

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS: Father Charles Brandt Gets On With His Work

At Black Creek, in a 30-acre forest, in a handcrafted house that blends perfectly with its surroundings, lives Father Charles Brandt. He settled there in 1965.

Every area of his home reflects a dedication to perfection, as master bookbinder, restorer of treasured manuscripts and preserver of significant works of art. The laboratory, orderly and businesslike, features a large stainless steel bath used in the restoration process, a wide trestle table, hand-operated presses, and other equipment. The living room slants towards utility but underscores his interests. On the patio door leading to the veranda is a small, round, translucent photograph of the Earth from outer space, symbolic of Father Brandt's other thrust in life.

Charles Brandt was ordained a hermit monk in the Roman Catholic faith by Bishop Remi de Roo in 1966. A Methodist by upbringing, he first changed to Anglicanism, becoming an Anglican priest in Wisconsin. Interested in the life of prayer, he

sought the contemplative life. This led him to England, to a spiritual community at Merfield in Yorkshire, and towards Catholicism. At St. Gregory's Abbey in Shawnee, Oklahoma he was introduced to bookbinding. With the basic skills he learned there, and with his educational background, he was ready for his life's work.

Bookbinding, to him, is much more than putting a book in a jacket. It is an art form. Some of the volumes bound by him I saw in his library. They are jewels of perfection. Resplendent in gold illumination and handcrafted artistic symbols, they have that unmistakable quality of perennial beauty. They belong to all time.

Charles Brandt is also known as a paper conservator and is hired by the National Museum of Canada to clean, restore and preserve their many treasures. He knows all that can be known about the storing, cleaning and preserving of paper products and frequently lectures on this subject.

Significant achievements

include a restoration of an Emily Carr oil painting on paper, the conservation of a set of Audubon prints estimated to be worth over \$1.5 million, and the complete refurbishing of a national treasure known as the Bowron Lake Bible.

Father Brandt, a trained theologian, is also a graduate in Biology from Cornell University. His inner life of contemplation motivates his distinctive art. His biological knowledge impels his concern for the environment.

The restoration of the Tsolum River as a fish habitat has been a major project of Father Brandt's. The habitat was destroyed by the leaching of copper to the river from a Mt. Washington mine. In recognition of his contributions he was recently presented with the Cal Woods Conservation Award. His work has also been acknowledged by the Federal Department of Fisheries.

Speaking about his deep concern for the environment, Father Brandt indicated that it was related to his perception

about existence. "Everything is inter-related," he said. "Everything affects everything else. There's no way of escaping the consequences of what may appear to be the most insignificant event."

It was then that the symbolic view of Earth from outer space fired home for me. On the patio door, coming in and going out, it reminded that the globe of Earth as seen from space is our home.

Father Brandt pointed to the fir, maple, alder and oak, all in profuse togetherness, and said, "No logging, no tree cutting here. I practice what I preach."

Here is a man dedicated to the preservation of the whole of life: to the restoration of the human spirit through contemplative discipline, to the restoration of those fruits of the human spirit known as the arts, and to the restoration and retention of those delicate balances that assure a viable domicile for man and the whole creation.

~ john fullerton ~

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