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The hermit

in the Ranft Part III

What man behind the myth?

BROTHER Klaus certainly gives us many riddles. The greatest is his entire personality. Whenever we are faced with trying to solve a difficult riddle there are three ways open to us.

First we can dismiss it as a good joke and attend to other business. Second we can give in and acknowledge defeat, standing in amazement before its clever author. Or third we can put our teeth into it and persevere until we have found an intelligent answer.

The frustrated life and terrific influence of Brother Klaus confront us with a riddle which is not easy to solve.

We can dismiss him as a "holy crank" who was helped by sheer luck and ignorance to become an almost mythical figure, a not uncommon feature of the dark Middle Ages. This is a sure way of flattering our arrogance and pride and proving our own ignorance and superficial knowledge.

Or we can canonise him and make him a saint, bowing before the mystery of God. It is an easy way out, but certainly not a bad one. After all, it proves human dignity, reverence, humility and great faith. But we will miss him in our daily life, being too distant, too far removed from our problems and our critical intellect.

The third way is dangerous. If we put our teeth into it the riddle can take hold of us and not let us escape – and this is fascinating. This is the way it caught me.

I tried to use all my experience and commonsense, trying to avoid all theological considerations. And after long and tedious work it began to make sense. But it did not fit historical evidence.

Then Carl Gustav Jung, the great authority in modern psychology, a Swiss like brother Klaus, gave me a key.

In his collected works I found a study in which he writes: "Medically I can find nothing wrong with Brother Klaus. I see him as a somewhat unusual, but in no way pathological person, a man after my own heart, my brother Klaus. Rather remote, to be sure, at this distance of more than 400 years, separated by culture and creed, by those



The oldest known picture of Brother Klaus, circa 1500

By Father Paul Bossard

fashionable trifles, which we always think constitute a world."

To look at him as being my brother, the way I would like to be. My elder brother, a few paces ahead of me, but not out of reach. Someone whom I can understand — and who understands me. What a thought!

Just like my brother, a down-right honest and healthy man with a great sense of justice, a reverence for truth, a sense of humour, a man who hates talking about love, because he simply does it within the family (he had 10 children with his wife Dorothea) and outside with the people around him by listening and giving them his time and heart, giving his active help, or his honest rebuke, or even a court case.

His public life, as famous as it began, ended in disaster at the age of 50. He could have thrown in the lot in disgust, pointing an accusing finger at corrupt judges, greedy landlords, unscrupulous politicians, timid friends, at the evils of the time.

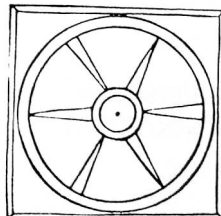
He could have become a Swiss

Abraham, a Santa Clara or a Savonarola, accusing everybody and everybody but himself. But he did nothing of that. He chose the other way, fighting these evils in his own heart and not giving up the fight.

But for such a war, he had to be alone. He could not involve anyone but himself, not even his wife, who had already enough to worry about and could not have stood the stress.

Of this he was aware, and the teaching of Christ gave him the words to put it into language: "Get rid of everything you have and follow me." Therefore he took the consequences, however painful and hard they were for himself and for his wife.

He certainly was a man of vision in more than one sense. And history leaves no doubt about the fact that he had "visions" of an exceptional kind. That they were so vivid was more



Klaus's "prayerbook"

a matter of degree. He certainly did not imagine things – that came from a deeper level of his personality than imagination.

We may have "such visions" too, though in a lesser degree. I mean really deep dreams, which can be very disturbing, especially when they stick in our memory and cannot be brushed aside. Usually we have a happy superficial mind which can dismiss them as "mere dreams", have a good laugh – and get away with it.

If not, we can visit a psychiatrist and have them analysed. We would not think of asking a priest — confession has come to be rather outdated.

My brother Klaus had no such escapes. But he had a deep Christian faith, and he had a parish priest in Heimo am Grund, a man of great learning, religious depth and insight, who was his friend.

To him he went for confession. From him he took advice and guidance. And it was probably he who gave him an illustrated book of Henry Suso for study and for meditation.

Though he could not read and write, the text was explained for him. But it was the pictures that mattered.

One was a wheel with six spokes, an illustration of the Holy Trinity. Today we call it a Mandala, a symmetric symbol of deep psychic meaning, representing human consciousness in relation to the world (Micro-Macro-Cosmos).

We find them in prehistoric drawings as sun-wheels in Switzerland, Rhodesia, Mexico, India, Tibet and China. There is no doubt that this wheel was one of the main subjects of his studies and his meditations. So much so that he called it his "prayer-book".

● *To be continued*