

THE  
JULIAN  
MEETINGS



*seeking God  
in silence*

*Magazine  
August  
2015*

## *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 Julian Meetings Magazine August 2015

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# The Best is Silence

When I was 15 years old I read *The Cloud of Unknowing*. I barely understood it, but it changed everything for me. This book told me that it was OK to be somebody like me. Words from the 14<sup>th</sup> century spoke directly to me about a journey I had obliquely known about since the age of four.

I am no typical contemplative – I am a big, noisy extrovert who struggles with silence, and loves lots of responsibilities and distractions. But this book spoke my language. I had learned the Christian faith in all its fullness from my parents and the Church, but the contemplative way of prayer had never been mentioned.

I realised that it was ‘allowed’ to be like me, and I didn’t have to live on a hilltop or wear a monk’s ‘hoodie’. This God I knew in the darkness was known to others too; and was, perhaps, our common property as Christians.

In 26 years of ordained ministry I’ve met many people who didn’t yet know it was OK to be themselves in this way. They knew a God who is not easily captured in words or theological formulations: a God best known in silence, darkness. Many felt their experience was marginalised by the demented activism of church life.

## Essential Oil

But the Church needs contemplatives like a car needs oil. Parishes and communities need to discover a deeply contemplative dimension to their common life, as the most profound kind of engagement. This can happen through traditional patterns of personal and corporate devotion, but many of these feel like *doing* something, rather than being still.

A preacher painted a wonderful picture of the wide range of ministries a local church was involved with, in the building and beyond. And then he simply asked: ‘What would happen if we stopped doing all that? What would actually be left?’

My church is like that, and I didn't want it to stop; it is key to our life as an apostolic community. What we needed was a way to build contemplative prayer into our church life.

First, alongside teaching and recommended reading, we created the right kind of space: a church open daily, warm, and with small intimate spaces alongside the big liturgical space. Our newly cleared Lady Chapel and south transept offer beautiful space.

Second, for three years we've had a programme of quiet days – worship, short address, but mostly just silence. In our daily morning and evening prayer we include at least five minutes of corporate silence – tiny, but it leaves clues and is an invitation to journey deeper.

Third, we have regular 'oasis' days for paid staff and for key volunteers. We must nurture those who, on Sundays and weekdays, hold big responsibilities. The 'oasis' day is taken in "work" time, and is a day for prayer, reflection, eating together, and silence.

We also have 50 minutes of pure silence, once a month, for anyone who wants to come. It opens with a short introduction and closes with a very brief compline. Is such extravagance affordable (like the oil of pure nard poured out on Jesus' feet....)? To just sit there? It has come to feel essential, rather than a luxury. It feeds people in the most extraordinary ways.

Contemplative prayer is not the whole gospel, and it is for those who are called to it. Our busy church is full of petrol, but this is the essential oil for the engine.

*Nicholas Henshall, now Dean of Chelmsford Cathedral, was Vicar of Christ Church on the Stray, Harrogate, when he wrote the original article for The Tablet in Sept. 2012. This is an edited version of the original piece, used with permission.*

*(a version of the Lord's Prayer  
from the New Zealand Prayer Book)*

**Eternal Spirit,  
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is  
And that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God in whom is heaven.**

**The hallowing of your name  
Echo through the universe.  
The way of your justice be followed  
By the peoples of the world.  
Your heavenly will be done  
By all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
Sustain our hope and come on earth.**

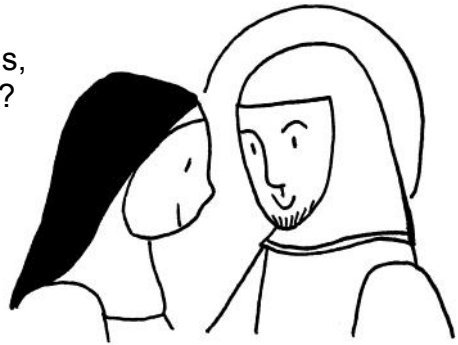
**With the bread we need for today,  
feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another,  
forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test,  
strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure,  
spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil,  
free us.  
For you reign in the glory  
of the power that is love,  
Now and for ever,**

## Praying with St Teresa of Avila (part 2)

In her book 'The Way of Perfection' Teresa laid down some guidelines for beginning on the way of prayer. In this area we are always beginners, so here I summarise her teaching. It is clear, forthright and practical, yet it can lead us to the heights if we persevere.

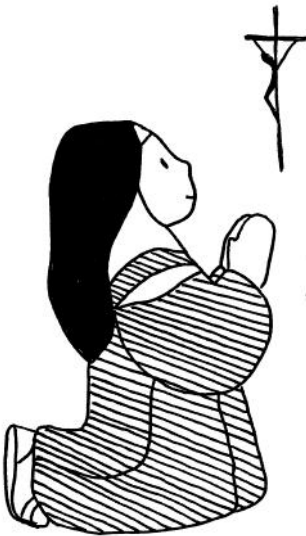
Begin by having in mind a vocal prayer like the 'Our Father' which we can fall back on when the going is tough. Also, to pray vocally, when we consider carefully what the words mean, is actually to pray mentally. Compose yourself with an examination of conscience, an act of contrition, and the sign of the cross. Then as you are alone look for a companion.

Who could be better than Jesus, who taught us the 'Our Father'? Imagine Jesus beside you. He is teaching you, looking at you lovingly and humbly. Look at him in return, for he, on his part, never takes his eyes off you. Hold that gaze for as long as you can and forget about any special words.



If you cannot think of God, don't worry, just keep bringing your gaze back to Christ. Talk to him as you would talk to a friend. Find ways of praying that accord with your temperament and mood of the moment. For example, don't choose to meditate on the passion when you are feeling happy, choose the resurrection. Think about the mystery of the birth of Christ when the liturgy points in that direction at Christmas. Learn how to praise and thank God for all that happens. When the thought of yourself is obnoxious then turn to prayer for others. To pray for others is to give them and God a wonderful gift and proof of love.

Another great help to prayer in Teresa's estimation is to remember that the Lord dwells within us and we have only to look within ourselves to find him present. 'The Lord is within us and we should be there with him' she writes. This practice of 'recollection', when the thoughts are 'collected' together and the mind is simply dwelling silently on Jesus, enables us to make great progress. Learn to keep yourself still, to keep your eyes closed, and then turn within quietly and trustingly, sure that the Lord is there.



Teresa knew that to make use of the senses in the interior life was a boon worth taking trouble over. To have a picture that arouses devotion and focuses our attention; to imagine Jesus beside us; to read prayerfully so as to grow in the knowledge of God and forget oneself: all these can help one get started along the way.

Above all, the nature of love demands that we are determined to keep nothing back from God should he ask it of us. To give ourselves is to give the whole of ourselves, and that is proved by the way we live our daily lives. It is to be consistent in giving. Yet Teresa's own experience made her tender and loving towards those who failed, and failed often. She realised that all growth takes time and is not accomplished in one fell swoop.

Above all, Teresa never allowed 'prayer' to suffocate her humanity. She retained her human qualities to the end. Prayer refined and perfected them, rather than stifling them. It was this attractiveness that drew others to her. Her qualities of mind and heart were, and still are, supremely admired. It was Jesus who became the centre of her life, and



she saw that life as a continual song to 'the mercies of the Lord' who had gifted and chosen her for union with himself. That union she saw as offered to all who wanted it, if only we surrender ourselves completely to the work that God wants to accomplish in each one of us. To this end she sings:

*Take, O Lord, my loving heart;  
See, I yield it to thee whole,  
With my body, life and soul  
And my nature's every part.  
Sweetest Spouse, my life thou art;  
I have given myself to thee:  
What wilt thou have done with me?*

*Let me live or let me die;  
Give me sickness, give me health;  
Give me poverty or wealth;  
Let me strive or peaceful lie,  
Weakness give, or strength supply:  
I accept it all from thee;  
What wilt thou have done with me?*

When Teresa died it was said she continued to live on on earth in her books, and in the lives of her daughters, the Teresian nuns. Read her books, visit one of her Carmels, and you will understand what is meant. But her teaching on prayer is not confined to any one way of life or kind of person. Teresa is a woman for all time and all people, because she wants only to introduce us to the friendship with Jesus that made her own life so fruitful and so fully 'lived'.

**Sister Elizabeth Ruth Obbard**

*2015 is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St Teresa's birth.*

## Martha's Song

"That good part?"

Listen.

I've stirred ferment in the pot,  
Drawn conclusions from the well,

Regularly gathered straying thoughts,  
Religiously polished reflections,

Woven stories unpicked dreams

Spun philosophies on to the spindle

Weeded out fears sown hopes.

Desires nursed fluttering in cupped hands  
Prayers rising under the warm cloth.

And all the while I tend the  
Flickering silence within.

Think on

We are one.

**Elizabeth Bailey.**

(With kind permission of the poet, and taken from  
'A Speaking Silence' reviewed on page 24)

## **ARE YOU THERE LORD?**

We are so blessed here in Sherborne to be able to meet in the Chapel of St. John's Almshouse which was built in 1437 and exudes the peace and timelessness so conducive to meditation.

Our Meeting was started in the early 1990's, by the then curate the Revd John Paton, with 6 members. The numbers have fluctuated over the years, but we now have 35 on the books (with an average attendance of 15) although a few of them come only once or twice year. It is ecumenical, which we emphasise, and a lovely fellowship has developed between members, four of whom are retired clergy.

We meet on the second Wednesday of each month, except August, at about 3.45 and close the door as the Abbey clock strikes 4 o'clock until 4.30. We have a focal point on the stone-flagged floor: this always includes a cross and a candle and usually something from nature – berries, flowers in season or a remembrance poppy in November. For each meeting we have a meditation sheet in which we try to include a quotation from Julian of Norwich herself. This we send to all those unable to make the meeting. Sherborne is a small town so most can be delivered by hand (walking the dog or whatever) so we only have to post to those out of town. This keeps everyone in touch and is much appreciated.

All members are given the opportunity to lead - some use pictures or a stone to hold. Some choose to lead into the silence with music, faded away and brought gently back again at the end of the silence. There are no rules, everyone chooses their own way.

A note of dates and who is taking each meeting is delivered quarterly and our meetings are publicised in the weekly Abbey Pewsheets, the monthly Bulletin and Quarterly Information leaflet which are circulated widely.

In this increasingly noisy and stressful world people are

finding that the balm of silence shared with fellow Christians is a blessing indeed.

**Shirley Fry**  
(*Sherborne Julian Meeting*)

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## **Come and Find Out!**

Our Leeds Julian Meeting arranged an “Introduction to Julian Meetings and Contemplative Prayer” afternoon on 17<sup>th</sup> February at St. Edmund’s Church, Roundhay. We asked Deidre Morris, JM Co-ordinator, if she would lead the afternoon – she lives in Wakefield, only 8 miles from Leeds – and she was happy to do so.

We had two main reasons for approaching Deidre about the possibility of holding the event:

- \* The numbers at our twice monthly afternoon Meetings had fallen to 5 regulars, due to changing work patterns and clashes with other events.
- \* A number of people had asked what happened at Julian Meetings and what contemplative prayer was.

We felt we needed an opportunity to introduce and explain both contemplative prayer in general, and the Julian Meetings in particular. Our regular half-an-hour meeting would be too short.

We had advertised the afternoon in the magazines and weekly notices of our three covenanted churches; on both the church and diocesan websites; in the diocesan e-news; and through flyers which went to the three churches and further afield.

As the day approached we all had some feelings of trepidation. Would anybody come? Would Deidre’s trip from Wakefield be wasted? What if the weather meant she couldn’t make it? We wouldn’t be able to cancel, since the meeting had been advertised too widely. We met to work out

a plan B if we had to lead it ourselves.....

## O YE OF LITTLE FAITH!

The weather was great and 27 people from Leeds and beyond turned up, quite a number having picked it up from the internet advertising. We quickly had to get some extra chairs out, and widen the circle!

Deidre had suggested allowing two hours, from 2.00pm – 4.00pm, with the last 30 minutes for people just to stay and chat if they wished. She spent some time explaining about both JM and contemplative prayer, including answering questions, and then led into a centring exercise and 15 minutes of silence. People could then feedback their reactions (good or bad) and ask questions.

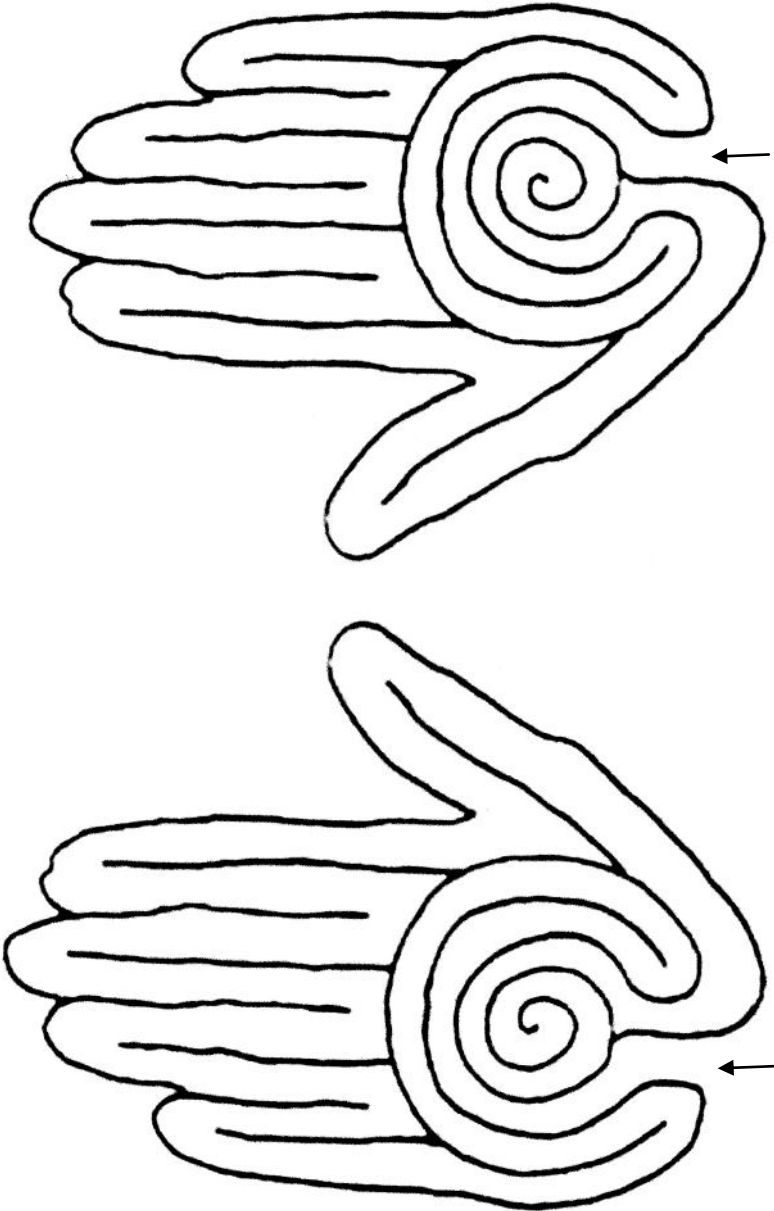
We had a 10 minute interval, which allowed folk to stretch their legs, take a comfort break, and look at the JM publications Deidre had brought. We were also asked to choose a cross from a large selection Deidre had brought and laid out on a table. When we were all seated again Deidre led a longer time of silence, using music as a lead-in and lead-out, and with each of us able to use the cross we'd chosen as a visual or tactile focus. After the silence there was again time for feedback, and we were all given a 'Waiting on God' leaflet and the 'Introduction to Contemplative Prayer' leaflet to take away. There were then welcome refreshments and a chance to chat more informally.

We had some very positive feedback, due in no small measure to Deidre's leading. Since then the numbers at our meetings have increased and there has been a new impetus. We are also considering an extra monthly evening Meeting that could be offered to people of other faiths as well.

So if you are considering hosting something similar we would say "Give it a go!"

***Martha Jaggs & Astrid Fielden***

# Palm Labyrinths



Palm labyrinths have the advantage of always being with you. Once you have learnt the pathway you will have your own portable labyrinth, literally at your fingertips, no more than an arms length away, always at hand.

## **The Labyrinth**

The labyrinth – the palm-print  
of the hand of God  
in which we walk.  
And, at the centre we must reach,  
the nail-mark of his love.  
We circle it; now distant; close;  
drawn by its gravitation  
in our orbit, till at last  
we reach its truth.  
Then, turning, bear it out  
to those we meet along the path ;  
the silent sharing of the love of God.

*Brian Morris*

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## **The Cosmic Blessing**

*From the Noddfa Centre, North Wales*

May the vastness of the universe draw  
you to wonder at the living God

May the complexity of the universe thrill  
you with joy at life's diversity.

May the journey of the universe remind  
you of life's changing cycles.

May the wisdom of the universe inspire  
you with a sense of your true place

In the sacred web of life.

## **News from the JM admin team**

Having developed the new website, which offers a very wide range of information and services, the Core Group decided to send a press release (see below) about it to the main denominational church newspapers, in the hope that one or more might use it - they can often use small 'filler' items.

It might also be something you could use in your own local church, village or town newspaper, or perhaps in a diocesan, churches together or similar publication. It is more likely to be used, or read, if you can provide a local 'hook' to hang it on. This might be details of any local Julian Meeting(s), or in the case of a diocese, mentioning the number of Meetings in the diocese - information available from Sheana Barby.

People can only come to a Meeting if they know about it, so on-going publicity about JM, locally, regionally and nationally, is something we must all try to do. The press release, below, is available to download from our website.

### **The Julian Meetings Move Forward**

In 2013 The Julian meetings celebrated 40 years of waiting on God in silence. As many of us now look for information about contemplative prayer and meditation on the internet and through social media we have developed a new interactive website and database: [www.thejulianmeetings.net](http://www.thejulianmeetings.net) . In it can be found details of our network of people who value the practice of silence in the Christian tradition; how to join one of over 300 meetings at home and overseas; receive our magazine either electronically or in print; purchase our booklets that suggest ways to seek God in stillness. Do click and see.

<p>You can follow us on Facebook and Twitter now, so if you, or friends, are into social media do pay us a visit!</p>
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## **New Charges for Publications.**

### **New CD recordings for those with visual loss.**

Our charges for booklets have been the same for ten years, despite printing costs rising steadily. We have been aware for some time that our charges for postage and packing, although increased over time, do not meet the actual costs. We are no longer able to absorb these extra costs from other sources of income.

With the introduction of online ordering we can now offer printed or electronic material to our non-UK members. But we feel it is fair to make the same charges, as appropriate for their country, as we do for our UK members.

We have never aimed to make a profit from the sale of our literature but we are sure you will understand that we do have to cover the actual costs.

We introduced new charges for online orders in June. The new charges will apply to postal orders from 1<sup>st</sup> August. In all cases postage and packing are included in the quoted price, and we have tried to provide as many resources as we can for the postage band. So for example we no longer offer one bookmark, one pew card, one poster but a bundle based on the maximum weight available for the postage, and on our experience of the sorts of quantities that people order. As material is reprinted we will adjust the price as necessary to reflect the new cost.

Please ensure you use the most recent order form if you are ordering by post. This can be printed from the website, or in the UK requested from Pat Robinson (see last page).

**Finally good news** – We now have recordings on CD of 'Waiting on God', '+ Some Basics of Contemplative Prayer', 'Approaching Silence', 'A Brief Introduction to Contemplative Prayer', 'Going into Silence...and Coming Out', 'It's Your Turn to Lead into the Silence', 'The Ideal Julian Meeting'. These are very useful for the visually impaired or those who prefer the spoken word.

## God's Hospitality – a Quiet Garden

Paulmead, Bisley (Gloucestershire) is one of many Quiet Gardens in the world. For me it is particularly special. It is the home and garden of Philip and Judy Howard who together created this very special quiet, holy, space which they share with all-comers. Philip, a garden designer, created this quirky, imaginative garden some 30 years ago, in an acre of a quiet, high Cotswold valley with a stream running through. Judy says he designed the garden quite un-self-consciously as if in the footprint of a Benedictine Abbey, the 'east end' looking into the distance down the valley.

There is a tree-house, a shelter, a seat beautifully carved out of a yew hedge, an 'out of the ordinary' swing, immaculate lawns, beautiful shrubs and flowers and, above all, peace. The birds fly overhead, the quiet is tangible. Judy, now a retired priest, offers this wonderful open space, and also their home, with log fires, warm shared kitchen, the scent of coffee and freshly baked bread; above all the smiles and human warmth of total inclusivity. Nowhere (except their bedroom) is out of bounds. Her vocation, she says, is 'my place, my family, sharing'. On any quiet day, 'we are the community;' the host is God.



### Quiet Days

Judy offers Quiet Days bi-monthly through the year. A typical pattern is arrival in good time for a 10am start; gathering together for c.15 minutes of spiritual input; followed by silence for the rest of the day (with a 12.30 gathering, for those who wish to join a short act of worship); a bring-and-share silent lunch at 1pm and a gathering together at 3pm for reflection (some wish to share, others remain silent), followed by prayer and, perhaps, a very simple inclusive communion. Judy highlights some paradoxes in this approach:

Quiet	and	Calling - a vocation journey
Solitude	and	Community (yet at the end of the day previously total strangers may share the most intimate things)
Rest	and	Challenge
Stillness	and	Calling
Rooted in tradition	and	Free to explore theologically and liturgically

The comments in her 'Visitors' Book', over the years, show that this approach, with its openness and freedom for those with faith and those with none, works.

### **Quiet Gardens**

The Quiet Garden Movement was begun by Philip Roderick, an Anglican priest. The first garden opened in 1992 but his vision goes back to when he was 14 years old and, on holiday in Wales, he had a transforming experience. Some years later he returned to Wales and met a woman who 'opened the door of her heart and her home' to individuals who needed space and hospitality. He came to realise that all that was needed for a simple ministry of hospitality and prayer was a home and a garden. There are now Quiet Gardens all over the world, with 209 in the UK. The majority of gardens are privately owned, but there are some now in churchyards, hospitals and prisons.

Judy and Philip Howard joined the Quiet Garden Trust in 1996. Sometime before, Judy had visited a retreat centre in Wales and met Esther de Waal who encouraged her to find out about the Quiet Garden Trust. They did, and Paulmead was signed up. As Judy puts it 'I came to realise that if God couldn't be present in my place, there was no point in going to Wales.' And so, together, they have made a commitment to hospitality at Paulmead: 'the host is God, we are the community on any day'. Judy acknowledges how liberating it is not to be the 'hostess' and how manipulative that role can sometimes be, albeit through the best of intentions.

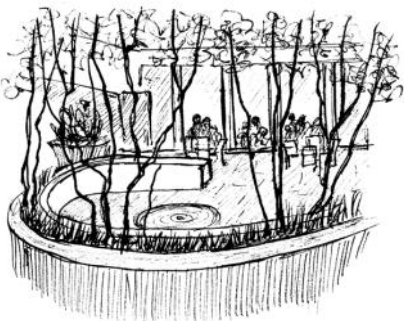
## **A welcome for all**

Initially Judy led all the Quiet Days, and still leads most. Each one is unique, due to the material she prepares to share, and the mix of participants. Some retreatants return time and time again over the years: at different times people come to work out a troubling problem, to read, to catch up on sleep, or to be still in silence. Paulmead is also a welcoming location for small groups that wish to be self-contained, as well as for individuals who feel drawn to be still in the garden. And, while most visitors are persons of faith, not all are. Philip and Judy welcome some secular groups such as Stroud Carers, whose support-group meets there.

I have joined Judy's Quiet Days for a number of years and always return home refreshed in body, mind and spirit. Paulmead fulfils the Quiet Garden Movement's vision: 'to create opportunities for silence, solitude, and the appreciation of beauty; for the teaching of prayer; and for the experience of creativity and healing'.

***Jennifer Tann***

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We now have a page on our website to list places such as Paulmead which offer a special ministry of hospitality on behalf of God. If you have visited such a place - a quiet garden; a small house of retreat; a church or chapel for quiet days etc.- and would like to recommend it to others, please send us details

(with website / contact details), and a brief description of why others might visit. E-mail them to: [it@thejulianmeetings.net](mailto:it@thejulianmeetings.net) Or post the information to the Editor, whose details are on page 27. We might feature some places in the magazine or newsletter in the future.

*We received the following question:*

*I'm trying to understand whether Julian Meetings are meant to be independent of a particular church, even if many (but not all) members of the Meeting worship there. Is such a group correct to say that the Julian Meeting is under the auspices of their church?*

*Our response was:*

All Julian Meetings should be independent and autonomous, and ecumenical in intent even if in practice they may not be. Many meet in a church or chapel: it may be the easiest place to meet, with space and chairs to gather in a circle, and often with parking. Churches are usually easier to find than private houses. The atmosphere may be more helpful than that of a house, though many Meetings are held in people's homes. A lot depends on local circumstances.

Most Meetings held in a church or chapel have at least one member who worships there. They know the place, and how suitable it is, and are known to the minister, who is happy for them to use the building. Outsiders would need someone to open and lock up the church, and therefore would probably have to pay a hire fee.

There are some places where a Meeting seems identified as 'belonging' to a particular church - St Peter's JM - because it was started by the church *without at the outset* advertising it widely to all the other local churches as being ecumenical. It may then be more difficult to encourage people from other churches to join, as it does not appear to be a group that is independent of the church.

Julian Meetings belong to all their members, and it is for them to decide where and when to meet. Some do change venue. A new minister may not be happy for a Julian Meeting to continue, or circumstances at the church may change. A JM in a home may become too large, or the regular host is ill, or moves away.

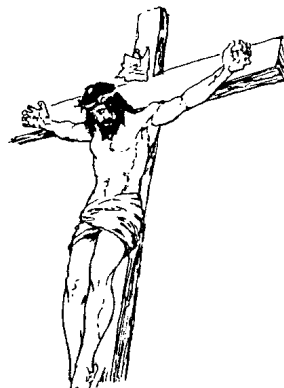
It is very good for a Julian Meeting to be supported by local churches, but it remains an independent entity.

## Power and Powerlessness

***Only what is emptied can then be refilled.*** When of my own will and choice I am emptied, by handing back my own will, my gifts, my thinking to God, it gives him space which he can re-fill.

It's hard, really hard to become convinced of this because our general experience of loss is pain. And we are taught at all costs to avoid pain.

On the cross Jesus deliberately gave back, emptied himself of everything he had. He lost his control over his own actions, his few possessions, his body, his reputation, his friends, his God, his life. And that space was refilled by God with the redemption of the whole world.



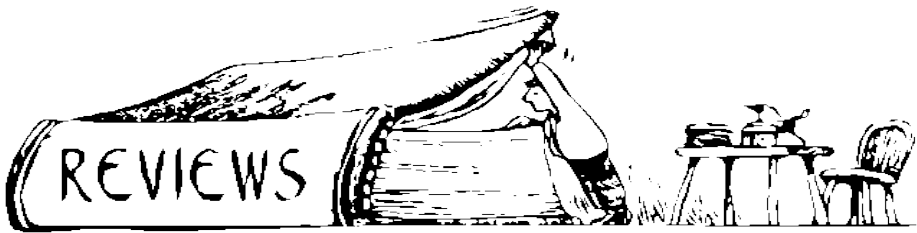
Just for a few moments each day I take on that degree of powerlessness of which I am, capable. Journeying to that still pool where it is okay to be still; it's okay to be me; okay to give over control; okay to contact the child and the clown in me. It is important to clear the channel for God to flow in the way only he knows. That means clearing away for a few minutes the very things we prize. Even our gifts, the very things we have worked at, can be at times rocks in the path of the smooth flow of the living water.

***Wanda Nash***

*An extract from* **Turning the Downside Up** - Growing in Unexpected Places' HarperCollins Publishing 1995

Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm and harmony

***Thomas Merton***



**MAKING ALL THINGS WELL: finding spiritual strength  
with Julian of Norwich**  
*Isobel de Gruchy*

Canterbury Press, 2013 £10.99  
ISBN 978 1 84825 240 0

In his Foreword Desmond Tutu says 'I cannot commend it highly enough'. No wonder!

Isobel de Gruchy, a South African, lived through many hard years of ministry with her priest-theologian husband during the anti-apartheid years. She first encountered Julian and her *Revelations* in 1983, but it was not until 1989, when she read *A Lesson of Love* (1988), Fr John-Julian's translation, that they became meaningful. She belonged to a group of women ('all white, middle aged') who read and discussed *A Lesson in Love*. 'We did not understand everything but found what she (Julian) said very special and pertinent to our lives during the upheavals in our country, the 'evil' that surrounded us.' The group's nickname became 'the Hazelnutters'.

Isobel reflected on Julian's *Revelations* for 20 years. In 2009 she read the Colledge and Walsh translation, studied them, summarised them and eventually - 'my mind as it were in my heart' wrote poems inspired by them. Friends encouraged her to 'embed' these poems in meditations. The result is these 40 themed reflections, based on *Revelations of Divine Love* and relating to themes such as suffering, love for others, prayer, all shall be well. Each has a Bible passage, passage(s) from Julian, a reflection based on it, a prayer theme or question.

We have Isobel's insights, as well as Julian's, often in poems. sometimes bringing together passages from different chapters to reflect on the theme.

This book is of great depth but also easy to read. It relates Julian's *Revelations* to our times and helps us to use her wisdom and compassion to live in them. I'd recommend it to anyone seeking to know Julian better, or to cope with our world. It has many passages to lead people into silence.

***Gail Ballinger***

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**SILENCE: A User's Guide. Volume 1: Process**

***Maggie Ross***

978 0 232 53148 0 DLT 2014 £14.99

978 0 232 53177 0 eBook £12.99

Maggie Ross, a solitary in the Anglican Tradition, lives near Oxford. Her blog is on <http://ravenwilderness.blogspot.co.uk>

This is an academic book which examines the traditions of silence throughout the centuries. It raises some interesting conspiracy theories of the suppression of silence by more active parts of the tradition.

I found this book spoke very deeply to my spirit, whilst my mind was somewhat irritated by the noise of the author's thinking. It was an interesting experience to read. In reading I was helped back into the awareness and experience of deep silence, whilst, at the same time, being bombarded by the noisy anger of the writer.

I very much appreciated the discussion around the Eucharist, between the use of the sacrament, and the pleasure in living the event for itself. So often in life we are tempted to use a holy event for our own ends, rather than to experience and live the event for the purposes of God. The argument could be helpfully extended into other self revealing acts of God.

It is my belief, though I don't practise it often enough, that the world is held in the love of God by the ministry of those who in silence and prayer stand before the Beloved on behalf of us all. This book is a gift in that tradition which will sustain seekers after silence in their inner beings. If you do read it,

pass gently over the railing against spiritual direction, the noise of the present western world, and the anger against the church. Allow the depths of love to speak into your spirit and nourish your own practise of silence.

**Sarah Cawdell**

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## **THE POWER OF SILENCE: the riches that lie within**

**Graham Turner**

Bloomsbury Press

ISBN 9781441182234 (hardback) 2012 £16.99

ISBN 9781472909190 (paperback) 2014 £8.99

e-book (£16.99) from [www.bloomsbury.com/uk](http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk)

This is not a book about Christian contemplative prayer, though you will meet some Christian contemplatives in its pages. Rather, it is a wide-ranging exploration of silence in all sorts of contexts. In writing it the author travelled widely and interviewed a wide variety of people who value silence.

Each chapter is devoted to one theme e.g. The silence of the mountains, silence in drama, in classical music, in psychotherapy, transcendental meditation, Zen Buddhism, a Quaker Meeting in Oxford.

The chapter *Letting go* describes interviews with Fr Richard Rohr and Fr Thomas Keating, *No Words Please* tells of the author's stay at Gethsemani, the Trappist monastery which was the home of Thomas Merton for many years, and there is a visit to the present day Desert Fathers in their monastery in the Egyptian desert: '...the next three days were among the most enriching of my life'.

There are two moving chapters about people with blood on their hands. The first, *Better than bullets*, is the story of an inter-faith group in Lebanon, some of whose members were on opposite sides during the civil war. The group meets for an hour and a half of shared silence, followed by sharing what has come to them in the silence and ending with improvised prayers. 'A Muslim may begin, then a Christian

will continue.' The second is about a man doing life for murder in a Scottish jail who is helped by the Prison Phoenix Trust in his journey into meditation and a changed life.

The final chapter describes the author's own first experience of meeting God in silence many years ago.

**Gail Ballinger**

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**A SPEAKING SILENCE: Quaker Poets of Today.**

***Eds. R.V. Bailey and Stevie Kramer***

2013 IDP £9.95 ISBN 978-1-909357-30-3

At first glance this is a book somewhat outside our usual remit since the editors make no distinction in their choice of poems between the sacred and the everyday. However, this is perhaps an attitude common with members of the Society of Friends: "finding heaven in a wild flower," so we should not be surprised by the range of subjects.

Nonetheless many of the poems are, unsurprisingly, about sitting still, forgetting self.

...let the waves sound, birdsong, seal song  
Enter your dreams and let yourself  
Bleed out into the eternal. (Annie Foster)

Others are questioning or ambiguous:

...I believed in God then  
and love that lasted.  
I no longer breathe  
such absolute air. (Jo Alberti)

Some of the poems mourn noise, celebrate the small, concentrate on people – especially the old and marginalised. There are poems that are almost purely descriptive and some that are funny, but all are thoughtful and clothed in language that is distinctive and fresh.

I have found many that, in the words of George Fox "speak to my condition," and I have used them for my morning

contemplation, reading them slowly and garnering meaning and insights.

The poem by Elizabeth Bailey which you will find on page 8 of this magazine will, I believe, particularly appeal to you. So much of our stillness has to be incorporated in the everyday and Martha's Song encapsulates this to perfection.

**Janet Robinson**

*One of the poems is quoted on page 8 of this magazine*

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## **TRAVELLING INWARDS St Teresa's Interior Castle for everyone**

***Sr Elizabeth Ruth Obbard***

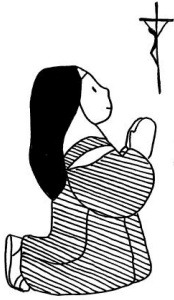
New City 2013 £5.95

ISBN: 978-1-905039-21-4

For St Teresa spiritual growth is the process of travelling in towards the centre of our being, where God dwells. She uses the image of a castle with many rooms, and suggests seven that may be stages on our journey. In rooms 1-3 our efforts are paramount. In room 4 God begins to take the initiative. In rooms 5 and 6 Christ becomes more important to us, and in room 7 God is all in all.

Teresa wrote this as a way to teach her nuns, who were neither theologians nor well educated, so her language is simple and direct. It is also very clear that she is writing out of her own experiences, not some theoretical position. She knows what she is talking about: she has been there. Teresa encourages, but also warns, and is clear about some of the pitfalls we are likely to encounter.

Like Jesus with his parables, Teresa makes good use of images to explain her points, and to engage her readers (or hearers, in the case of her nuns, who would mostly have had her work read aloud to them). Sr Elizabeth follows Teresa's



example by including 46 line drawings to illustrate points in the text, in a book of only 87 pages.

But those few pages draw you in, with so many words of wisdom applicable to us in our spiritual journeys today. Teresa's language is easy, accessible and very down-to-earth, as when she is talking about those distracting thoughts with which we Julian's are all too familiar:

"Thoughts come and go and we just cannot get hold of them and control them as we would like.

We cannot stop the moon and stars in their courses, any more than we can stop thinking.

So don't get depressed about this, giving up the struggle. Just keep trying to remain gently in God's presence without forcing yourself to great concentration.....

Don't forget - we are human beings, not angels!"

This is a book that can easily be read at one sitting, but returned to time and time again to savour and consider just a few of the points Teresa is making. They may sometimes be blunt, or even unwelcome, but there is much wisdom here.

***Deidre Morris***

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