to death, nearly frozen beyond numbness, and exhausted far beyond the endurance which the name of their sunken ship used to boast. It was at this extremity, when these men themselves hovered somewhere between the frail filaments of life and the certainty of death, when they tottered upon the final edge of their last psychic edge, that all three simultaneously sense the Presence of a fourth Man climbing with them, an invisible, supernatural Being who radiated calm,

peace, and consummate assurance. After their rescue, all three described how language failed them when they attempted with halting breath and stumbling speech to describe that ineffable Presence, how mere mortal words seemed not only inadequate, but also rough and crude when compared to the ethereal serenity of their Companion. Christ had appeared to them to sustain them on their epic road to Emmaus, when they had within them no further reserves with which to sustain themselves; how very like the advertisement which Shackleton had posted when attempting to recruit men for his expedition.

A newspaper had printed his unlikely ad—MEN WANTED for hazardous journey. Low wages, brutal cold, long hours of darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in event of success.' Much to Shackleton's surprise, a long line of hopeful applicants twined round the city block.

If Jesus Christ had advertised for disciples, His ad would have similarly read—MEN WANTED for hazardous journey. No wages, brutally cold reception from the world, long hours even years of spiritual darkness, psychological starvation, and emotional invalidation. Safe return doubtful, in fact journey will most likely lead TO DEATH. But for those who persist with stubborn determination, their journey will lead to honor, recognition, and an encounter with the Divine.' Much to Jesus' surprise, long lines of hopeful applicants for two millennia have encircled the globe. Like those three starving men who had scaled Mount Erebus on their way through the hellish conditions of Antarctica, determined contemporary disciples will also experience at long last Christ Himself who will bestow upon them indescribable peace and other-worldly consummation.

In this era of seductive ecumenism, when all religions are viewed as somehow equal, worthy of equivalent consideration,

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Hanging on the wall just above our computer is... NOT a picture of a saint NOT an inspiring proverb.... BUT a colorful stylized map of western North Carolina featuring roads, small towns and rivers. The most eye-catching feature of this map is the green mountains. Roads thread the valleys, or highways such as the Blue Ridge Parkway rise and dip along the top of the higher ranges.

You won't find the main road that runs through the township of Spring Creek—Hwy. 209 — even though it is the principal artery into and out of our small community of homes and farms. We do have a General Store, complete

with gas pumps and a renovated school which serves as an all-purpose community center. This area is our home base so when we are asked by folks where we live, we reply “Spring Creek” and all the locals know where Still Wood is. Sometimes we need to be more specific so we add “Upper Spring Creek on Trust Mountain”. We treasure our mostly unseen neighbors but it is the mountains surrounding us which have become our closest “friends”, shielding us from the worst of nature's onslaughts.

From our position on the side of Trust Mountain, we look north across the valley of Spring Creek, to a range which runs along the North Carolina border with Tennessee. To the south we can glimpse the mountains which compose the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. We have to warn potential visitors not to rely on their GPS because much of the uploaded data about this area is incorrect. Even family members get led astray and end up at an overlook or struggling their way over Troublesome Gap!

We can liken this landscape to the spiritual life where we often plod along unmarked paths without the assurance of a GPS “voice” telling us where to turn or even allowing us to know where we are at any particular moment. We learn to trust that if we have strayed off our given way, something or someone will come along to show us our true way. There are few if any street lights on spiritual paths and precious few road signs either. We must hone our spiritual instincts and cultivate our awareness of *The Presence* so that, when we go off track, we can be guided to our true way. It is a practice of faith that grows over the years; a reassuring trust that even if we have swerved off the path or turned round this way or that, we will in the end “come down right” in the words of the old Shaker song. We may discover a whole new (to us) spiritual way which the Holy has always intended for us to travel. We may never feel “secure” in the solitary life; or sense a confidence that we have achieved our goal but we will experience the wonder of how Love is always energizing and guiding us to vistas beyond description, as *“exiles in the far end of solitude, living as listeners, with hearts attending to the skies we cannot understand...planted like sentinels upon the world's frontier.”* Thomas Merton

With Gratitude & Prayers for 2024, Paul & Karen

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 donations to: ravenbread97@gmail.com or *Raven's Bread Ministries*, 18065 NC 209 Hwy., Hot Springs, NC 28743 or via PayPal at our website. Our website is: <http://www.ravenbreadministries.com>. Our phone number is: 828 622 3750. Our videos are posted on YouTube. An annual donation is appreciated, each giving according to their means.

Please send payment in US dollars (PayPal converts foreign currency to US dollars). All donations go into a fund to insure that anyone who wants to receive *Raven's Bread Newsletter*, or *Resources*, or *Library books* or an individual retreat space when available, can receive these services.

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).

STILL LOOKING

We continue looking for a “hermit-minded, able-bodied someone” to live in **Raven’s Rest Hermitage** very affordably in exchange for assistance with upkeep and maintenance of our home and property. Still Wood itself is barely an acre of wooded mountainside surrounded by a thousand acres of undeveloped forest with hiking trails and beautiful views.



We have recently made improvements to the hermitage so that it is now better equipped to accommodate long-term residents as well as individual short-term retreatants or individuals planning a sabbatical or period of renewal in a quiet space with minimal interruptions.

Thoughts In Solitude

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all superficially explored with serious delving into their depths, it is easy to forget that Christianity demands an enormous cost for being a follower of Christ, because this religion guarantees the most rugged and dreadful hardships, as well as the most painful and gruesome ordeals which have nothing to do with the appreciation of nature, the valuing of an uncomplicated life, or the living at a slow pace with its daily enjoyment of simple pleasures. For those who adhere to His strict cost of discipleship with unshakable morale and unwavering trust, who willingly bear for an unknown time their uniquely-personal *dark night of the soul*, who explore down to their marrow the teachings of Christ undiluted by other dogmas or poetic fantasies, He Himself will appear, an ineffable supernatural Being whom no mortal tongue can adequately describe who offers *honor and recognition* to His sincere followers who cling to His teachings without regard for personal cost, as though their spiritual lives throughout eternity depend on that adherence, because in fact they truly do.



**Contributed by
long-time Raven’s Bread reader,
Bonnie Werner of Ohio**



BOOK NOTES AND REVIEWS



THE NOT-YET GOD: CARL JUNG, TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, AND THE RELATIONAL WHOLE

by Illia Delio

We are a species between axial periods. Thus our religious myths are struggling to find new connections in a global, ecological order. Delio proposes the idea of relational holism rooted in the God-world relationship. The complex human can no longer be simplified to one view or another: one must see the whole of our existence or one does not see at all.

304 pp. pbk. Orbis Books 2023

ISBN-10: 1626985359 ISBN-13 978-1626985353

GIVE UP WORRY FOR LENT!: 40 DAYS TO FINDING PEACE IN CHRIST

By Gary Zimak

Self-described “recovering worrier”, Gary Zimak combines practical spirituality, daily scripture readings, and simple action steps to help us kick the worry habit as part of our Lenten renewal. We learn how to relinquish the need to control the uncontrollable—not just for Lent but for good.

160 pp. Ave Maria Press 2019

ISBN-10: 1594718814 ISBN-13 9781594718816

IN THE HANDS OF A FIERCELY TENDER GOD: 31 DAYS OF HOPE, HONESTY, AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE SUFFERER

By Colleen Chao & Colleen Elisabeth Chao

Drawing upon stories from past saints, rich truths from Scripture, and habits that build joyful endurance, Colleen helps us to embrace one day at a time, to trust and love Jesus more, and put ourselves in the Hands of a Fiercely Tender God.

192 pp. pbk. Moody Publishers 2022

ISBN: 0802429904 ISBN-13 9780802429902



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



A new Resource Available!

RB is pleased to announce a new Resource for Raven's Bread readers.

From Restless Loneliness to Peaceful Solitude

by Carolyn Humphreys

(a frequent contributor to Raven's Bread newsletter)

This article appeared in the final issue of "Human Development" Magazine in 2023. We can send it as a PDF file or as a print copy for a \$3.00 donation. A listing of other available Resources can be found on Raven's Bread website.



In Diana Woodcock's *Heaven Underfoot*, we find a beautiful marriage of scientific fact, social understanding and lyric image. This book travels the world with eyes wide open and a generous heart — Africa, Cambodia, the Arabian Desert, the Arctic, the Great Smoky Mountains, the Everglades — and everywhere it goes, it names the world with specificity and music.

While acknowledging the imperfection of a human inhabited world, these poems remain awash in gratitude and wonder. They invite us to participate in that wonder and, along with the poet, to "give thanks all day / For the rapture and despair, / For all that is missing / And all that's still there."

— Anne McCrary Sullivan, author of *Notes from a Marine Biologist's Daughter*

About the Author

Diana Woodcock (long-time Raven's Bread reader and contributor) holds a PhD from Lancaster University where she researched poetry's role in the search for an environmental ethic. Since 2004, she has been teaching creative writing, environmental literature and composition at VCUarts in Qatar.



Photo courtesy of Markat Ellblanc, photographer

Wood B. Hermit



"Humankind has not woven the web of life.
We are but one thread in it. What we do to the web,
we do to ourselves. All things are bound together.
All things connect." Chief Seattle

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The list can also be sent by postal mail with a \$3.00 donation.