



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

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Thoughts In Solitude

My hermitage is located in the heart of an ancient rainforest, mid-Vancouver Island, BC. The forest borders the Oyster River which sings throughout the day and night. In late summer, it is all but inaudible. In winter, the sound becomes more vibrant. But always it is music to my heart. It was this river that attracted me to this forest. Its sound is like a mantra. It reminds me of another river, the river of love that flows between Jesus and the Father. As a hermit-monk, I seek God. Isn't that what we all do, *search* for God? We all have the archetype *Monk* writ deep within our being.

The *search* led me here. Even in my early teens I wanted to go, like Henry Thoreau, to the woods to see what life was all about. I heard St. Paul admonishing, "Pray always. Pray without ceasing." Was there a link between the two, between the forest and the meditative life? My *search* continued in the Ozarks when I was initiated into the honorary tribe of Mic-O-Say where I came to know and respect the culture and deep religious spirit of the native peoples. They knew the Spirit filled the whole earth. During my studies for the Anglican priesthood, I traveled to England to explore the contemplative dimension of the Church of England. I entered the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, Yorkshire and was ordained to the Anglican priesthood. I returned to the U.S. to live as an Anglican hermit near Kent School, CT.

Through reading Dom Bede Griffith's *The Golden String*, I was given the courage and grace to enter the Catholic Church, after a year's study of the faith at St. Gregory's Abbey, Shawnee, OK. Easter of that year I spent at Gethsemani Abbey where I spoke at length with Thomas Merton. He said, "Don't come here. We can make you a good monk but not necessarily a good contemplative." In 1956 I entered New Mellary Abbey in Iowa, where for eight years I prayed the office, studied for the priesthood and meditated. It was during Vatican II and we monks were studying our roots. We saw that hermits were the first monks, the monks of the Egyptian desert, where John Cassian went in the 4th century, seeking someone who would teach him to pray.

Then I traveled to Vancouver Island to visit a new colony of hermits founded by Dom Jacques Winandy, OSB on the Tsolum River. I was welcomed by Bishop Remi De Roo. Here I found my true home. He ordained me to the Catholic priesthood with a mandate to be a hermit, the first such ordination

in 200 years. Our group was given permission to find a more solitary site and hence the move to the Oyster River.

I began a serious study of Christian Meditation as taught by John Main. He had learned to meditate in the East and later discovered the same teaching imbedded in the Catholic tradition, particularly in the Conferences of Cassian. Cassian was the teacher of prayer for St. Benedict, who in his Rule, admonished his monks to read the Conferences. Cassian had learned mantric prayer from Abbot Isaac, a hermit of the Egyptian Desert who passed on a tradition that he believed went back to apostolic times. And so our tradition and teaching of Christian Meditation has come down from the early hermits of the desert. The main emphasis is on the continuing recitation of a mantra, a repetition of one meaningful phrase.

When teaching Christian Meditation, I stress that we enter into silence and stillness via the mantra, exposing our human consciousness to the glorified, human, infinitely expanded consciousness of Christ. Through him we are carried to the Father. This leads to transformation of our consciousness. A monk takes a mysterious vow, *conversio morum*, conversion of life. This should lead to a total inner transformation. That is why we meditate, to leave our false self or ego behind, to fall into the earth and die so as to bring forth fruit, to become Christ, find our true self. And since we all have the archetype of monk within us, we are all called to this same transformation, an ever deepening surrender to the love and grace of God within our hearts.

A final note: Where does contemplation lead one? Since it finds the Ground of Love in all reality, it leads to one's sisters and brothers; it creates a social consciousness; it leads to a deeper unity and love with and for the earth....If we can enter into this communion with all beings of the earth, living and nonliving, we will come to realize that we are part of the earth and the earth is part of us. This type of communion is not a rational discursive process, but a way of love. Perhaps there is no other way to enter into this communion other than contemplation. We come to experience the earth and the universe as our larger self. We come to care for it deeply, passionately.

Continued on page 5.

Thoughts.....continued from page 1:

As a society, we are closing down our life support systems. This is terrifying. But there is hope that this can be turned around. As Thomas Berry points out, it is necessary for the human community and the earth community to go into the future as a single sacred community. I think it is important to recognize that while we are distinct from the Ground of Love, we are not separate. We then realize our unity and communion with every human being, with the earth and with the universe. Let us not undervalue our great work, the work of meditation.



Charles A. E. Brandt
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Raven's Readers Write.....continued from p.4

you have expended a lot of time, effort and thought on it. You must now be experiencing a great relief. What was of particular value for me was the recent history of the solitary life in the United States. I had had a fair understanding of the British scene, after my sabbatical spent studying it there (see *Lay Hermits*) but this was a New World to me. The second treasure was your expressing the age old practices and ascetical forms in modern terms (social conditions of today, modern technology, concerns for environment, etc.) This is just the book to offer authorities, newcomers and questioners, and it will put to rest any opinions that this life is some sort of harking back to medieval antiquarianism. So thank you for the splendid service you have done for all of us.

Eugene Stockton
Lawson, NSW, Australia

I just recently finished reading your book, "Consider the Ravens" and will give it one of the highest compliments: I will read it again! Possibly what I liked best about it was that you made the hermit way of life very real and accessible, shorn of a lot of the sentimental and historical baggage that often accompanies a discussion of a hermit's way of life.

I am not a hermit; at best a would-be hermit. Although I have had reclusive tendencies since my teens, I have chosen to have a nine-to-five job and cultivate my hermit practices outside of work, especially on weekends and days off. I am a member of a group called Self-Realization Fellowship which focuses more on meditation than anything else. After exploring but not feeling suited for a monastic life, I've gradually tried to structure my life around monastic goals and values, hence my hermit-like life.

In this context, one of the most interesting points you made in your book was in regard to following the liturgical rhythm. As a yoga practitioner, this was not a problem. However, being involved in a meditation group all of my life and now finding it less satisfactory, your theme, with just a bit of adapting, was a real help to me. I have increasingly not been attending all the group meditations. Something in the way you wrote about this issue helped me to realize once again, and on a deeper level, that this is okay because it's not about the outer form, it is about the inner substance of one's spiritual life. That was a clarifying moment and helped to remind me that all outward forms should be measured by the way they help us to contact and deepen our relationship with God. Another point which you broached with great clarity was that of charity toward others. It gave me moment to pause and reflect

upon the way I do things. In our group we have several elderly people who I have tried to stay in contact with but with limited spare time, I have long wrestled with trying to find a balance between my meditation/prayer routine and this basic concept of charity where appropriate. Your words on charity helped me to see that the balance is more in the middle than I had been practicing. I have long understood that unsought solitude is a far cry from choosing solitude oneself and that abandoning people one has known since one's youth in the name of one's spiritual practice is neither Christian, yogic, nor very nice.

Other points you brought up that resonated with me were "being present in the Presence"; that a hermit's great desire is to not be seen; and the basic principle that no one is better than anyone else. I'm very familiar with all of these as being cornerstones of spiritual practice; however, the way they were expressed impressed me. In sum, I wanted to let you know how helpful and practical I found your book. Your writing was clear and non-judgemental; the manner in which the book was written made me very receptive to its message and I very much appreciate that. It's hard to find good books about hermit life; you've come up with winner! Thanks for taking the time to put it together and share.

David Lasky
Riverdale, NY



Continued from page 7.

repetition of the Jesus prayer or something similar. God, then, does the rest. Most often he will just let us sit peacefully and prayerfully with him; but at other times he will suddenly reveal himself to us in brilliant inner light, filling our whole being with his love and light. This may last for about half an hour, but it gradually overflows into our whole day and life, allowing us to walk in the happiness of the splendor of Christ. Some may only rarely, or never in their lifetime, experience this half hour of the prayer of union. Others experience it frequently. That is God's decision; but our preparation for it in living in a contemplative way and faithfully setting aside sufficient time each day for our prayer of silence is also a significant factor in how often and how deeply we experience contemplative prayer in inner light, which transforms our whole day and life.

Concerning contemplative living, those who are serious about contemplative praying will pay much attention to it, for they know what an essential part it plays for fruitful contemplative praying. They know that seeking unnecessary pleasures outside of God only diminishes the pleasure they will find in God himself, whom they seek to love with their whole heart. The splendor of one's contemplative prayer then overflows into one's whole life, while one's life forms the nurturing context within which contemplative prayer flourishes.

by Fr. Steven Scherrer
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