



# ***Raven's Bread***

## ***Food for Those in Solitude***

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### ***Vol: 6 No: 3 August 2002***

***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](mailto: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

**By: Barbara Erakko-Taylor, Catonsville, MD**

(Excerpted from *Silent Dwellers*, published 1999 by Continuum Publishing Co.)

Aloneness carries with it a certain poverty. While periods of aloneness can carry a deep richness, prolonged solitude carries a certain loss. The need to be alone is part of the human condition. Every person, no matter how extroverted, needs time to pause, to reflect, to simply rest in soulful silence. But the silent dweller, by choosing solidarity with one's own human aloneness thereby also chooses a particular form of human poverty and deprivation. The ingredient of companionship is absent when one embraces a life of deliberate solitude.

If true humanity is writ upon the soul, then the solitary – in communing so deeply with soul and spirit – lives out a deep expression of that humanity. It is in letting go of what seems necessary to be human – companionship, love, service, children – that one begins to touch the unseen roots that feed society and make it grow and thrive.

But this letting go is not abandoning, or turning one's back on humanity. It is letting go of the way such connections are held within the human heart. There is a woman within me who would clutch at God, determined to be one with God in her knowing much like the rich man who thinks he can buy solidarity with the poor by writing large checks to charity. A significant part of me has believed I can own God. I nurture this illusion by going up the mountain of human isolation – depriving myself of companionship – and equate this journey to oneness with the poor and dispossessed.

This is the dark side of solidarity with the poor. It has no life. It can only result in bitterness, human isolation, psychological death. The journey into authentic solidarity is very difficult, one which I am only beginning to understand. True solidarity requires a

genuine connection to the pain and horror, the awe and beauty, of being human.

I have read many books about the holiness of aloneness, and the psychological neediness of loneliness. For me, both run together in a river. I am alone... and lonely ... in the same indrawn breath. I feel the awe and holiness of my aloneness; I feel the sharp wounding pain of my loneliness. The two become so intermingled, it is impossible for me to distinguish them. Like coffee mixed with cream and sugar, who can tell what part is bitter, and what part, sweet?

The first step toward true solidarity with the poor is accepting our own human poverty. That is hard – keeping one's heart open to the enormity of one's pain, and not run, rush back to human consolation. Why not run to our brothers and sisters? We are meant to be human, to be in communion. What strange disorder possesses the solitary to seek a solidarity that cannot be seen, touched, or affirmed?

Fear can seduce the solitary to abandon the quest. Within me, I often feel a horrible debilitating uselessness. During those times – and they are horrible – I feel utter emotional helplessness. I am terrified of a kind of human oblivion, a negation of my human spirit. Yet it is in precisely this poverty that the essence of my solidarity with all human beings is revealed.

The true solitary who sings adoration to God through the human condition is the embodiment of solidarity. In such a one, God and the world are inseparable and the world draws closer to the inexhaustible richness of God.

## **A Word from Still Wood**

Some months ago, we were having some fun with the sanctoral cycle of the Church calendar. "How would you feel, " Paul asked, "if, after being canonized, you were assigned to be an Optional Memorial? Those holy men and women whose names follow the phrase: "And On the Same Day"? I admitted I would feel like I was in the "Also ran" or "Honorable Mention" category. One thing led to another and we were soon concocting new members of the ancient order of Holy Helpers, among whom are St. Barbara, (whose teeth were knocked out), patroness of dentists, and St. Dymphna, (who was beheaded by her own father), patroness of persons with mental health problems.

We suspect a certain holy couple has already been assigned to us: Sts. Frustratia and Futilibus. They are not the patrons of Lost Causes (St. Jude) nor of the Impossible (St. Rita). Rather they come to the aid of folk feeling totally frustrated; of persons who see how futile are their best efforts. Have you ever been visited by this couple? Their special gift is to help us see more clearly what in life really deserves our best efforts and what is merely a "chase after wind, vanity of vanities." After communing with them for awhile, time itself is seen differently. Instead of being a commodity that is always running out, it becomes a space in which we can find the nearest thing to heavenly bliss known on this earth - Contentment.

Contentment is the sweet gift of realizing that we already have everything we really need, even enough time to enjoy it! It requires the discipline of being aware of our life in the Present Moment and leaving the future (and the past) in Hands larger than our own. As hermits and lovers of solitude have discovered, Now is beautiful! Now is the timeless moment in which we know all is well. "From useless worry and futile fretting," may Sts. Frustratia and Futilibus deliver us!

We recently experienced a moment of *frustration* when we began editing this issue of ***Raven's Bread***. We had not yet received a single response to the questions about Spiritual Direction which had been posed for August. How strange ... when we had thought it was an important topic! Perhaps everyone was hoping someone else would write about it? As we proceeded to set up the rest of the issue, two responses did arrive and others were promised. If you would still like to contribute to the discussion, we will be glad to publish reflections in the next issue about your experiences, *frustrations*, or desires re Spiritual Direction. Or you may address the other proposed topic: Degree and Nature of Interaction with 'the World.'

May we share a recent and long-awaited achievement with you? After months of seemingly *futile* efforts and *frustrations*, we have finally realized our dream of establishing a website for our fabric art enterprise, ***Faith Keeper Originals***. Please check out [www.faith-keeper.com](http://www.faith-keeper.com) and share our joy!

**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 each week for **Survey Results** and back issues containing the summaries we have printed thus far.

The current print issue of **RB** (August 2002) features the results of the Fourth of Ten Reflection Questions: *"If you are a member of a religious congregation, what has been the reaction of the community to your choice of hermit life?"*

...forty members of various religious communities responded to this fourth survey question. Among them were Benedictines, Franciscans, Carmelites, Augustinians, Dominicans and others who have remained members of their respective communities while living as hermits /solitairies. They report the various accommodations they must make in order to maintain this affiliation (*from editor's introduction, pg. 4 of August 2002 Print Issue*)

We are still offering the "big picture" 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

**By E-Mail:** [fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)

**Without solitude there can be no real people...  
The measure of your solitude is the measure of  
your capacity for communion.**

**zzzzzzCanonical Reflectionszzzzzz**

**By: Natascha C. Johannessen**

Renewed interest in eremitical life has evoked new (canonical) definitions and revived old ones based on ancient or medieval forms. There are even attempts to legislate for problems not yet encountered. These well-meaning legislators often come from religious or monastic traditions with well defined norms, practices, ceremonials, and communal environment. Their lack of experience in the freedom and demands of solitary life in the world may lead them to establish structures based on the familiar model of canonical religious life. Aspiring solitaires who left this background to apply to the eremitical state have done so not to replicate those conditions but to branch out and build on what was learned from them. They seek a freedom of spirit necessary for living in solitude, in the presence of the Lord without interruption. This is not to say that the eremitical life is so free-form as to be totally without parameters. But this life-style, by definition, is a call to an individual to live out his/her own vocation according to his/her own formulary, as Canon 603 acknowledges.

This demands respect for the individual call and recognition of practical adaptability. Although public profession of the evangelical counsels includes those in the "religious state," Canon 603 does not specifically refer to or require observance of, norms proper to religious institutes. Rather, the canon specifies that a Rule of Life be developed by the individual applicant and approved by the Ordinary. The essence of solitary life is simplicity in all things ("the one thing necessary") - in daily living, in relations with the Bishop and Chancery, in rituals and all else. Elaborate formularies and observances hinder and distract from the spirit of peace and simplicity. It is worth considering that the hermit lives, moves, and works in a continuously sought presence and companionship with the Lord. It is a different life form than that of the active religious or monastic whose many tasks, duties and recreations can distract from this single-minded focus. There is less need to be "heeled in" by scheduled observances in order to restore a recollected state. In truth, the hermit would find this counter-productive.

Another point to consider is that of practical living in today's world. Few hermits can support themselves in cottage industries. Many must work

outside the hermitage, or may be living on social security payments and dependent on Medicare. In most cases, they experience life at or far below the poverty line - which is, of course, consistent with vowed poverty but not necessarily in line with diocesan guidelines for financial management. Many come from a background in religious community or are retired and are already technically and actually poor. For most, marginal living is the norm.

Health insurance (often demanded by diocesan authorities) runs in excess of \$225/month. How many hermits can afford that? Terminal health care will, by today's provision, be reliant upon Medicaid with resultant loss of assets - the same as experienced by the majority of our population. The move to simplicity in all things is integral to the eremitical state and encourages one to strive for freedom from time-consuming worldly concerns. Few hermits want to spend excessive time poring over their investment portfolio! But for those whose income derives in part from investments, handing over administration to others could guarantee poverty, particularly in today's fluctuating economy!

In conclusion, let there be room for flexibility and individuality consistent with the realities of life in our present day world... the environment in which the Lord has called the hermit to live. Even the most sincere commitment cannot ensure fidelity; nor can the most detailed legislation be a guarantee against the foibles of human nature. Certainly, this is clearly apparent today!

A willingness to allow a hermit to live a yet-to-be-defined and developing way of life; to learn and to grow with a Solitary may well be the most helpful stance authority can take toward ensuring genuine holiness in solitude. Risk is intrinsic to the eremitical state. Let us avoid placing both hermit and diocesan officials in bondage to elements of frustration. Multiplication of canonical guidelines could become a quagmire, bogging down the liberty required for genuine solitary living.

"How do you, as a hermit, envision your service to the world? How do you determine your degree of contact and interaction with others?"

Deadline: September 30, 2002

"Stillness is our most intense mode of action.  
It is in our moments of deep quiet  
that is born every idea, emotion, and drive  
which we eventually honor with the name of action."  
*Leonard Bernstein in "Religion and Ethics by D.J. Green*

## "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 Solitaires directly click on this  
link: [fos@btinternet.com](mailto:fos@btinternet.com)

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

Inner Light Productions, Michael McClellan, Editor

Thoughts-of-the-Week from the Desert Fathers

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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

## Raven's Rest

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

Retreatants welcome to schedule time from March 25 through November 1, 2002 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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[email: fredette@nclink.net](mailto:fredette@nclink.net)

## BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**A Pelican in the Wilderness - Hermits, Solitaries, and Recluses** by Isabel Colegate. *A readable discussion of various solitaires and forms of hermit life throughout history from China to Great Britain.* 2002. Hardback, 284 pp. \$25.00. Counterpoint, P.O.Box 65793, Washington, DC 20035-5793. (Can be ordered through Amazon.com)

**Wisdom for the Journey, Conversations with Spiritual Fathers of the Christian East** by Serge Bolshakoff. *A collection of discussions which the author enjoyed with monastic fathers of the Russian Orthodox Church over a period of fifty years* 2001. Paperback, 208 pp. \$14.95. Alba House, 2187 Victory Blvd., Staten Island, NY 10314. Tel: 718-761-0047

**Kything, The Art of Spiritual Presence** by Louis M. Savary & Patricia H. Berne. *Kything is an easily mastered skill that allows people to be more intensely present to each other or their surroundings, a way of consciously living in the loving presence of other persons, of God, and all of creation.* 1988. Paperback, 208 pp. \$9.95. Paulist Press, 997 Macarthur Boulevard, Mahwah, NJ 07430. Tel: 800-218-1903

**Lumen Christi...Holy Wisdom, Journey to Aawkening** by Nan Merrill. *Prayer-poems that reflect the author's search for fuller awareness of the Divine Presence and which offer glimpses of longed-for inner contentment.* 2002. Paperback, 174 pp. \$16.95. Continuum Inetrnational Publishing Gropu Inc., 370 Lexington Ave. New York, NY 10017. [www.continuumbooks.com](http://www.continuumbooks.com)

**Essential Monastic Wisdom, Writings on the Contemplative Life** by Hugh Feiss. *An introduction to the rich history and values of Christian monasticism intended for all readers regardless of their religious convictions.* 1999. Hardback, 218 pp. \$23.00. HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd St., New York, NY 10022. [www.harpercollins.com](http://www.harpercollins.com).



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