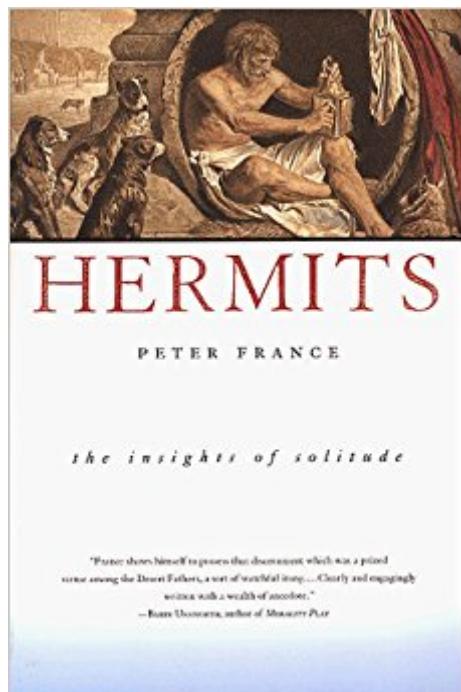


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Hermits; The Insights Of Solitude



Synopsis

In this inspiring book, Peter France, who spends much of his time living in a semi-eremitic manner on the Greek island Patmos, explores the history of hermits and uncovers the truths they found in their solitude. This rich compendium provides engaging accounts of the lives of famous hermits and hermitic movements--from the Greek Cynics to the Desert Fathers to more modern seekers such as Thoreau, Thomas Merton, and the American poet Robert Lax. As an antidote to disillusionment with the modern world and as a guide to rediscovering our true selves, *Hermits* will not fail to provide reassuring enlightenment.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Following on from 'The Rape of Egypt' and 'Greek as a Treat', Peter France has once more produced a book that is both informative and insightful. With his usual wit, discernment and sweet reason, France guides the reader through a selected history of human solitude. As an antidote to disillusionment with the modern world the book both entertains and uplifts. Perhaps it was the first chapter - 'The Emergence of the Individual'- that I found most beautifully written, with a clarity of thought that sparkles. Being Orthodox, France's chapter on Russian hermits is also one that has called me back to re-read it. Illuminated by personal anecdote and informed by a broad knowledge of solitude through the ages, this book is a masterpiece. Along with France's 'Journey - A Spiritual Odyssey', it is one of my favourite books to read at night, alone, watching and waiting....

Too few books are available on the life of the contemplative. With that said, this book is already a

rarity. Its quality is quite good, although the pages have yellowed in only three years, like most books in our "technologically advanced" culture. The content of the book gave this reviewer a great sense of peace, as it is comforting to find that others hold the experience of solitude in high esteem. It seems that because of France's firsthand experience with this simple pleasure, he is able to describe the perspective in a unique and calming way, far from the usual deprecatory references to the Unibomber, etc. It undoubtedly helped to alleviate some of this stigma, as well as piquing interest in the solitary life. We need respected hermits in this day and age, as an outside view of the inside is what keeps us balanced. I recommend it to everyone.

A beautiful account of man's timeless search for solitude and truth, this book scours the great religious traditions and recounts the lives and writings of some of the coolest, wierdest and most sane people the world has ever seen. The chapter on Charles de Foucauld is itself worth the price of the book.

I suspect that individuals who have not yet heard the call to solitude will have trouble understanding the attraction. But for those who have, this book is very nicely done. I recommend it without reservation to anyone who would like a sort of sampler of writings about solitude and the hermit life. One small thing, however. This excellent book deserved much, much better proof reading. There were egregious errors (1939 for 1839, and more of that sort). The author could have been better served, after preparing such a fine book. Having said that, however, it was still worth reading.

What an inspiring book regarding the life of different Hermits! For a long time just to learn, I studied the lifestyles of different hermits and wanted to understand more why someone would choose to become a hermit. Then I discovered this book. In this book, there is the bios of several hermits from days of yore. Each one had a different story and different reasons for becoming a hermit. This book I found to be a very interesting read and the chapter that I enjoyed reading the most was the chapter regarding the life of Charles de Foucauld. Of all of the people in this book, this one was the story that I liked reading about the most! This book is one that I like because it taught me things, inspired me and gave me a broader understanding of life and different meanings of life. If you like history and wonder about why people become hermits, then this book I suggest to you.

In *Hermits: Insights of Solitude*, Peter France brings to life over 2,000 years of hermit history, from the Desert Fathers, Leonid, Macarius, Ambrose, Ramakrishna, Thoreau, de Foucauld, and Merton

to the modern day Robert Lax. France's introduction explains that "many thousands of recluses have lived their solitary lives and gone to their graves in silence." His book is about those who passed on their experiences to visitors, preserved their thoughts in writing, or gave up solitude to present their views to the world. Hence, interspersed between the narratives is an intellectual study, a personal collection of quotes from hermits that explain their reasoning, purpose, philosophies, and daily life. Typically society views hermits as anti-social, but hermitage is about living in loneliness rather of being loners or outcasts. Some live in austere conditions, some live totally alone, and some live in monastic communities. Some take a life of hermitage seasonally - either in summer or winter - and some are static (living in caves) while others are migratory travelers. Some speak often, while others are infrequent talkers - "to speak little is natural." The common thread is that theirs is a contemplative life. "Paradoxically, these men and women who fled from human society developed, in their solitude, a uniquely subtle awareness of human psychology." Hermitage is therefore not seen as an escape from life's problems, for "if you haven't first conducted yourself well among men, you won't conduct yourself well in solitude." Hence, often solitude is not a permanent separation from society, but a preparation for taking an active part in it. This is an interesting insight into solitude and aloneness from a philosophical perspective that entices the reader into their world.

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