



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 7 No: 1 February 2003

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in the eremitical life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. The newsletter seeks to affirm and support this way of life. ***Raven's Bread*** is a collaborative effort and thus depends on the shared reflections, stories, news, notices, letters, and information from hermits themselves. The ***Raven's Bread*** Web page is an abbreviated version of our full printed newsletter, which also includes a **Bulletin Board** and **Reader Forum** featuring responses to a quarterly discussion topic.

Please send your written contributions, as well as address changes and subscriptions to:

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

The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$8.00 in USA and \$10.00 US currency for foreign subscriptions. (Drafts drawn on US banks are the most convenient form of payment by foreign subscribers.) Any extra donations will be used to subsidize subscriptions for hermits who cannot afford the full cost.

To E-mail ***Raven's Bread*** directly click on this link: fredette@nclink.net

Raven's Bread (formerly ***Marabou***) derives its name from the experience of Elijah, the prophet, in 1 Kgs.17: 1-6. A raven, sent by God, nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (the Cutting Place).

zzzzzz Thoughts in Solitude zzzzzz

Excerpts from Thomas Merton Uncensored
By: Rev. Patrick W. Collins, Ph.D., Douglas, MI

Much can be learned about prayer and contemplation from Thomas Merton's uncensored writing in his (now) published letters. Interestingly, most of his best correspondence about contemplation is not with "official" contemplatives - like persons in Holy Orders or in religious vows. It is with the laity and usually with persons who were not in the Roman Catholic community. One question which Merton addressed many times is the extent of God's call to contemplation. Is it a vocation for a few favored persons? Or are all of the baptized called to contemplation? The answer depends upon what one means by contemplation. Depending upon the context of the correspondence, the Trappist says it is a special gift and yet he also says all persons are called to contemplative living. In fact he wrote in one place: "Christ came on earth to form contemplatives."

One of his frequent correspondents on the topic was an Anglican laywoman, Etta Gullick, who apparently wrote to Merton frequently about contemplation. Contemplation, the Trappist contended, cannot be explained. It can only be hinted at or suggested. It is only "known" in the doing of contemplative praying and living. He wrote to Gullick in 1962 of the inadequacy of all explanatory words. "The nothingness and emptiness (of contemplation) are more important than their explanations, and I think you will find eventually that explanations are not needed. Yet, of course, you do need to communicate with someone and feel yourself understood. But you are understood by Christ and that is the great thing; the least thing is to understand oneself."

How does one learn contemplative prayer and living? Merton wrote to Gullick in 1964: "I do not think contemplation can be taught, but certainly an aptitude for it can be awakened. It is an aptitude which quite a lot of people might have. The important thing

is that this be made real and credible by someone who knows by experience what it is and who can make it real to those in whom it begins to awaken."

How does one measure one's growth in prayer? In 1965 Merton answered Etta Gullick's question on this point. He warned her about the danger of too much self-focus in this matter of measuring one's prayer. "Progress in prayer: it is a ticklish subject because the chief obstacle to progress is too much self-awareness and to talk about "how to make progress" is a good way to make people too aware of themselves. In the long run, I think progress in prayer comes from the Cross and humiliation and whatever makes us really experience our total poverty and nothingness; and also gets our mind off ourselves."

Thomas Merton wrote some very practical advice to Abdul Aziz about the role of reading, vocal prayer and silence in meditation. "...one who is learning to meditate must also learn to get along without any support external to his own heart and the gifts of God. Hence it is good for such a one to have to remain in silence without reading or even using vocal prayers sometimes, in order to come to terms with the need for inner struggle and discipline. On the other hand this is not a universal rule. There are times when it is necessary to read, and even to read quite a lot, in order to store up material and get new perspectives. In the solitary life, however, though one has a lot of time for reading, it becomes difficult to read a great deal. One finds that in a couple of hours one reads only a few pages. The rest of the time is spent in reflection and prayer. It becomes difficult to absorb more than this. Someone in solitude who would read voraciously all the time might perhaps be in the wrong place. Moderate reading is, however, normal. Provided that more time is spent in prayer and meditation than in reading..."

In 1964 the Trappist wrote to Gullick: "I have greater and greater confidence in the reality of the path that is no path at all, and to see people following it in spite of everything is comforting. By rights, they should all have forgotten and lost their way long ago. If they keep on it without really knowing what it is, this is because God keeps them there."

A Word from Still Wood

Ravens inhabit these mountains although sighting them is rare. We occasionally hear their soft "quark, quark" when we are walking in the woods that surround our house. Ornithologists who study ravens have discovered one astonishing characteristic. When one bird finds a large kill or food source, it summons all the other ravens in the area to share in the feast! The raven in the Book of Kings apparently shared its bread and meat with Elijah who was in hiding from the king's wrath. There are many "ravens" flying into Still Wood with wonderful fare which we, as editors, are privileged to enjoy and then offer to you. We feel like circling the globe crying "quark, quark" as we call our readers to come to the banquet.

This issue of ***Raven's Bread*** offers us valuable insights from a number of hermits who responded to the question posted on our web site about incorporating "Simplicity" into their daily lives. Such candid snapshots of their various lifestyles are instructive and inspiring. You will also find yet more responses from the 2001 Survey. This question focuses on how solitaries who are married accommodate their spouses. Once again, we are reminded that there are as many ways to live hermit life as there are those who are doing so.

In the last issue, we made passing reference to having found a publisher. We co-authored a novel – then spent over two years searching for a publisher. Benoy Publishing, Wilmington, NC plans to bring it out this spring. Rejoice with us! And forgive us for enclosing a small flyer describing our "dream child" and an order blank in case you may be interested in our fable about a lost community of elders in these mountains who nurture a life based on The Book.

Thank you to all who have renewed their subscriptions, conveying to us how nourishing ***Raven's Bread*** is to them. Comments such as:

"I always look forward to receiving ***Raven's Bread***; it is beautifully produced....

"Thoughts from Survey Soundings are most revealing and important; the responses to the monthly topics are also quite insightful ...

"***RB*** gives me so many pearls of wisdom ...

"I am deeply grateful for ***Raven's Bread*** - it fills a real need...

"There is loneliness in being a solitary in a parish that doesn't understand my focus -

how much Raven's Bread helps me to not feel so alone and different...

"It really helps me to receive the information contained in **RB** and to find the Resources offered...

"I found **RB** a real boon once I found myself moving in this direction...

"I often feel out of place in the common world and seek to find thoughts and ideals of others similar to mine so that I might not feel so unblended...

"Thank you for all your work; the journal is excellent and surely helps many hermits throughout the world."

Your encouragement keeps us going, dear friends, and helps us know that **RB** is meeting at least some of your needs and expectations. When folks find us flying about crying "quark, quark," you, at least, will understand!

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

The 2001 Survey of Raven's Bread Readers

Since last year more than 620 copies of "The Survey" have been mailed to our readership, and we received over 175 responses. It continues to be a truly gratifying experience. The volume of returns stays at a fantastic 25%!!! It says something wonderful about everyone who cooperates in this project, making it truly reflective of what is happening in our own time re solitary lifestyles. We continue to receive requests for **Survey Results** and back issues containing the summaries we have printed thus far.

The current print issue of **RB** (February 2003) features the results of the Sixth of Ten Reflection Questions: *"If you are married and are attracted to solitude, how do you work this out with your spouse?"*

This survey question attracted thirty-six responses and constituted some of the more surprising data we received. It challenges the traditional definition of "hermit" as a celibate recluse with extremely limited contact with other human beings. Most the respondents to this question referred to themselves as "solitaries" or "lovers of solitude" and the accomodation reached with spouses varied considerably depending on the spouse's personal attitude which ran the gamut from sharing the attraction to solitude; supporting the spouse respectfully; mystified by the idea or expressly opposed to it.
(from editor's introduction, pg. 3 of February 2003 Print Issue)

We are still offering the initial "big picture" summary from the eleven categories covered in the Survey's check-off section (Personal Information, Location, Religious Affiliation and Status, Lifestyle, Prayer Forms and Religious Practices, Financial Situation, Spiritual Direction, and Difficulties) which was published in the August 2001 Issue. In the months ahead, we will continue to review with our readers the material received in answer to the **10 Reflection Questions** and offer updates about any significant new data we receive. Eventually, a complete Report will be available from **RB RESOURCES**.

If you are interested in obtaining the **2001 Raven's Bread Survey Results**, these initial reports are available upon request to our online readers for \$5.00 each (U.S. currency):

By Mail:

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

By Telephone: 1-828-622-3750

**If we fail to embrace our ultimate aloneness
and seek meaning only in communion with others,
we wither and die...**

from The Courage to Teach by Parker Palmer

zzz The Art of Spiritual Recovery zzz

By: Mark Redmond, MA, MSW, CSW

In a recent issue of Raven's Bread (November 2002), Judy Sigmund wrote, "As a therapist, I listen for spiritual themes, questions, and impasses in my patients' stories and I can often see how these mesh with the psychological and emotional problems they express. But on the two occasions that I have worked with spiritual directors, there has been an overt determination to keep psychotherapy issues separate and out of the discussions."

During the mid-1990's, I worked as the Program Administrator on an inpatient treatment unit for victims of sexual and cult abuse. Many of our clients were the victims of horrendous ritualistic and satanic abuse which left them devoid of any sort of spiritual center in their lives. As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, who also happened to be a former cloistered religious, I was asked to develop a treatment modality that would address the spiritual needs of our patients. What resulted from my preparation became known as the Spiritual Recovery Group. Naturally, every time the group [was announced it was met with skepticism and ridicule. Some of the patients would politely refuse to attend; attendance was not mandatory. Some would get angry and resentful at the mere suggestion of anything spiritual, likening it to another form of ritualistic control. Some would attend as an attempt to please the staff. And some would attend who recognized the need to reconnect to this aspect of their personhood. When all was said and done, I believe that many of the therapists, physicians and even some of the patients gained a greater appreciation for the spiritual dimension of recovery from illness, whether emotional, physical, spiritual or a combination of these.

As a clinician I found it natural to move from the clinical realm to the spiritual and back again. However, making the jump from the spiritual realm to the clinical is not so easily accomplished. While it is possible for therapy to enhance one's spiritual focus, and for spiritual direction to be therapeutic, the difficulty lies not in the practice, but rather with the practitioner. First of all, the average spiritual director is not well versed in the clinical realm and hence is likely to feel uncomfortable delving into such issues with someone seeking spiritual direction. Many of those spiritual directors who were lucky enough to have any sort of exposure to clinical issues in their training were also likely counseled to refer out to the "professionals" when such issues arose. There are some within the ranks of spiritual directors that are both competent and comfortable in addressing such issues with those seeking spiritual direction. However, our increasingly litigious culture is likely to scare some of them away out of fear of someone claiming malpractice. On a more positive note, I recently came across a graduate program that offered a dual degree consisting of Masters of Divinity and a Masters of Social Work.

What concern is all of this to those aspiring to an eremitical existence? Often, as I sat in the group therapy room waiting to see if anyone would show up for the Spiritual Recovery Group, I reflected on the many times Thomas Merton pointed to the monk, nun and hermit as the glue that keeps our world from lapsing into chaos. And, for him, just knowing that they were there in their cloisters and cells helped to ease his own journey through the dark night. As the curious and suspicious patient would pass the door to see if it was a safe place to enter, I would attempt to put on my most welcoming posture. Eventually some would enter. Eventually some would talk. Eventually some would say they felt as if they were making progress along their spiritual journey. All I did was sit calmly, listen patiently, and applaud their courage. I honestly could not say whether I viewed myself more as a clinician, spiritual director, or humbled fellow traveler. But what I do know beyond any doubt was how good it felt to momentarily be a part of the glue.

We welcome further reflections on
"The Challenges of living simply or simply living."
Deadline: April 1, 2003

So, instead of loving what you think is peace,
Love others and Love God above all.
And, instead of hating the people you think are warmongers,
hate the appetite and the disorder in your own soul,
which are the causes of war.
If you love peace, then hate injustice
hate tyranny, hate greed-
But hate these things in yourself,
Not in another.
Thomas Merton

"A Suggestion"

Trying to get in touch with another hermit? Want contact from a hermit or solitary? Aware of opportunities that may be of interest to solitaires? Have you a service to offer? Are you looking to locate or re-locate a hermitage? Why not place your message on the **Bulletin Board** of *Raven's Bread* (printed version). Requests are posted **free of charge** for our regular subscribers.

Resources Available from *Raven's Bread*

(all prices include postage)

Readings in Spirituality - Annotated Bibliography by Sharon Jeanne Smith **31pp.**
\$15.00

Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp.** **\$13.00**

Commentary on Canon 603 from "The Law of Consecrated Life" by Jean Beyer SJ, 1988 Translated from the French by W. Becker, 1992 **10pp.** **\$3.00**

Hermits: The Juridical Implications of Canon 603 by Helen L. Macdonald, Researcher Novalis: St. Paul University, Ottawa, ONT **24pp.** **\$12.00**

Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp.** **\$7.50**

Statutes for Hermits by The Bishops of France (1989)
12 pp. **\$6.00**

Fellowship of Solitaires

Comprised of and open to religious solitaires of all stripes. The Fellowship is ecumenical and has no official connections with any church. People may join the Fellowship either as Members or as Associates. All receive a regular Newsletter and a List of Members, so that they may be prayerfully aware of each other in their different paths and to make contact with each other if they so wish.

Correspondent: Eve Baker, Coed Glas, Talgarth Road, Bronllys, Brecon, Powys, LD3 0HN

To email Fellowship of Solitaries directly click on this link:fos@btinternet.com

To access the website of Fellowship of Solitaries click on this link:<http://www.btinternet.com/~benedict.baker>

Inner Light Productions, Michael McClellan, Editor

Thoughts-of-the-Week from the Desert Fathers

To subscribe:

Send a blank e-mail to:thoughts-of-the-week-request@innerlightproductions.com

with this text in the body: subscribe thoughts-of-the-week

Four Articles by Kenneth C. Russell. Reprinted by permission from "*Review for Religious*" (excellent footnotes & references)

Being a Hermit: Where and How 12 pp, \$6.00

Acedia - The Dark Side of Commitment 4 pp. \$2.00

The dangers of Solitude 5 pp. \$2.50

Must hermits Work? 10 pp. \$5.00

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from 11 categories (personal information, location, religious affiliation and status, lifestyle, prayer forms and religious practices, financial situation, spiritual direction, difficulties).

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.5 No.3. **2 pp. \$5.00**

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from First Reflection Question: "For me the grace and essence of solitary living is..."

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.5 No.4. **2 pp. \$5.00**

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from Second Reflection Question: "How did you come to recognize your call to religious / solitary / hermit life?"

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.6 No.1. **2 pp. \$5.00**

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from Third Reflection Question: "Reactions of others to my choice of eremitic life..."

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.6 No.2. **2 pp. \$5.00**

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from Fourth Reflection Question: "For members of religious congregations: Reactions of the community to my choice of hermit life..."

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.6 No.3. **2 pp. \$5.00**

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from Fifth Reflection Question: "For former members of religious congregations: What prompted you to leave? Was your departure related to your attraction to solitude..."

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.6 No.4. **2 pp. \$5.00**

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from Sixth Reflection Question: "If you are married and attracted to Solitude, how do you work this out with your spouse?"

Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.7 No.1. **1 page \$2.00**

Raven's Rest

The Silence...The Solitude...The Solace of God...

Retreatants welcome to schedule time from April 6 through November 1, 2003 at **Raven's Rest** Hermitage (a fully furnished apartment with kitchenette & private entrance) here at **Still Wood**. Offers opportunity to experience solitude and silence on a forested mountainside of the Newfound Range in the rural Smokies, approximately 35 miles N.E. of the Great Smokies National Park and 35 miles N.W. of Asheville. Spiritual Direction available upon request. Suggested offering \$25.00 per day includes meals. For further information, contact:

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BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A Journey into God: A Forty-Day Retreat with Bonaventure, Francis and Clare by Josef Raischl, S.F.O. and André Cirino, O.F.M. *Co-written by one of our own Raven's Bread subscribers, this book by two experienced spiritual directors is a forty-day retreat into the joyful acceptance of goodness that is part of Franciscan spirituality. Ideal for a Lenten retreat, the basic theological concepts of St. Bonaventure are presented in clear and practical language. Each day there are readings from "The Journey of the Human Person into God," reflections by the two authors and exercises one can carry out in daily life. Can be used by groups or individuals. Appendix contains a new translation of "The Journey" by Zachary Hayes, O.F.M. 2003. Paperback, 416 pp. \$14.95 St. Anthony Messenger Press, 28 W. Liberty St. Cincinnati, OH 45202, Tel: 513-241-5615*

Sharing Silence; Becoming Bread; Journeying in Place by Gunilla Norris. *A collection of three meditative classics in which Norris demonstrates the life-transforming powers of celebrating the beauty of everyday life. 1996. Paperback, 250 pp. Quality Paperback Book Club. New York.*

If God is...A Poetic Search for God Within by Warren Molton.

Fifty-six prayer-poems and accompanying meditations that open doors to see God everywhere. Molton is a rare writer - with the mind of a theologian, the heart of a seeker and the soul of a poet. 2002. Paperback, 135 pp. \$13.95 Forest of Peace Publishing, 251 Muncie Rd., Leavenworth, KS 66048-4946 Tel: 800-659-3227

New additions to Raven's Bread Resources:

"A Rule for Hermits" by Padre Fray Alberto E. Justo, OP in English and Spanish. 9pp. \$4.00

Note: "Marabou" founder, Fr. Bede Jagoe OP, brought this to our attention and asked us to credit Fr. Tom Johnston OP who offered it to him.

"A Briefly Annotated Bibliography of Books on Solitude" prepared by an RB reader. 4pp. \$2.00

Websites of Interest:

www.heandi.qc.ca; www.mediaspaul.qc.ca;
www.umilta.net/eremit.html; www.chrmysticaloutreach.com;
www.commstanth.org

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