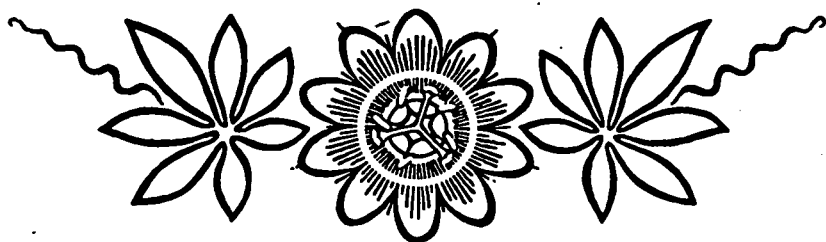
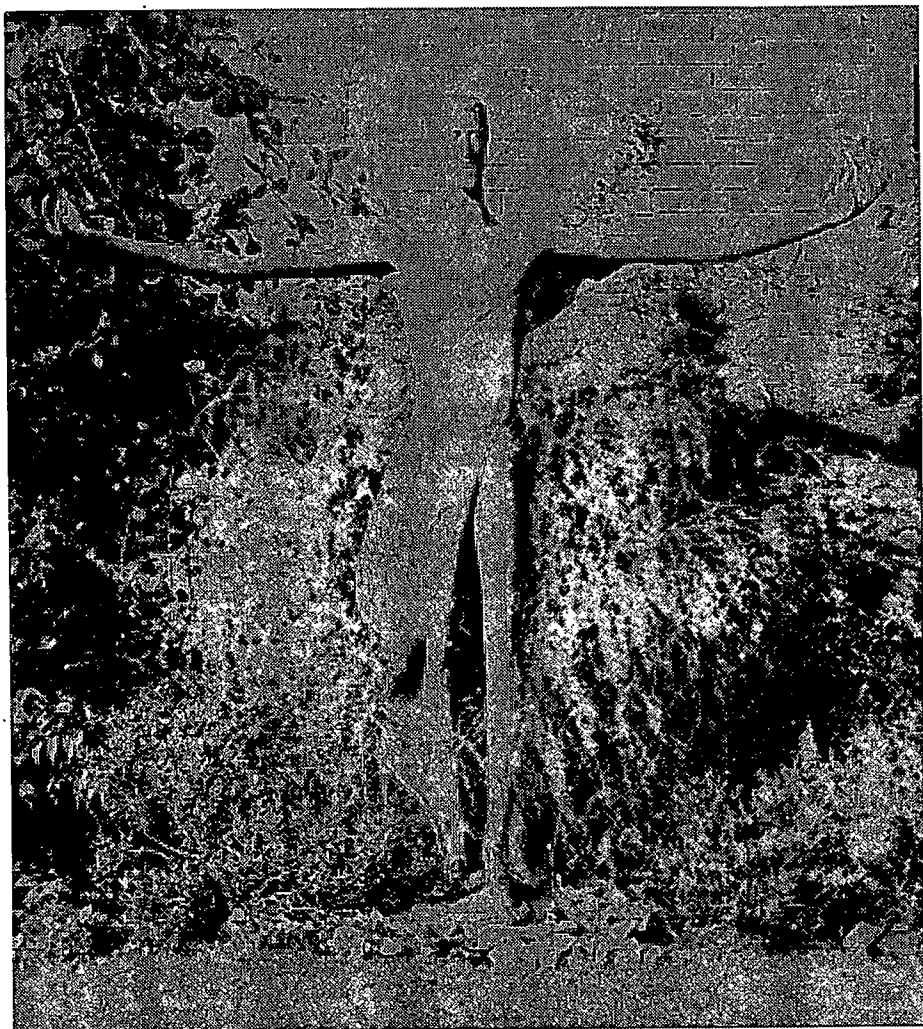


THE JULIAN MEETINGS *Magazine*



December 2001

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The sculpture of the Risen Christ at Launde Abbey

The JM Annual Retreat 2001

Jenny Moulton

LAUNDE ABBEY – a lovely and tranquil-sounding name for a lovely and tranquil place – the setting for this year's Julian Meetings Annual Retreat. Some sixty of us arrived at this Elizabethan manor house in Leicestershire surrounded by pastures with sheep and cattle quietly grazing, and when we had been guided to our accommodation either in the house itself or in the converted stables nearby, we were given a warm welcome to Launde by the Warden as we gathered together for supper on the first evening. That meal of course was one of introductions and chatter as we became acquainted with each other, all from our different backgrounds.

Then, that same evening, after our first session in the Stables conference room when Graham Johnson introduced to us the theme of foolishness, we became receptive to the silence which fell quite naturally and enfolded us from then until Sunday lunchtime.

And somehow, in spite of the silence, or surely more accurately, because of it, and through the awareness of self and others which a peaceful and purposeful silence promotes, there was a sense of getting to know each other, a warmth of fellowship and companionship as the weekend progressed.

Graham's four addresses to us were each followed by a period of corporate silence which complemented and enriched the silence of each individual, drawing us all together as we reflected on his words.

And what wise words they turned out to be, based on the title "I'm a fool – you're a fool." We were invited to let go of all the things which we regard as important in our busy everyday lives and which play such a large part in our self-image in the world – and to be ready to let God take centre stage for the weekend. It is quite likely that this openness to God may have unexpected consequences; as we draw closer to God in the silence, we may well find that our image of God goes out of focus, and that we are left feeling more than a little foolish. This state of affairs, however, can come to be a point of growth for God's life within us, disconcerting though it may feel at the time as we move beyond what has been familiar. Perhaps this could lead to our taking ourselves a little less seriously in our spiritual lives and to being more open to a sense of awe and delight in creation, to enjoying God's world more fully

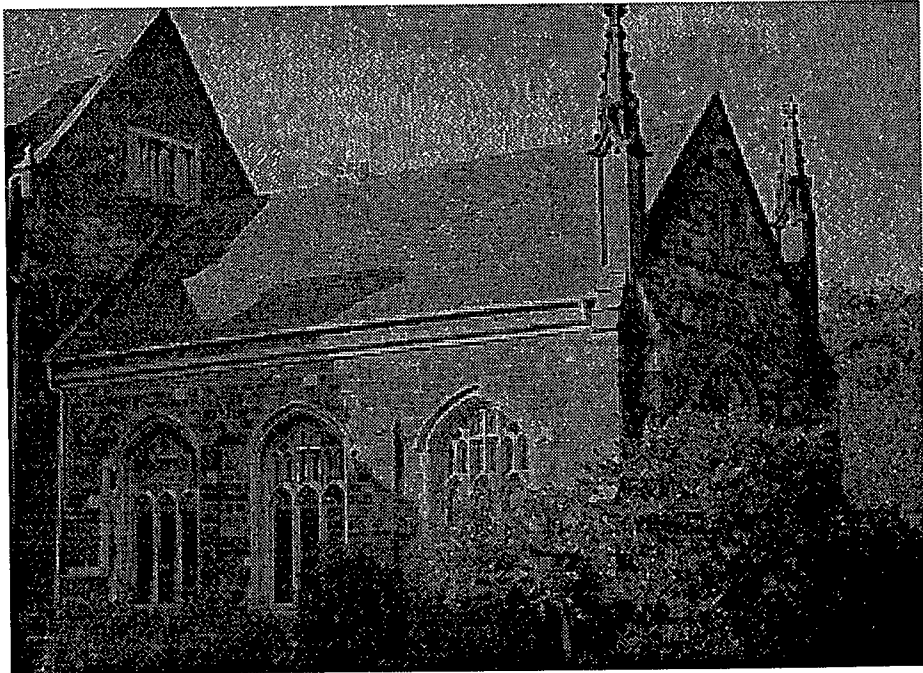
than ever before – and learning “to sing in harmony with the Trinity.”

Graham’s final address made us realise that although a sense of foolishness may be a necessary experience in our relationship with God, we are not alone in that experience. We are all interdependent and we each play our small but vital melody in the huge symphony of Life. I may be a fool but I am a fool with others.

In our final act of worship the theme of foolishness was very much present in our prayers and readings, and we ended by offering one another the sign of Peace and Foolishness.

To be really alive
To be holy
One needs:
Discipline,
Artistry,
And a little Foolishness.

The chapel at Launde



Prayers from the Retreat

Prayer is a central part of the JM Annual Retreat. As well as the individual and corporate silent prayer, there is a time of intercession and we have all the prayers sent in by individual Julian Meetings. Here are some of the prayers from this year's Retreat.

1. A prayer sent in by Eddie Askew

Lord, when I think about it, I reckon I sometimes come to you to show you how much I'm doing. To encourage you to tell me what a hardworking, good and faithful servant I really am. I sometimes wonder how you'd get on without me!

Forgive my pride, Lord. Forgive me for believing there are no limits to what I can do. Forgive me for trying to do so much for you that I do most of it badly. Forgive my arrogance that says if I don't do it, it'll never get done at all. Sometimes it does seem like that. But when I look at it coolly – help me to do that, Lord. I reckon your kingdom needs as many cool heads as it needs warm hearts – when I look at it coolly I'm really saying that you couldn't do it, if I weren't here. That if I weren't rushing around like a juggler with twenty plates in the air all at once, your kingdom would collapse.

Lord, forgive me for telling myself that I'm the vine and all the branches as well. For believing that no-one can do things like I can. (That's true, but not in the way I think!) Help me to acknowledge that you are in control, and that I'm just one of the branches, just one.

I've seen vines, Lord, and although I'm no vinegrower, I know the branches have to be pruned. And if one tries to take over it gets cut back. Give me the humility to see that the more I try to do, the more I'm shutting other people out, letting them think they're not needed, not encouraging them because it's all better done my way.

And when my energy is draining away like water down the whirlpool of my own frantic busyness, slow me down – gently – lovingly. Help me to relax in you. Help me to understand that your kingdom is on its way even when I can't take on any more, and help me to realise that when there seems to be no-one around to do all that needs doing – you are.

From "Disguises of Love", published in 1983 by the Leprosy Mission

2. Symbol prayers from individual Julian Meetings

Give us, Lord, a jester's eye to discern and speak the truth in love and laughter, to look for the rainbow through the rain, and to dance through life with joy.

Ham 1, Richmond, Surrey

We pray for wisdom on those who are foolish, a little foolishness on those who are stern and dour, and the gift of God's loving humour on us all.

Epsom 1, Surrey

Lord, in the foolishness of silence, the foolishness of waiting and the foolishness of serving, may we spread the wisdom born of being fools for Christ, in our often noisy, impatient and self-seeking society.

Poringland, Norfolk

We offer you our own foolishness to add to yours, Lord. One of our members is a clown, and we offer you our service and commend to your care all clowns who serve you, and especially members of the Leeds Children's Circus.

Harehills, Leeds

3. Prayers included in the addresses by Graham Johnson

God of flowing love. I am human. I am a home for you. Let the ripple tide of your divine love break on the shore of my heart, that you may be in me and I may be immersed in the ocean that is you.

? Evelyn Underhill

Breath of Heaven, carry us on the impulse of Christ's love, as easily as thistledown is carried on the wind; that in this retreat while Christ is formed in us, in secret and in silence – the Creator in the hands of his or her creatures as bread in our hands at Communion – that as he grows in us so we may grow up into him and carry him wherever he wishes to be.

Based on a prayer by Caryll Houselander

From rushing round to stillness, Lord I come. From being pulled in all directions to the simplicity of this moment, Lord I come. Help me to realign my will with your will and my spirit with your Spirit as I reach out to you in the silence.

You are my beloved child. I will always welcome you into the rhythm and breath of my life. Let me love you again into becoming the person I created you to be.

Angela Ashwin

God's Pater Noster: My child who art on earth, I know your name perfectly, and I pronounce it to hallow it, because I love you. No, you are not alone, but lived in by me, and together we are building the kingdom which you are going to inherit. I like you to do my will, because my will is that you should be happy, for the Glory of God is a living human being. Always count on me and you will have bread for today; do not worry, I only ask that you should get used to sharing it with your sisters and brothers. You know that I forgive your trespasses even before you commit them; that is why I ask that you should do the same to those who trespass against you. So that you should never fall into temptation, take my hand tightly and I will deliver you from evil, my dear child.

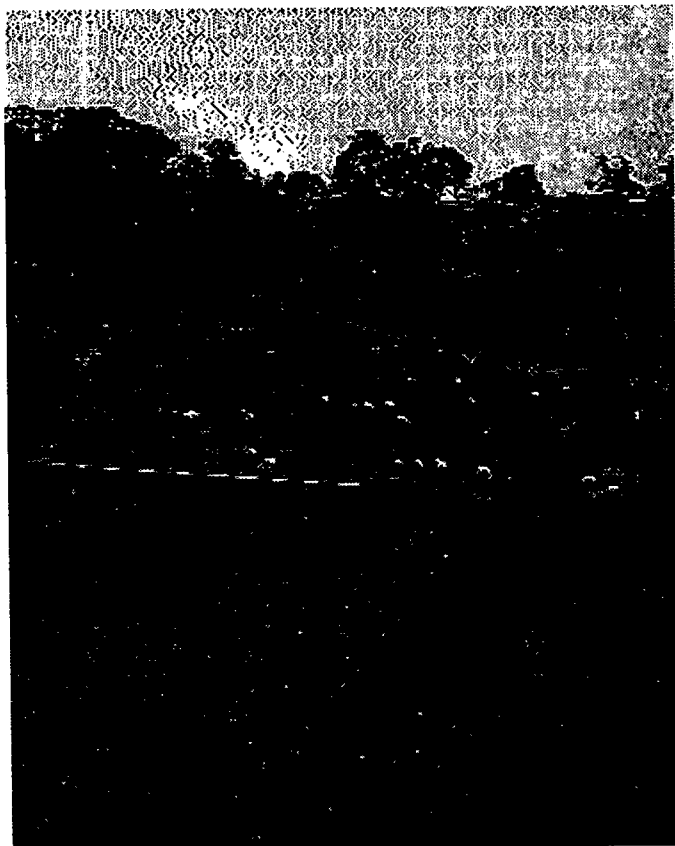
A version of a translation by Margaret Hebblewhite

God, you are the one to whom I reach out, mystery beyond human thinking, love beyond our comprehending. Yet, because you are love, you have reached out to me, joined me to Christ, taken me into the very heart of your divine life, come close to me as Father, Mother, Brother, Sister. And even more, you yourself have come to dwell in me; so it is your love within me, reaching out to your love beyond me. O God beyond me, God beside me, God within me: three persons in one God, you are ever to be worshipped and adored.

Richard Harries

God stir the soil. Run the ploughshare deep. Cut the furrows round and round, overturn the hard, dry ground. Spare no strength or toil, even though I weep. In the loose, fresh-mangled earth, sow new seed. Free of withered vine and weed bring fair flowers to birth.

CMS Singapore



Launde Park: the road going south towards Loddington

The 2002 Retreat

The JM Annual Retreat in 2002 will take place over the weekend of 20–22 September at the Woodbroke Quaker Study Centre, Birmingham. The Revd John Rackley, who is Chair of the Retreat Association and Minister of Manvers Street Baptist Church, Bath will lead our thoughts on “Thin Places.” Full details and a booking form will be circulated with the April 2002 issue of the JM magazine.

The Spiritual Life of Evelyn Underhill, writer and mystic

Audrey Atkinson

"MYSTICISM is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or lesser degree: or who aims at and believes in such attainment."

When she wrote this in 1913, Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941) confessed that it was a definition she had discovered; a definition which to her appeared "to cover all the ground; or at least, all that part of the ground worth covering." She discovered spiritual truths for herself by testing the claims of occultism, the mystics and Christianity, in her own life.

For a young woman, the romantic Edwardian atmosphere – a compound of "the psychic, the psychological, the occult, the mystical, the medieval, the advance of science, the self-unfolding of the Absolute, the apotheosis of Art, the rediscovery of the feminine, and an infatuation...with the most unashamedly sensuous and the most ethereally spiritual" – must have made Anglicanism, the denomination Evelyn Underhill was born into, seem out of step with the times. Christopher Armstrong, her biographer, tells us that she sought the place where the action was, the heart and centre of life. She was one of the first fortunate women to obtain a University education – Botany, Languages, Philosophy and Social Science at Kings College, London. Her father and husband were both barristers which enabled her to devote herself to her interests.

Evelyn's great interest was writing and her passion was mysticism. She spent eight years researching her most popular book – still in print today – *Mysticism* (1911), followed by *The Mystic Way* (1913) and *Practical Mysticism* (1914). She wrote about mysticism as one who practised it. By demythologising the subject she seemed to open up the possibility of mystical experience to everyone; this, and the wealth of data about actual experiences which her books contain, gave her work enormous appeal. The popularity of her books and articles gained her a celebrity status in Britain in the first decades of the last century.

After the publication of *Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill's life underwent a radical change. Although she continued to write scholarly books about the mystics, she began to address a wider and more varied public more directly. In 1920 she was invited to give a series of lectures on Religious Experience at the Unitarian Manchester College, Oxford. This was to be the first of many conferences, academic and church, at which she was a participant. She was asked, in 1924, to lead a retreat at Pleshey Retreat House, near Chelmsford; this, and her work as a spiritual director which the retreats engendered, was to become a major (and most enjoyed) part of her work. 1927 saw her awarded an honorary D.D. at Aberdeen; and for four years, 1929–1933, she was Religious Editor of *The Spectator*, a magazine in which she had many articles and book reviews published. 1932 was the year she first spoke on the radio. Her last major work was *Worship* published in 1936, five years before she died, aged sixty-four, of the asthma which had severely affected her health since 1930.

Chapter Eight of *Mysticism* is (unexpectedly) a comment on magic – occult practice – and its difference from mysticism. Evelyn Underhill had researched this subject as there had been an explosion of interest in the occult and mind-control practices at that time similar to today. The most important difference she found between occult and mystic practice was that whereas occult practice was done to *get* something – knowledge, experiences, a change in circumstances – the motivation for mystic practice was to *give*: giving of the whole self with any natural powers one might have, however difficult or painful that may be – to the service of the Ultimate power, God. Her experimentation with the occult had taught Evelyn that it promises what it cannot fulfil: it awakens a desire that it is unable to satisfy. She writes:

“...the mere transcending of phenomena does not entail the attainment of the Absolute. Magic, even at its best [and she could see that much liturgical practice of the church was a form of magic – performed to get from God] extends rather than escapes the boundaries of the phenomenal world. It does abnormal things, but it does not lead anywhere...magic is merely a system whereby the self tries to assuage its transcendental curiosity by extending the activities of the will beyond their usual limit.

(*Mysticism*, p.151)

Mysticism, on the other hand, has only to do with Love – a generous, eager, outgoing activity.

In an early edition of *Mysticism* Evelyn Underhill had quoted Plotinus' description of mysticism as "the flight of the alone to the Alone" which she referred to as "superb words." She leaves these out of later editions, and has a complete change of attitude towards them. By 1922 she had come to realise that this fleeing from the world was not the Christian path. She saw that these wonderful moments "are only wonderful moments." They are "entrancing and overwhelming" but they do not lead anywhere. To her, the Christian life came to mean not an escape from this world, but a loving, positive, "voluntary acceptance of all the circumstances of our common situation." Christopher Armstrong writes that she had been tempted by "the flight into solitude", as had St. Augustine, but had made a conscious decision to be instead an instrument of Divine Will within the world. In this alone she found her greatest happiness.

This radical change in her thinking was due to the influence of Baron von Hügel, a Roman Catholic priest and writer on mysticism, who became her spiritual director. Through his teaching Evelyn Underhill came to reject what she describes as "all merely monistic, pantheistic and immanentist philosophies of religion." She saw her early works as insufficiently emphasising "the utter contrast...between the Creator and the creature. God and the soul." Christopher Armstrong suggests that Evelyn's

"...whole religious philosophy up to the time she met the Baron, while it might hold the doctrine of self-loss and self-transcendence in theory, was, in virtue of its strongly psychological and subjective bent, strongly focussed in practice on spiritual experience as a kind of value in itself."

The Baron distrusted the claims made about "pure mysticism" and taught that "a humble recognition of the reaching out of the divine to the human does more for the soul's best interests than any arrogant reaching-out of the human to the divine." The former attitude would lead to exclusiveness – of the body and the material world; but an attitude of inclusiveness would take up the whole person and the whole of creation into the divine: that is the purpose of the Incarnation.

In a report to the Baron, Evelyn Underhill had admitted that she was unable to understand "the religious feeling of the need of a half-way house [i.e. Christ] between oneself and God." Von Hügel explained that "the human soul...requires not a half-way house for it on its way to God, but God Himself to come down to it, not half-way but the whole way." She had to seek and find Jesus Christ as a living reality, not just as an icon or psycho-mystical apotheosis. As her later writings show, this is what she did.

I am sure that many of us can relate to aspects of Evelyn Underhill's spiritual journey. We can be tempted to believe that we have reached some endpoint on our journey into God when we have had peak experiences. But how can we ever reach the end of that which is infinite? I end by quoting Evelyn Underhill's final view of mystical experience, from *School of Charity* published in 1954, which I believe contrasts strongly with the opening paragraph of this article:

"The mystics continually tell us that the goal of this prayer is union with God. We meet this phrase often: far too often, for we lose the wholesome sense of its awfulness. What does union with God mean? Not a nice feeling which we enjoy in devout moments. This may or may not be a by-product of union with God: probably not. It can never be its substance. Union with God means such an entire self-giving to the Divine Charity, such identification with its interests, that the whole of human nature is transformed in God, irradiated by His absolute light, His sanctifying grace. Thus it is woven up into the organ of His creative activity, His redeeming purpose; conformed to the pattern of Christ, heart, soul, mind and strength."

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Evelyn Underhill's later books, which are based on her retreat addresses, are well worth reading. Sadly, you will have to find them secondhand.



*(above) Evelyn Underhill at
the age of fifteen*

(left) In the garden at Pleshey

*(below) With Bishop Frère at
the Anglo-Russian Conference,
1938*



Walking the labyrinth

Deidre Morris

SATURDAY 4 AUGUST 7.30PM. The cathedral nave is clear of chairs, the lighting is subdued. Two dozen of us gather in a circle in the north transept. At the centre of our chairs is a bunch of carnations, and a ball of twine with its free end curling in a spiral away from the flowers. A flautist quietly plays variations on Taizé chants.

Judith, the Cathedral chaplain, welcomes us and explains the history of labyrinths and mazes as spiritual aids. Following the path occupies your mind, while walking occupies your body, and your spirit is free to be with God. For some there is great significance in working towards the centre – of yourself, of God, of... – and then working outwards again back to your everyday world.

The labyrinth we are to walk is laid out in the centre of the nave. It is a 36-foot diameter canvas on which is a copy of the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral. Because it is on canvas we are asked to remove our shoes before we enter it. While Judith is explaining to us, a verger is walking the labyrinth, censuring it as he goes.

We are each given a flower, to be a symbol of whatever we choose and to do with as we choose. Judith explains that we are free to use all the cathedral, the cloisters, the cloister garden and the crypt as we choose, and to join in with others as much or as little as we wish. She then picks up the end of the twine and sets off slowly out of the transept and down the north aisle. Each of us in turn picks up and holds on to the twine so that eventually we are spread out along it like beads on a string. It gives me an unusual experience of connectedness.

Judith leads us down to the back of the nave, across to the west doors and then up the centre of the cathedral towards the labyrinth. In the subdued lighting the labyrinth looks very mystical, surrounded as it is with nightlight candles and wreathed in the smoke of incense.

There is a limit to how many people can physically walk the maze at any one time, and I am a long way down the line, so I leave the string and walk quietly out to the cloisters and the garden. In the evening light the stones glow, while the pool at the centre is darkly reflective.

When I return to the nave I remove both my shoes and my socks. It seems right to walk the labyrinth barefoot. As you can see in the diagram (*overleaf*), it is a tightly interlocking pattern. At first I head towards the centre, and then the path turns away from it, and continues on a complicated twisting route. I need to concentrate, or I wobble or nearly miss the path. I try looking up and out across the labyrinth, but this confuses my eyes as there are so many lines. So, unless I am very near the edge of the maze, I keep my gaze within quite close limits. I am short-sighted: I wonder how it feels to someone with long sight?

As I walk I keep passing some people regularly, others I never encounter, and yet more are near at intervals and then at a distance. I often have to turn sideways, or dip aside so that someone on an adjacent path and I can pass without knocking each other off our route. One lady is dancing her way around the labyrinth, swaying along to the music she can obviously hear in her head.

It takes a surprisingly long time to reach the centre – it is quite a long walk. Most people seem to stop there for a while, sitting or standing in the small space to pray, or reflect. I feel quite claustrophobic at the centre of the labyrinth, perhaps because of the number of people in a small space. I would like to walk it alone, or with one or two others only, to see how different an experience it might be.

Some people have placed their flowers round the edge of the labyrinth. Many leave them at the centre, but mine is still in my hand as I start on my return walk. I have realised what it signifies for me, and therefore where I wish to leave it. There are fewer people on the labyrinth as I walk back. At times I go quite a distance without meeting anyone, and I am aware of the pattern stretching away from me, and then the shadowy spaces of the cathedral beyond. I feel a sense of relief when I reach the end, almost as though I am escaping...

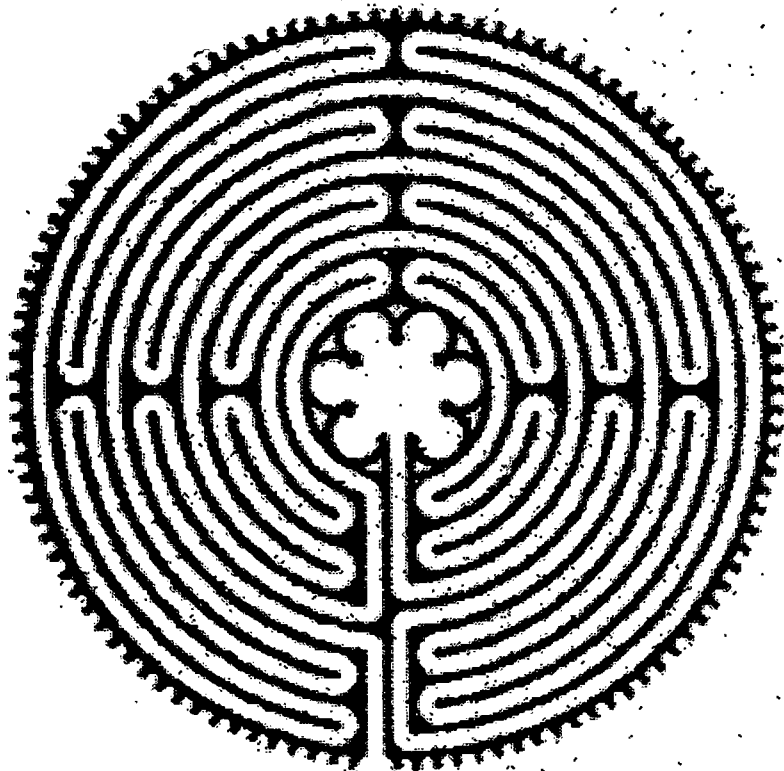
Perhaps I am escaping *to* something. Still barefoot, I walk across the cold stone floor, and up the steps into part of the cathedral that is unlit. But I know where I am going, and there is enough light shining through the arches and tracery to find my way. I take my flower and place it quietly, gently, in my chosen place, and open my heart to God, and make a promise. This is why I came. This is why I am here.

After a while I return to the nave and reclaim my shoes and socks. I walk towards the west door and sit in one of the stone seats built into the

west wall. The building is transformed by the dim light, the wafts of incense, the lack of chairs or furnishing. A lady is dancing quietly, caught up in the atmosphere of this magical, mystical space. One person is walking the labyrinth alone, moving within the circle of lights and flowers.

We all move towards the maze, and gather round it. We can just reach to hold hands and encircle it. There is chance for people to speak, to pray, to share. Then we bless each other in the words of the Grace, eyes meeting eyes across the maze, the candle flames flickering on our hands, on our faces. We know we have been blessed indeed.

The Chartres Labyrinth was replicated at Gloucester Cathedral in August 2001.



JM – Australia

Meryl Webb

AT PRESENT THERE ARE FOUR JULIAN MEETINGS in Victoria as well as three potential Meetings; two Meetings in New South Wales and two potential Meetings; two Meetings in South Australia and two Meetings in Western Australia. We have 65 magazine subscribers and another 20 complimentary "subscribers" on the list. There are no subscribers in either Queensland or the Northern Territory, as yet. However, we keep working on it.

Barbara Lumley is busy organising a Quiet Day for the beginning of Advent in the Newcastle area entitled "Julian of Norwich, a woman for our time." I am running a Quiet Day in North Central Victoria in mid-November for a group of people who are keen to learn about contemplative prayer and who I hope will be forming a Julian Meeting there. Next March I will run a Quiet Day here in the Geelong region entitled "Praying with St John of the Cross." This past March I ran one entitled "Praying with the Celtic Saints." These are always well attended and since it is held near the shore the venue provides a great environment for peace and quiet.

In May there will be two Retreats, one in NSW and one in Victoria, possibly run by the same person, the Rt Rev Bishop John Bayton, one of our patrons. Although John has not definitely chosen his subject as yet, I expect that it will have something to do with Spirituality and the Arts. John is a well-known architect, sculptor and painter as well as a much-loved bishop. Not too long ago he had a very successful exhibition in Singapore! Our Victorian Prayer School on 27 October was entitled "Praying with Icons", led by the Rev Dr Rob Gallacher, Uniting Church minister who is the head of the Otira Icon School in Kew, Victoria.

The main aim of the Prayer Schools is to teach people about contemplative prayer, various ways of going into silence and coming out, and so on. All of our events are well attended, averaging 25-30 at most of them. I am hoping that now we have found a warm and comfortable place for our retreats here in Victoria that we might just increase our attendance a bit. We are currently using the Holy Cross Centre in outer Melbourne owned and run by the Passionist Fathers.

Stop! in the name of God

National Quiet Day 2002

Yvonne Walker

For some years now the third Saturday in June has been set aside as National Quiet Day with retreat houses, ecumenical groups and some Julian Meetings offering the opportunity to be still. This was again so on 16 June this year. Each quiet day was different, but all had the same purpose – to help people appreciate and enjoy the life-giving benefits of stillness.

A new initiative

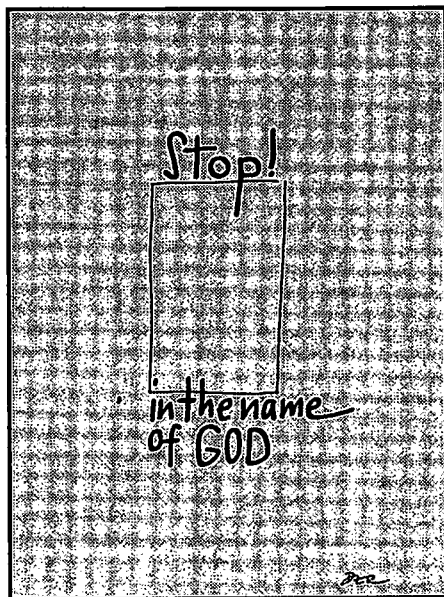
Next year the Retreat Association is joining with Churches Together in England to promote the weekend of 14–16 June 2002 as an opportunity for people from all walks of life to experience a time of stillness and quiet. Local Churches Together groups and other organisations such as Julian Meetings are being encouraged to organise a time of quiet in their area. These events could be on the Friday evening or on the Saturday – even on the Sunday afternoon, perhaps following a shared meal after morning worship. Another possibility might be to offer a short break for stillness and quiet in places such as shopping centres, sports complexes or airport chapels. The Retreat Association has given this initiative the title: “Stop! in the name of God.”

Resources and training

A small planning group is producing a Quiet Day Pack for those organising or leading an event over the weekend of 14–16 June 2002. Retreat houses are being encouraged to include an event during that weekend in their programme. Some workshops are being planned for the New Year to encourage and resource those considering a quiet day for the first time. For details of the Quiet Day Pack and training workshops, and for copies of the small card (shown here) which can be used to promote the event, please contact Mrs Paddy Lane at this address:

Mrs Paddy Lane
The Retreat Association
The Central Hall
256 Bermondsey Street
London SE1 3UJ
Telephone: 020 7357 7336
Fax: 020 7357 7724
E-mail: quietday@retreats.org.uk.

Julian Meetings around the world might like to join this new initiative to introduce people to the experience of stillness and silence and to share with others an opportunity to be reflective and creative as they explore their inner journey.



Such a feast

Individual voices and testimonies: a Quaker

Increasingly I find I do need other sources of nurture. The insights of the mystics have opened my heart and mind to new ways of approaching God. The writings of Julian of Norwich enabled me to discover new, liberating images of God as comforter, sustainer and healer, existing as the very ground of my being. More recently I have become increasingly drawn to the *via negativa* and to practising the prayer of silence which, I have found, helps to keep me more centred, more aware of the Spirit in my daily life.

Taken from "Such a Feast", published by Churches Together in England, 2001. Reproduced with permission. "Such a Feast" is reviewed later in the magazine.

Prayer in the workplace

Ruth Treves Brown

THE ARTICLE ON 24-7 PRAYER in the August 2001 issue of the magazine made me wonder how prayer could be more part of the life of Methodist Church House in London where I am volunteer lay chaplain. About 150 people work in the building. They already meet for worship at lunchtime, once a week, and I lead 15 minutes of quiet prayer on my day there.

What I have done is put a prayer and a poem onto the Intranet (I have my own Intranet site at MCH), changing them every 3–4 weeks. “A Blessing” by Anne Davies in the August issue was the first prayer printed there, and much appreciated. I have also set up a prayer table in our chapel, a lovely room on a floor with few offices, so potentially quiet. We are steadily working through the 7 floors of offices, praying for everyone on a particular floor over a period of about 3 weeks, and then moving on to another floor. There are post-it notes for prayer requests; a book of psalms and a small book of prayers; and some prayers printed on paper which I change as often as I can. It was all especially useful just after 11 September since I could print out suitable prayers from “Worship in every Event” by Tony Jasper and Pauline Webb.

The idea is that people will pop in to pray for a few minutes when they are passing. I hope that is happening!

Methodist Church House



Contemplative prayer and the future of Christianity

Hilary Wakeman

TO SAY THAT "THE WORLD HAS CHANGED" after the 11 September attack on New York City and Washington DC has become a cliché; but one that affects our daily lives and our future.

Not perhaps from the same causes and not quite as suddenly, but with effects every bit as deep, religion too has changed, especially Christianity. Not perhaps since the 16th century has the Church faced such an unknown future. The influence of New Age thinking, the continuing impact of science, the growing distrust of authoritarianism, the writings of Bishops John Spong and Richard Holloway, and Don Cupitt, and suddenly so many others like them: all of these show a Christianity that is shifting and slipping. Some people retreat to the security of fundamentalism. Most are being gradually moved, even while they think they are standing firm. Which is just as well: the alternative to our moving is surely the end of Christianity.

There is much evidence that many of the old ways of talking about God carry no meaning for people now, or are actually repulsive; that doctrinal statements which in early Christian times sought to put flesh on abstract ideas are heard as concrete statements in modern ears and are quietly denied in modern hearts. We are like a vast crowd looking at the parade of Christianity and thinking, if not actually saying, that the Emperor is wearing no clothes. Mostly we are not saying it because we are afraid of hurting the people around us, whom we imagine to be still believing in that marvellous suit of clothes. For a while we stay at the roadside, supported by the apparent belief of those around us. In the end we silently slip away, and go no more to the parades. And the crowd becomes smaller and smaller (apart from the areas where new people, looking in, are told about the marvellous suit of clothes, and so much want to be part of such enthusiasm that they do indeed see them). The crowd shrinks, but the parade of the unclothed Emperor goes on.

It has been claimed for a long time that the problem lies in the widening gap between what the theologians are saying and what the

people in the pews are hearing. The fault is said to lie with the clergy, and the forecast has been that the gap will go on widening until disaster hits. Yet we go on papering over the gap, trying not to think about how many will fall when the paper splits.

The churches have become spiritual juggernauts, vast structures stuck in the mud by their own weight. When people talk about "the decline of the Church" I suspect that what they are describing is mainly a corporate disenchantment with the structures — and then church-going and the resultant sense of community is abandoned too.

At first glance it seems obvious to say that the more superficial our faith, the more fact-based it is, the less easily it will survive this crowd-thinning that Christianity is undergoing. Yet even the thinnest faith holds on for many reasons, including the security of habit and, not least, the comfort that is obtained in times of distress or sorrow. It would be dreadful if that was lost. But it need not be lost. The choice is not between faith-with-comfort and honesty-with-no-comfort.

Christianity can survive — if we are brave. The voices telling us this are getting louder, and in the end maybe the crowd will turn and listen. What will not survive in this new century are authoritarian, hierarchical (and therefore denominational) structures, finance-driven structures, and creeds and doctrines that need re-interpreting line by line before they can be spoken with honesty. What will survive is our experience of God, our "knowing" God. And one of the deepest ways we know God is through contemplative prayer.

In the practice of contemplative prayer we enter a sense of God that is beyond ideas and concepts: we "know" God and are content to know nothing about God. All we can say of God is that God is. "I am that I am." At best we can say that we sense a personal relationship, or that we feel aware of being sustained by a great love. All else is glimpses of God in our lives (e.g. Jesus, holiness, miracles), or a recording of such glimpses (e.g. the Bible, doctrine, creeds), that human weakness tries to set in concrete.

Which is why I believe that in meeting together to share and support the practice of contemplative prayer we are on a path of hope for Christianity. There already we have the setting aside of doctrinal statements and denominational claims. While respecting our traditions we do not impose belief-tests, or use a lot of words, which are so often belief-traps. We manage without setting some people up on pillars of supposed spiritual

superiority: instead we value what each one has to offer. We need no special buildings, that will become idols or mill-stones, but we make ordinary places into "sacred spaces" by praying there. We simply allow God to be God to us, and in sharing that experience we build community and strengthen our capacity to love others. What, as we get older, we increasingly know to be true in our personal lives will be seen to be true in our religious lives also: "What will survive of us is love" (Philip Larkin).

Having recently retired from full-time parish ministry I am well aware that a faith that is too formless could become so vague as to disappear entirely. Certainly contemplative prayer needs a basis of story, both of myth and of godly people of the past, if it is to be fed. Yet just as our bodies know what foods they need and we do not all eat the same meals, so our souls too will draw the sustenance they need from what is available. Fears that this will lead to spiritual anarchy can be offset by seeing that behind that fear is often another fear, that of loss of authority. But Jesus managed with no larger power structure than the Spirit of God.

And what is true of Christianity is true also of all the major world faiths. Already we know that some Buddhists and Christians meditate together. Where will it all end? In hope for the world perhaps, and what we used to call in the old-fashioned symbolic language "the kingdom of God."

An African hymn (10th Century)

The cross is the way of the lost
the cross is the staff of the lame
the cross is the guide of the blind
the cross is the strength of the weak
the cross is the hope of the hopeless
the cross is the freedom of the slaves
the cross is the water of the seeds
the cross is the consolation of the bonded labourers
the cross is the source of those who seek water
the cross is the cloth of the naked.

Job's wife

Marion Carpenter

Anonymous wife of despair
Memorialized through the ages
By one bitter, stung cry of faithlessness
Worn down by accretion of grief
Long sorrow of watching another
 Of seeing him suffer
 Of bearing him broken
The writer dismissive, as she is no part of his purpose.

Like that other worse-fated and nameless one
Lot's wife, meeting memorable doom
For one natural gesture in fleeing her homeland for ever.
 Remember Lot's wife.

Was Sarah superior in her disbelieving laughter?
She but echoed her husband, though later she feared and denied it.

Even loyal and loving Ruth, upon leaving fair Moab,
Implies in her words to Naomi that she would relinquish,
In blindly accompanying the other, her God and her faith.

Faith and faithlessness – where shall faith be found in Israel?
Zacharias, too, doubted the angel – “Whereby shall I know this?”
Yet “Blessed is she that believed” the Annunciation
 And uttered the fiat of faith
 Pondering in her heart
 With the sore-piercing sword to follow.
“They shall praise thee and suffer in every generation
With glory and derision.”

But Job's faithless, suffering wife, that mother derided:

"Dost thou still retain thy integrity? CURSE GOD and die" –

"Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speakest" –

The writer's device and no more, with her fairytale future
(Or so we surmise, with her fairest of daughters and sons.)

Beside her, the hero shines.

The cause of his suffering unknown to the end, he vindicates God.

Job grows.

Humble trust is wisdom.

Not reason nor righteousness – faith.

Too much for mankind the massacre of the innocents

The incomprehensible holocaust

The problem remains and the pain.

But the faith of Job can regain and retain

A communion with God in the whirlwind,

Transcend the suffering, perceive man's insignificance.

"Now mine eye seeth thee."

And all the protagonists kneel there before their Creator

When the morning stars sing together, as Blake has envisioned

("May God keep us from single vision and Newton's sleep")

Remember the visions, the shewings to that other sufferer

Of Norwich, in days of bitterest plague and dearth,

Sickness, wars and despair.

With "no manner of comfort of earthly life,"

With nothing on earth that she liked to live for

Julian awaited death

BLESSING GOD.

No test of Satan but identification

"For I would that His pains were my pains

With compassion and afterward longing to God."

God in the whirlwind, in the Trinity, our "Maker and Keeper."

God of the righteous, the sufferer and the sinner,

"He willeth to give us more light..."

For sorrow and merckness which we are in...

Lord bless'd mayst thou be, for it is thus

It is well."



Job Castigated by his Wife
(c.1503–1504),
by Albrecht Dürer

This scene is derived from the second chapter of the Book of Job, verses 9 and 10. Job was blameless and upright, but God allowed him to be deprived of his possessions, then his sons and daughters, and finally his health. He was afflicted with painful sores from head to foot. As he sat among the ashes and scraped himself with a piece of broken pottery, even his wife turned against him: "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" But he refused: "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" The book as a whole is a profound statement on the mystery of suffering.

Despite its potential, the theme of Job castigated by his wife is rarely seen in religious art. One other example is *Job and his Wife* (c.1635), by Georges de La Tour. Surprisingly, this scene does not feature in the set of 21 *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1825) by William Blake.

Book reviews

All Shall be Well

Joan Wilson with Alf McCreary
Canterbury Press, 2001, £8.99

Subtitled "A Bereavement Anthology and Companion", this is a very moving collection of short reflections by the mother of Marie Wilson, the young student nurse who died in the bombing at Enniskillen in 1987. Gordon, Marie's father, was with her at the bombing and became famous for his forgiving attitude and untiring work for reconciliation. Joan lived through the death not only of Marie, but also of her son Peter in a road accident in 1995; her husband Gordon died a few months later.

The reflections are a page or two long and relate to her own experience of loss. They include various prayers, poems, Bible passages and hymns which helped her. Her hope is that by sharing her experience she may help others. Reading it while people are shocked and grieving after the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States and after the sudden death of a member of the Julian Meeting I belong to, my feeling is that Joan could well help others live through grief.

The book is beautifully produced in a hardback edition which would make an attractive gift.

Gail Ballinger

Such a Feast: Spiritual Nourishment and the Churches
ed. Judith Lampard (Churches Spirituality Group)
Churches Together in England, 2001, £8.50

This is a book which lives up to its title. *Such a Feast* gives us an account of how the Churches offer sustenance to their members and of how those members experience it. The title is taken from *The Call*, a poem by George Herbert, the 17th century English poet. To quote from the introduction: "The image of a feast conjures up ideas of variety, plenty, richness, colour, nurture and celebration. Feasting is not a solitary activity but enjoyed with others, and the feast is offered to all who read this book."

The first section of the book contains the response of each of the member Churches of Churches Together in England to an invitation to identify ways their members receive spiritual nourishment. Individual

Christians from a variety of Churches and encompassing the wide range of Christian commitment have written about their own spiritual nourishment in the second section. In the third section the Bodies in Association make their contribution. These include The Retreat Association, The Focolare Movement, L'Arche, The Iona Community, SCM... *Such a Feast* concludes with "Endpiece" in which people who are familiar with the content of the book offer their reflections on it.

This is compulsive and perhaps compulsory reading which balances the many excellent individual writers on spirituality by offering something corporate which reminds us of the riches we share. Reading this book was an enlarging experience.

Here is an extract from "Endpiece" (reproduced with permission):

*"Earth's crammed with heaven,
and every common bush aflame with fire,
but only he who sees takes off his shoes,
the rest sit around and eat blackberries.*

"In these words Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in her poem *Aurora Leigh*, declares the belief that others can share Moses' experience of meeting God in transformative everyday experience.

"*Such a Feast* gives glimpses of some of the ways in which 21st century Christians discover a heightened awareness of God. We read of three main strands. There is a range of personal devotion – of waiting on God in silence, in Bible study and prayer, of spiritual nourishment through music, art or poetry and the use of symbols. There is the breadth and depth of public worship, with distinctive elements but often surprisingly common practices. Do those who are pursuing their spiritual journey alone realise what resources they could find in the churches – and do the churches realise what they have to offer?"

Gail Ballinger

Pilgrims Make Progress

Howard Booth

Kevin Mayhew, 2001, £8.99

This is a collection of very personal meditations, each between one and two pages long. Each ends with two quotations, one from *Winding Quest* or *New World* – Alan Dale's translation of the Bible – and one from the *Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich. An opening chapter

"Suggestions for the use of this devotional guide" encourages reflective rather than contemplative prayer; but the meditations which follow could be used to inspire either form of prayer. Many of them could be used as lead-ins for a Julian Meeting.

The author is a retired Methodist minister with much experience of the Ministry of Healing. He shares openly with the reader some of the difficulties he has experienced on his own pilgrimage, including dealing with anxiety and how quiet prayer has helped in resolving it. He is clearly very attached to Alan Dale's translations as he says in his introduction: "These writings made an impact on my life and ministry equivalent to a reconversion...I have worn out two copies of *New World* and am now on my third." Alan Dale's words do still have impact and are thought-provoking, but because his is such a free translation I would suggest supplementing the Bible passage with a standard modern translation.

- *New World (New Testament)* by Alan Dale. OUP, 1967
- *Winding Quest (Old Testament)* by Alan Dale. OUP, 1972
- *All Shall be Well: Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich, translated by Sheila Upjohn. DLT, 1992

Gail Ballinger

Desiring Life: Benedict on Wisdom and the Good Life **Norvene Vest**

Cowley Publications, 2000, £11.99

This is the third in a series by Norvene Vest on Benedictine spirituality for people living in the world today. She examines the themes of wisdom (gaining insight into fullness of life, based on daily experience), virtue (becoming good) and ethics (right conduct). Each theme is illustrated by a commentary on relevant chapters from the Rule of St Benedict, respectively the Prologue, chapter 7 (humility) and chapter 4 (good works). I found the book rather dry, but the extended discussion of humility is interesting, as is her insight (in a section entitled "Overvaluing Results") that what we are matters more than what we achieve. In general the book points back to an earlier and saner way of living.

Members of Julian Meetings might also want to look at the first in the series, *No Moment Too Small* (Cowley Publications, 1994, £9.99), which deals with silence, holy reading and prayer.

James Toon

Strength of the Hills

Jenny Robertson

Bible Reading Fellowship, 2001, £5.99

Here is a fascinating bird's-eye view of the ebb and flow of the Christian faith in Scotland from St Ninian to the present day. Neatly divided into bite-sized sections, it is full of stories and quotations which illumine and personalise the necessarily complex history. The essence of the faith of Scotland is here, though many of the details are not.

Jenny Robertson, the poet, shows her own spirituality in some beautiful and moving sentences, e.g. "...ancient stone crosses lift weathered heads to the hills and gather into their silence the sound of the sea." And, referring to the Highland Clearances, she says of the ships taking the evicted crofters to the New World – "The sails dipped beyond the horizon and the ebb tide was full of the bleating of sheep."

This book is sub-titled "Understanding Scottish Spirituality" and, if we are left without knowing what is meant by spirituality, we are certainly offered an exciting insight into the journey which has shaped it and a moving introduction to those who gave birth to it.

I would have liked to hear more about the contemporary expressions of spirituality in Scotland including the revived interest in spirituality, prayer and retreats, and the part Roman Catholic orders have played in this. Nevertheless, if you are Scottish – read this book. If you are not, but wish to understand the faith which colours so much of our religion, life and culture – read this book, which is "a rough chart to an abundant treasure trove."

Ken Lawson

Retreat and Quiet Day Resources

Susan Hardwick

Kevin Mayhew, 2001, £9.99

A practical guide for those planning a quiet day or retreat with suggestions for becoming still and using silence creatively. There are helpful checklists and practical hints on organisation. Permission is given to photocopy material including a publicity flyer.

The section on Inputs contains a number of themes with five or six Bible references of relevant points. Anyone using the material might wish to be selective in order to leave time for silence and reflection. The sample

programme outlines tend to be rather busy with often barely an hour's silence between readings and might need to be adjusted with less input in order to allow plenty of time for silence.

I found it puzzling to provide a long list of support agencies in the appendix (so that retreatants bringing up problems outside the scope of the retreat leader might be referred on) and I was disappointed that no mention was made of resources available from the Retreat Association, denominational retreat organisations and prayer or meditation groups in a book such as this. The dismissal of Retreats magazine as not being a resource for those wishing to organise their own quiet days or retreats is misleading and I hope that any future editions will rectify this.

Yvonne Walker

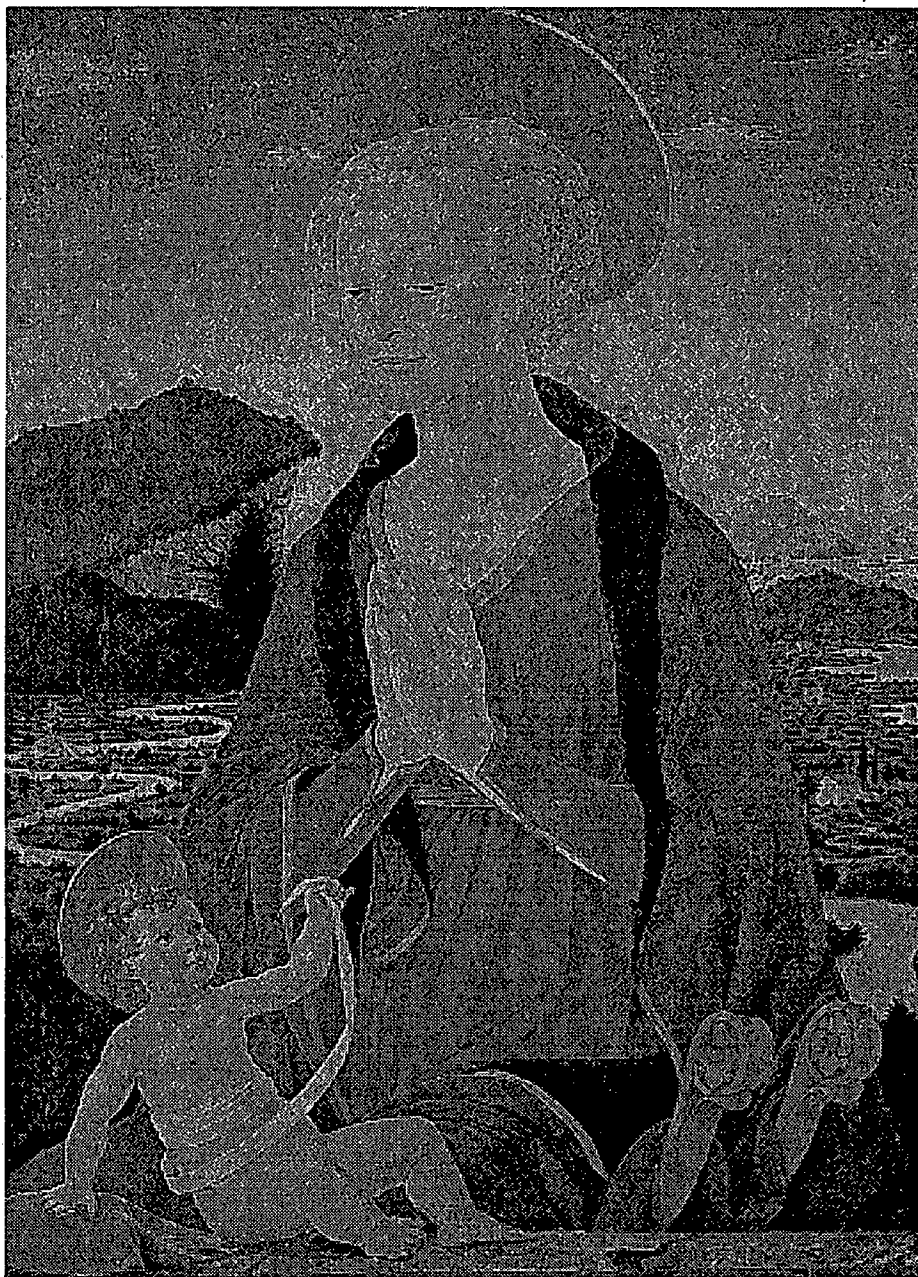
Contemporary Spiritualities: Social and Religious Contexts
ed. Clive Erricker and Jane Erricker

Continuum, 2001, £18.99 paperback, £45.00 hardback

I had great difficulty in deciding what this book is about, as there is within it a wide diversity of essays, some of which are readable, while others are obscure and written in such a way that regular consultation of a dictionary was necessary. Some of the questions raised make me pause for thought: in the essay *Mysticism and Contemporary Society* discussing Teilhard de Chardin the question is raised "What is the importance of mysticism for our society today?" The essay on Bede Griffiths raises questions about whether all religion is valid, or is our Christianity culturally determined? In the essay on Thomas Merton his humanity comes through; I found myself disagreeing with the Dalai Lama's claims for a priority of ethics over faith. A number of the people written about are not Christian, nor are most of the communities, but the description of Taizé tallies with my experience.

At the end of the day I was disappointed that this book was neither a study of spirituality nor of sociology and disappointed with the obscure writing, e.g. "Spirituality concerns itself with transcending what Bauman refers to as individual insecurity and ontological insecurity." Many Christians will find some of the spirituality strange – for instance Carol Christ's "Goddess theology." But there is nevertheless here a challenge to think hard about what we mean by prayer and meditation and the many paths by which God is revealed.

Francis Ballinger



The Virgin and Child (c.1460), by Alesso Baldovinetti

Doxological

Joy French

I don't want Halleluyahs,
 Growled the Father;
Nor all those Praises,
 Added the Son;
Nor Ave Marias,
 Murmured the Mother,
 Packing up nappies
 For some Holy Innocents
 (Jewish or Moslem?
 She wasn't worried).
The Spirit sighed:
 Gloria in Excelsis?
 I'd rather see the glory
 Of a good deed
 In this naughty world.
O humanity, humanity,
When will you get it right?

The Julian Meetings

Foster the teaching and practice of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition

Encourage people to practise contemplative prayer in their daily lives, and explore ways of doing this which are appropriate for them

Support the individual ecumenical Julian Meetings – groups whose members meet regularly to practise Christian contemplative prayer together.

The views expressed in this magazine are those of each writer, and are not necessarily held by the Editor or the Advisory Group.

The Editor is always pleased to receive original articles, short meditations, stories, poems or artwork for use in the magazine. Book reviews for publication should include date, publisher and price.

Contributions for the next magazine should be sent to the Editor by **15 February 2002**. Please type, or write clearly, on one side of the paper. Contributions by e-mail are welcome.

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