

Consider the Ravens: On Contemporary Hermit Life

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Paul and Karen Fredette seek to overturn society's misunderstandings of hermits with their groundbreaking book *Consider the Ravens: On Contemporary Hermit Life*. From the everyday practicalities of living as a hermit—such as paying the bills and explaining one's life to family and friends—to the intensely spiritual considerations of finding a balance between prayer and the mundane tasks of life, *Consider the Ravens* leaves no stone unturned.

The Fredettes edit the quarterly newsletter for the eremitical life, *Raven's Bread*, and have more than a thousand subscribers around the world. They also have an online presence with a popular website by the same name. In 2001 they took a survey of hermits; the results from the more than one hundred who responded add credence to the book's value as an indispensable resource for all interested parties. Karen Fredette spent thirty years as a nun before embarking on a secular life of solitude. Her marriage to Paul, a fellow hermit, adds a pleasantly intriguing aspect to the often paradigm-shifting contents of this seminal book.

The focus of *Consider the Ravens* is primarily upon hermits within the Catholic church and the profoundly interesting ways they have coexisted with society, historically and in the present. The eremitical writings of several Catholic saints are shared. The Fredettes also explore Canon Law as it relates to hermits, as well as the often difficult path of modern Catholic hermits seeking sanctuary within the Church.

Consider the Ravens is professionally packaged and extremely well presented. The cover is compelling, and the backcover draws the reader in with an excellent overview of the book's contents. The table of contents quickly leads the reader to a vast treasure-house of wisdom and information about ancient and modern eremitical life. The text includes fascinating and surprisingly practical anecdotes culled from the sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth century, as well as the sometimes controversial writings of the off-and-on-again hermit Thomas Merton.

Consider the Ravens is rich with deeply moving testimonials from living, thriving hermits offering their take on a patently individual calling. For example, a hermit in the Ozarks writes about what drew him to a life of solitude: "Yet there comes a time when one simply becomes tired of pretense and games. A thirst for integrity takes over, a passion to undertake the austerity of living in complete honesty, without convenience, support, or distraction. This call into solitude is a pilgrimage into darkness and crucifixion, for it annihilates the self we once knew and fostered."

The Fredettes are both excellent writers, and the prose beautiful and moving. *Consider the Ravens* truly deserves five stars.

PATTY SUTHERLAND (January 30, 2012)

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