

Fr. Charles A.E. Brandt (Yde)

Christian Meditation

I live in the temperate rainforest, mid-Vancouver Island, British Columbia. And I live as monk, a hermit-monk. In fact, I was ordained a "hermit-priest" by Bishop Remi De Roo, Nov. 21, 1966 at the local parish church in Courtenay, Canadian Martrys. The ordination certificate states that my mandate is to practice as a "hermit-priest", perhaps the first such mandate in the last 200 years of the church's history.

The setting of the hermitage on the banks of the Tsolum River near Courtenay, B.C. was an unusual one. Monks had come from all over the world in 1964-65 to join a small "Pia unio" founded by Dom Jacques Winandy, OSB. He and the first hermits had been welcomed into the Diocese by Bishop De Roo. I arrived in late winter of 1965, coming from New Melleray Abbey, Dubuque, Iowa. It was the time of the Second Vatican Council. Monks everywhere were seeking their roots, historical and spiritual roots. As a Cistercian I followed the Rule of St. Benedict. Most of the hermits came from similiar monastic backgrounds. In our research in early monastic life in the middle east, we discovered that hermits were the first monks in the desert of the Skete in middle Egypt in the 3rd and 5th centuries. It was into this milleux that Cassian came from Yugoslavia seeking a teacher on Prayer. And it was from Abbot Issac as recorded in the Conferences of Cassian that he learned to pray, to pray mantrically, a type of prayer that came down to the Egyptian hermits from apostolic times. And our Holy Father Benedict admonishes monks to read the Conferences of Cassian. Cassian was the teacher of prayer for St. Benedict.

How I rejoiced living the hermit life on the banks of the Tsolum River where I could, following the admonition of St. Paul, pray without ceasing. And when later the hermits were given permission by the Bishop to find a more individual solitary hermitage on Vancouver Island, I discovered the spot on the Oyster River in the heart of the temperate rainforest of mid-Vancouver Island. The only sounds were the wind and the music of the river, a mantric-music from the natural world.

But the journey to the Oyster River had been a long journey: from a child growing up in Missouri with summers in the Osarks teaching natural history topics at Oeola Boyscout camp, and coming for the first time to come into contact with my aboriginal brothers and

sisters, the Osage Indians, and came gradually to learn that the natural world and the human community was a single sacred community.