

A natural perspective on The Meditative Life

Review of Charles Brandt's book *Meditations from the Wilderness*, by Judy Hagen.

“The wilderness experience can be translated into one's lifestyle, with meditative prose and poetry, into song and dance.”

Thus writes Father Charles Brandt in the introduction to his new book “Meditations from the Wilderness, a compilation of the writings of such notable naturalists as St. Francis of Assisi, Chief Seattle, Sir. Thomas More, Albert Switzer, and Henry David Thoreau.

Charles Brandt is a soft spoken introspective man of dichotomies: a hermit of the Trappist order who in 1965 was ordained as Roman Catholic Priest of the Diocese of Victoria of B.C. He spends six hours a day in meditation and spearheads environmental projects like the restoration of the Tsolum River.

He rejects worldly values but he restores the most priceless of early printed manuscripts. In his paper restoration lab which adjoins his living quarters with its small chapel, Charles lovingly repairs the oldest of printed words, an art which he learnt while working at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa.

At that time he repaired his most challenging assignment, the *Labor Chronicarum* (Nuremberg Chronicles) of 1493.

When he was in the Boy Scouts, he began his life long love of nature, particularly bird lore. After serving as a pilot in American Air Force during WWII, he studied Ornithology at Cornell University, where as a graduate student he helped to



Father Charles Brandt

record the bird sounds that today accompany the *Petersen's Field Guide*, the Bible of contemporary Birders.

After graduation he was ordained as an Anglican priest, but was drawn to the contemplative life of a hermit; he asked to join the Cistercian Hermits that formed a com-

man must have an earth-human relationship as well if he truly wants to be one with God's plan for man.

It was this philosophy that promoted the contemplative priest to compile the writings of a number of men who reflect the earth-human relationship.

The 98-page book has brought the prose and poetry of such different factions together as eastern philosophers, Christian saints, and modern environmentalists.

There are quotations from native leaders and fourth century desert hermits. Each quote is a nugget of truth upon which the reader can contemplate his or her relationship to earth and thereby his relationship with God.

This source book is a treasury of the writings of men and women whom Charles hopes will help the reader to view the natural world in a new dimensions so that man and earth will

object with which to commune to find our true self.

Although he does from time to time leave the hermitage to participate in environmental work across Canada, the core of his life is meditation.

He often leads workshops and silent retreats at Queenswood House of Studies in Victoria.

“To practice meditation we simply place one foot before the other as we move through the wilderness. We have no destination. We allow our anger, frustration and fear to fall away as we open ourselves to that which is. We discover a deep harmony and peace surround us.”

• *Meditations from the Wilderness*, published by Harper Collins of Toronto, \$14.

There will be a book signing at The Blue Heron Book Store on Saturday March 1, noon to 4pm.

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mune on the Tsolum River in the mid-1960s.

These Trappist monks soon learnt that communal life did not lend itself to the solitude required for contemplation so they dispersed. Charles chose 27 acres at the Oyster River.

Here in the serenity of God's world, Charles has come closer to the world he loves so well.

For the past 39 years, the 73-year-old priest has strived to mesh his reclusive life with his deep environmental convictions.

He believes that man has long had a human-divine and a human-human relationship, but

become a single sacred community.

While once our children were taught the wisdom of the elders in cave or tent, in synagogue, temple, mosque or church, the next generation is replacing universal mystery with television-commercialism.

Charles believes that man has become “hard of hearing” to the natural world, that we are “autistic” and “separate” and “separated” from the universe. We must not view the natural world as an object to exploit but as an