

THE
JULIAN
MEETINGS



*gather in silence
with God*

Magazine

August

2016

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 2016

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Be Still and Know

Exploring Contemplative Prayer

This was the theme for an ecumenical teaching day, arranged in April by the West Malling Julian Meeting at the beautiful, modern St Matthew's Church complex in South Gillingham. The inspiring and stimulating day was led by Bishop Dominic Walker OGS, formerly Bishop of Monmouth. It was attended by 70 people from Kent and the south east, both fellow JM members and others who wished to learn more about contemplative praying.

Bishop Dominic gently introduced us to praying - 'Lord, teach us to pray' - with the emphasis on prayerfulness rather than prayer techniques: praying in praise, confession, thanks-giving and intercession; praying in worship together or alone; spoken and unspoken, with and without words; listening and being praying.

We looked at the place and purpose of praying in our lives. We considered meditation, imaginative praying, and contemplation, the differences between them and the value of silence. The morning talk ended with a short practical look at the Benedictine 'Lectio Divina' praying, using Mark's account of Jesus stilling the storm on the lake (Mark 5. 35-end)

The second talk, in the afternoon, concentrated in more detail on our contemplative praying. Bishop Dominic pointed us to examples from 'The Cloud of Unknowing', 'The Confessions of St Augustine', the Desert Fathers and other classic writings. He also referred to more recent teaching from Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington, John Main and others. All of them authors who write about centring prayers, silence and self-emptying, and the practice of Being with God.

We were reminded of some significant aids for contemplative praying: a quiet place with a lit candle, an icon or flowers; a relaxed but alert posture; centring exercises, words or music

to lead into silence; the use of a word or phrase - 'Maranatha: come Lord Jesus', or the Jesus Prayer - repeated as a mantra or used as a 'fail safe' to refocus from distractions; perhaps the Rosary using either the traditional mysteries or other namings.

The morning and afternoon each concluded with a time of contemplative praying, following the pattern we use at our Julian Meetings. These silences, with 70 people sitting in small groups or on their own around the quiet church were palpably powerful and energising - 'Being Still and Knowing' together, with God.

We all appreciated the quiet welcome and hospitality of the members of St Matthew's, the peaceful setting of the church, the gentle scholarship and wise words from Bishop Dominic and the prayerfulness and silences on what proved to be a most refreshing and renewing day in Resurrection time.

Be Still and Know - Exploring Contemplative Praying' - this we did!

Michel & Ann Echlin
West Malling Julian Meeting

DATE FOR YOUR 2017 DIARY

Saturday 20th May

St Mary's RC Church & Centre, Derby

A Julian Meetings National Gathering

Speaker: **The Rev'd Malcolm Guite**

More details of the day in the December Magazine

The speaker at our 2017 Julian Meetings Day is the Rev'd Malcolm Guite. Some of you will be familiar with his books, and may have used his sonnets or poems to lead in or out of a Julian time of silence, but the following information (taken from his blog) may be of interest.

Malcolm Guite

I am a poet-priest and Chaplain of Girton College Cambridge, but I often travel round Great Britain, and to North America, to give lectures, concerts and poetry readings. I am also one of the Clergy at St. Edward King and Martyr, in Cambridge.

I research and write about the interface between theology and the arts, more specifically Theology and Literature, and have published books on both subjects, separately and together. I also have special interests in Coleridge and CS Lewis.

I offer individual supervisions in both English and Theology, I lecture for the Cambridge Theological Federation, and at times help clergy returning to academia to do a dissertation to reflect on their often amazing parish experiences.

The first time I came to Girton was with my band, Mystery Train, to play at the famed Blues Booze and Chocolate Party. I've been here for seven years now and have always enjoyed the College's unique warmth and sense of community.

I have a rock band called Mystery Train and am part of a jazz-poetry performance collective called riprap. I have three CDs out on Cambridge Riffs and on i-tunes. and give regular poetry / music performances here and in the States.

I am a poor administrator and God is usually obliged to send someone to help.

I am the author of six books (with two more on the way):

<i>What Do Christians Believe?</i>	<i>Granta 2006</i>
<i>Faith Hope and Poetry</i>	Ashgate 2010 & 2012
<i>Sounding the Seasons</i>	Canterbury Press 2012

The Singing Bowl Canterbury Press 2013
The Word in the Wilderness; a poem a day for Lent, Holy Week and Easter Canterbury Press 2014
Waiting on the Word; a poem a day for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany Canterbury Press 2015

Some kind comments on ‘Sounding the Seasons’:

Malcolm Guite knows exactly how to use the sonnet form to powerful effect. These pieces have the economy and pungency of all good sonnets, and again and again, offer deep resources for prayer and meditation to the reader. In his own words, ‘brevity, clarity, concentration and a capacity for paradox’ are typical of the best sonnet sequences, and all those qualities are to be found here.

Rowan Williams, *Archbishop of Canterbury*

Malcolm Guite’s poetic sequence is fresh and wholly contemporary, yet richly rooted in tradition. Using the sonnet form with absolute naturalness as he traces the year and its festivals, he offers the reader – whether Christian or not – profound and beautiful utterance which is patterned but also refreshingly spontaneous. *Sounding the Seasons* is an important poetic event, and one that invites readers to share both celebration and soul-searching.

Grevel Lindop, *poet and literary critic*

Some kind comments on *Faith, Hope and Poetry*:

“A profound theology of the imagination, developed in dialogue with writers both familiar and unfamiliar, beautifully combining close reading with wide horizons

Rowan Williams *Archbishop of Canterbury*

Malcolm Guite has offered us an immensely rich work...in which the truth telling available only in poetry is brought to the service of mature theological vision. It is quite simply both astounding and outstanding

Rt Revd Stephen Sykes

Former Regius Professor of Divinity, Cambridge University

Like Father, Like Son

"I saw in Christ what the Father is like"

*I saw in Christ what the Father is like
as he spoke of the burden he had borne;
I saw there was only love in his look.*

*I watched his will subduing the lake
in the turbulent dark before the dawn:
I saw in Christ what the Father is like.*

*I touched his side when fear seemed to pluck
at my heart and I longed for his concern:
I saw there was only love in his look.*

*I learned his love makes good any lack
in the love we allow him in return;
I saw in Christ what the Father is like.*

*I heard his word that they who are bleak
will be blessed and consoled; for all who mourn
I saw there was only love in his look.*

*I found his grace the key to unlock
and release the delight we cannot earn:
I see in Christ what the Father is like,
I see there is only love in his look.*

*Richard Skinner
after Julian of Norwich*

Able to be part of Church and City

The day didn't begin well. Being stiff and weak with multiple sclerosis, I needed a crane (a sleepy husband) to help me get out of bed: but as it's a work morning for him he's up early anyway. After a cup of tea and some tears, I contemplate what to do after the shaky start.

I decide to head for the cathedral, with the laptop packed in my mobility scooter. I have a plan.

The cool dampness of this July morning is invigorating as I glide across the car park from our new flat in Peterborough, towards the cycle path by the river. Gathered under the bridge, beaks tucked under wings, the swans are still sleepy at this hour. Maybe they have that Monday morning feeling after a weekend of late-night bingeing on the leftovers thrown in the river by restaurant staff on their way home.

The city wakes slowly as the Cathedral bell chimes for the start of the 7.30 service. I feel like Maria in 'The Sound of Music', rushing to the abbey for mass, probably a bit late but sadly, not out of breath from running! It's a pleasure to approach this magnificent building. The porch is beautifully renovated with an ornate golden screen in front of an automatic glass-etched door. Then another glass door with automatic button allows me to enter with ease on my scooter.

Worship

The daylight floods into this huge structure, shining on the long 'walk-way' through the chasm, which will lead me to those gathered for prayer. I enter at the west transept, so face the sunrise. Where the aisles cross, I turn left and see the warm glow of candles, and soft lights illuminating these ancient walls which have held people's prayers for centuries.

A semicircle of chairs face an altar, prepared for communion, and ten of us are ready to worship. Though formal in style, this is a cosy, intimate space. We're inspired by a short reading about the Saint who's remembered by the church today. After the set prayers we read a psalm together. We

intercede for the world and share silence. The pace quickens as people stand to shake hands. Communion is speedily, but sincerely shared: brought to each in turn by the celebrant.

I'm filled with awe, as I stare up at the golden-coloured stone. Three storeys of stained glass windows, plus arches, columns and ledges; flickering sunlight reveals the intricacies of more ornate features above. I feel honoured, privileged, humbled to be here.

Though I've been sat on my scooter, I have felt welcomed and included; cared for and no one has even asked for a donation. We share pleasantries before I head back into the morning air and a coffee shop for breakfast - and it's still only 8 o'clock.

Being part of city life

I now feel positive and energised to be productive today, not left at home, retired with ill health. I've kick-started the day and feel motivated to write: work on my laptop, correspond by email. I'm thankful for these facilities in this developing city. Thankful for the opportunity to be creative and take part in the working world, in comfort amongst the companionship of strangers. Strangers are friends when they open doors, or say, 'Do you need any help?'

It's been a lovely summer with a Mediterranean feel to the traffic-free zones around Bridge Street. Hospitality spills onto the plaza shaded by beautiful trees. I've watched the pigeons bathing; the children running through the fountains in the square; drunk coffee from the Cathedral Diner while listening to busking Eddie; sampled the perfumes in Boots, with the wide aisles enabling me to collect my prescriptions from the cheerful and efficient staff.

I'm learning the names of those selling the Big Issue and I may even pop into the Wildlife Garden at Rail World on my way home. The work of inspired volunteers has created a sanctuary in the city, where bees make honey, moorhens nurture chicks and another cup of tea can be drunk in relaxing

surroundings. The waterfall muffles the sound of the puffing, whistling old steam engine in the Nene Valley, but the excitement it sparks fuels more vigour for the day.

I'm glad to be outside. As I return along the river bank, its concrete edges softened by water-loving flowers, the swans have woken and the gulls call and dance above, anticipating the next toddler arriving with bread to 'feed the ducks'.

When I wear a smile, most passers-by smile back. There are times when disability brings out the best in people, and I hope I can help them to have a positive day too.

The commercial world can be pleasant, and I'm glad we've moved into this multicultural city centre. Disability doesn't feel so bad when people have thought of ways to accommodate us. It is really good to be able - not disabled - to take my part in the life of the church and of this city. So thank you to Peterborough and thank you to God.

Fiona Elliott

Fiona's article reminds us of those who find everyday life difficult due to physical impairment of some kind. Fiona is able to join the Julian Meeting at Peterborough Cathedral (and other things there) because independent access is so easy for her in her mobility scooter. Do Meetings always consider the extra needs some members may have? Or that some people who'd like to come find it impracticable? Is parking close for anyone with limited mobility? If they cannot drive, can they be offered lifts? Is it easy to access a toilet? Is the seating suitable? Low, deep easy chairs play havoc with some backs. One meeting made space on the floor for a member who could lie, but not sit. Some Meetings with members who are hard of hearing provide a printed lead-in and lead-out so that they are not excluded. You may not be able to provide for everyone's needs, but every Julian Meeting should take seriously the needs of those who would like to join them but are unable to.

One day it might be you who is unable to take part

The given moment is the only place one can meet God.

In God there is no time, only the eternal now.

God lives in that now moment on the other side
of the veil that separates time from eternity.

We enter the vestibule of that 'now'
when we concentrate on the present moment

Our beloved God is there,
and it behoves us to be there as well.

Ernest Larkin O.Carm.

The above thoughts were used as a lead-in to silence, and the word 'vestibule' jumped out at me. Not a word we use much these days. A vestibule is a hallway, or space which gives access to another room, or space. An 'in-between' place.

This is one of the things a Julian Meeting can be: a vestibule, an 'in-between space' with the world left outside behind us, and the doors to God's eternity before us. We may not yet have permission or ability to go through the doors ahead of us, but as I sat in the silence I was so aware that God had come though them to join us in the vestibule. Here, we were not in a place to *do* things. We were here in a place of transition, of stillness and waiting, between one world and another, between time and eternity.

Like the wood between the worlds in C.S. Lewis's book 'The Magician's Nephew' it is a very special place to be.

Julian Meetings Publications

Our free leaflet

We recently updated our free introductory leaflet 'Waiting on God in the Silence', which is very useful for publicity. If you have none to give enquirers, or leave in local churches, halls, libraries, etc. perhaps you might like to order some.

Our new booklet

We also have a completely new publication, rather different to our existing ones. We saw a small booklet produced by the Diocese of Gloucester called 'Try Praying', and were inspired to produce one called 'Try Stillness'. Stillness is less and less easy for many people to manage, in our non-stop society, so this gives ideas for people to try a time of stillness in different situations. The booklet is A6 landscape format, with a line drawing on the right hand page and text on the left. Overleaf are examples of two 2-page spreads. The first two pages say:

Always on the go? No time for YOU? No time to just BE?
Why not try STILLNESS?

It can take just 5 minutes, or 10, to catch up with your life.
The effects can last a lot longer

This little book gives you some simple ways to find stillness.
Many people find themselves, their true selves, in stillness
Some people also find God in stillness.
Why not try - it's very simple.

Some things to remember are:

- * Turn off your mobile phone etc. to avoid interruptions.
- * Stillness is easier away from distractions to both mind and body: try a quiet corner at home; a parked car; a garden; a church; anywhere you can be quiet.
- * If you find your hands will not be still, try taking a coin from your pocket and holding it gently.
- * Silence can help us to be still, so if possible find a quiet place in which to practise stillness.

Getting started can be quite simple.

Find a quiet place to sit.

Place both feet on the ground - feel it supporting them.

Sit erect, with your head up. Feel the seat supporting you. Let your hands lie still in your lap. Relax.

Close your eyes, to avoid distractions.

Become aware of your breathing.

Breathe normally, but be aware of the air coming into your lungs, and being breathed out.

Rest quietly in the rhythm of your breathing, just being aware of your body being alive in the stillness.

Be still and know that I am God

Try stillness beside a tree

Stand tall and still as a tree trunk

 feel your feet rooted to the earth

Gaze upwards, towards the light.

See the canopy of the branches

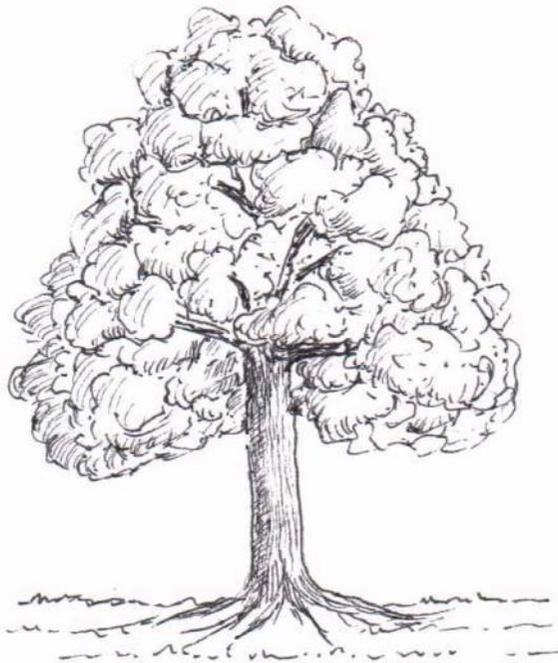
 leafy and green

 fading into autumn fragility

 bare winter branches

In quiet stillness, think about the seasons of your life

The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.



I should like to know how to pray, I should like to know how to cry for help, how to thank, how to wait, how to love, how to weep. I should like to know what can't be learnt, but I know none of it, all I know is how to sit and let God in to do the work for me, God or more often, for one mustn't be demanding, one of his go-betweens, rain, snow, the laughter of children, Mozart.

*From The Eighth Day by Christian Bobin,
translated by Pauline Mataresso
reviewed on page 23*

"... contemplation is very far from being just one kind of thing that Christians do: it is the key to prayer, liturgy, art and ethics, the key to the essence of a renewed humanity that is capable of seeing the world and other subjects in the world with freedom – freedom from self-oriented, acquisitive habits and the distorted understanding that comes from them. To put it boldly, contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit. To learn contemplative practice is to learn what we need so as to live truthfully and honestly and lovingly. It is a deeply revolutionary matter."

Dr Rowan Williams,
Address to the Catholic Bishops, 2013

Three People's 'Thin Places'

I found another 'thin place' recently, when a wrong turning on the way home from Poole took us to Moreton church in Dorset. I've long wanted to see the windows there, which were engraved by Laurence Whistler. The beauty of the windows and the stillness of the place have stayed with me ever since. A new window was finally installed years after its engraving: known as the forgiveness window. Did Judas find forgiveness? *You can read about the church and its windows on the church's website www.stnicholasmoreton.org.uk*

The small island of Samson in the Isles of Scilly has been uninhabited since the middle of the 19th century. Amid the bracken are the remains of cottages. It has twin hills, on the ridges of which are prehistoric burial sites. From the ridges looking due west you can see nothing but some rocks and then the Atlantic. It is truly a place where you can both sense the majesty of God's creation and feel a link to the distant past and its rituals.

I come through the cloister garth garden, enter through the south door, and cross to the worn steps down to the crypt. When I reach the bottom and turn left I am in a space built over 900 years ago, whose sturdy columns support the east end of Rochester's cathedral. This space opens into one 800 years old, with slightly more elegant columns, and enclosed in glass screens to create a quiet place for prayer and contemplation. Light filters in from head height windows whose glazing is at ground level outside. Sitting here before a simple altar and an icon, I am so aware of the presence of God, and the prayers of all who have come here before me, through the ages. The stone columns support the church building, but it is God and prayer that supports the people of God in this thin place.

Do you know a 'thin place' where God's presence seems particularly close? We'd love to hear about them, and what they mean to you. Your suggestions could be posted on the JM Forum

For one who had 'lived by the bell' for years as a teacher, losing track of time was quite something for me.

I had no idea of the extent to which I'd lost track of time until I signed out in the visitors' book at St. Julian's Church and saw that well over an hour had passed since I'd signed in. I felt as if I'd been there for about twenty minutes. Throughout that time I was the only person in the church.

I'd spent most of that time looking at the stained-glass window, at that depiction of Jesus on the cross.

I knew that, on my return home after my four-day retreat in Norwich, some people might ask me what I thought about St. Julian's Church and Shrine, so I tried to collect my thoughts. But I didn't seem to have any thoughts to collect. This was the strangest, weirdest experience I'd had for a long while. I normally had lots of thoughts whizzing around in my head, sometimes at war with each other – I had what I thought of as 'mental arguments.' For the remainder of that day, I had no 'mental arguments'.

Over our evening meal (we were not expected to remain silent during mealtimes) I spoke briefly with a fellow-guest about my visit to the Julian Shrine, and about my lack of any particular thoughts on it.

Later, as I sat in my room busy doing nothing, I heard a knock on the door. My visitor was the lady I had spoken with at our evening meal. She'd brought some leaflets and she told me she thought I'd been called to contemplative prayer. I had never heard of it, and was thankful for the explanatory leaflets she gave me.

I read several of the books she recommended to me. It was a long time before I spoke about contemplative prayer with anyone, a long time before I asked anyone else about it.

Sometime after my visit to Norwich, I attended a course at

our local retreat centre. In one small-group session, the leader suggested that we might spend some time in silent prayer. He led us into the silence with 'The Jesus Prayer': 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' We were silent for quite a short time – about ten minutes. When we came out of the silence, I looked at the circle of people in our group and felt that I was with friends – yet just hours before our time of silent prayer, we were all strangers.

The Holy Spirit unites. The Holy Spirit also shines a light on divisions that already exist.

My love for Jesus grows daily.

My love for truth, justice and mercy grows daily.

My anger and sorrow about duplicity, injustice and cruelty have become keener and sharper.

I would like to have a balance in my life between solitude and community, between prayer and action. It's not easy, but I keep praying.

And prayer is powerful.

'..Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.' Luke 5:16

Christine Quinn-Jones

Christine, who is a Julian Meetings Member, put this on her website ['yieldingtothewind'](#)

She graciously agreed that The Julian Meetings could re-print it in January 2015 on our pro-boards <http://thejulianmeetings.proboards.com/thread/153/losing-track-norwich-member-christine#ixzz4R4uUwne> and we are pleased to now include it in the magazine, to reach the wider JM readership.

Have you had an interesting, or surprising, experience that you could share with us? God certainly works in amazing ways in our lives, when we let him.

Meditation for Change

We seem to have a greater need for stillness and meditation now than ever before; to help us cope with information overload, perpetual chatter, seemingly endless busyness. But coping with the present is only one part of life that prayerful Christians need to be concerned with. Christian churches seeking to halt the decline in church attendance need to steer imaginative paths to the future: to dream ways forward to engage both the disaffected and the 'lost' generations.

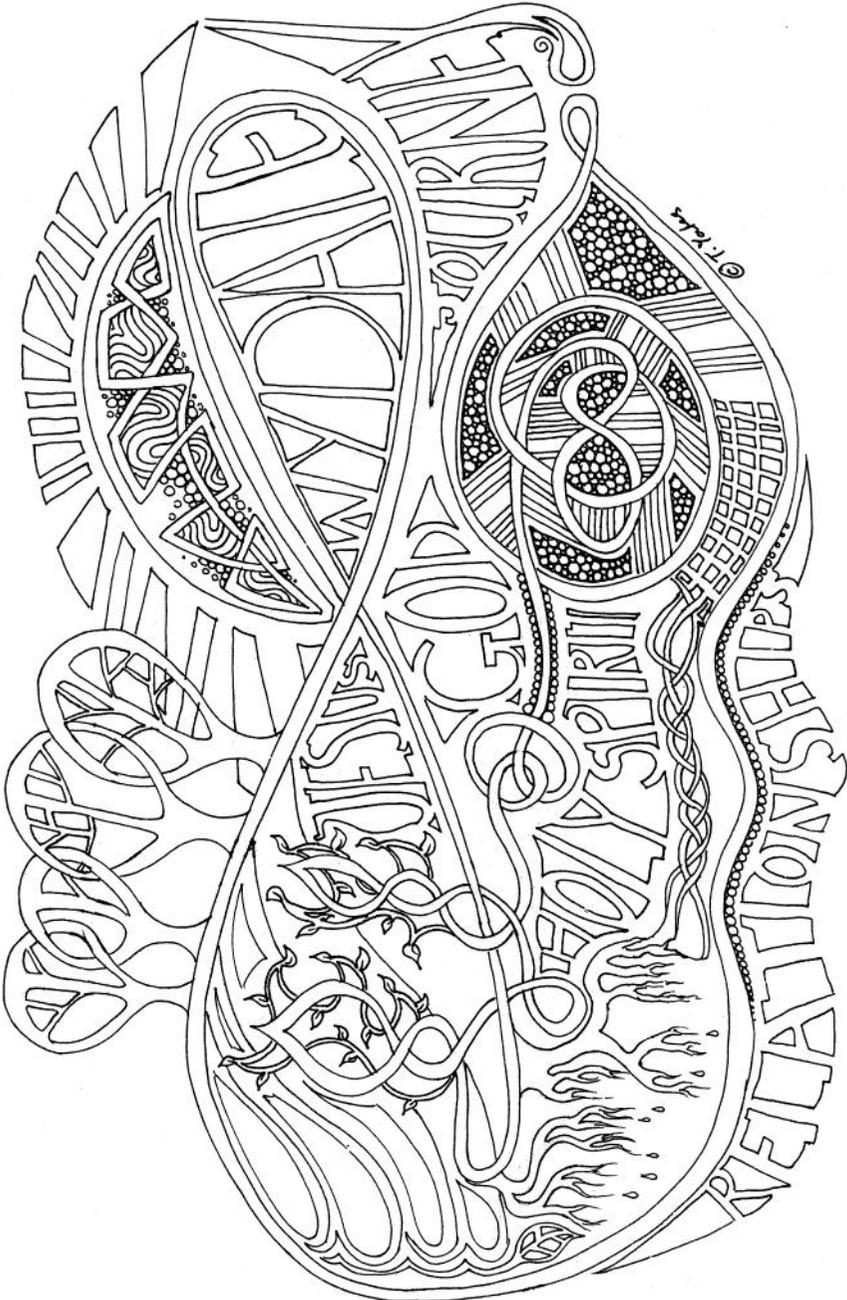
Change, particularly major change, unsettles all involved: those seeking to identify and implement a way forward and those who will be affected in any way. We each react in our own way, and at varying speed. In 1969 Elizabeth Kubler Ross identified the stages that patients suffering from serious illness - and their families - pass through: from denial, anger, confusion to acceptance. As Keith Elford recently reminded us, the emotional reaction to change is frequently one of grief. Loss is often part of the process and shouldn't be ignored.

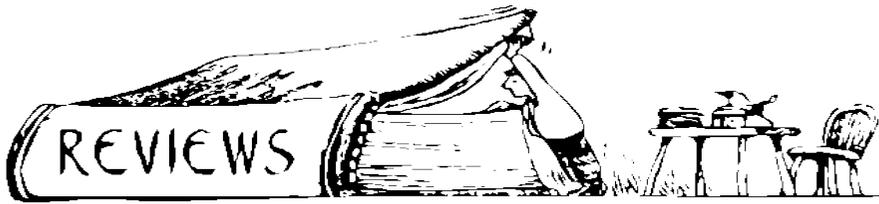
Radical change cannot be envisioned or enacted by any one person – different roles are required. Different roles need different gifts 'but it is the same God who activates all of them' (1 Cor.12.6). In contemporary language we might think of Paul's prophet as a change agent; the pastor as priest/ minister; the speaker in tongues as interpreter/enabler; and the teacher as implementer. The least understood role is that of change agent who, like the prophet, dreams of futures.

All involved in change in our churches, and in secular life, might seriously consider how stillness and meditation could feed them. Regular meditation, as those who practice it know, feeds and reinvigorates body, mind and spirit: 'May you recognise in your life the presence, power and light of your soul.' How might we in the Julian Meetings consciously seek to support the feeding of those involved in changing church?

Jennifer Tann

Tracey Yates drew this at a parish weekend at Wydale Hall. It is for your personal use to contemplate, colour in if you wish, but **not to copy**.





SACRED IN THE CITY: seeing the spiritual in the everyday
Margaret Silf

Lion £9.99

ISBN-978-0-7459-5698-5

This hard back is the most beautiful and meaningful book I have read for a long time, and having lived in a city for two years it was totally relevant for me. The cover picture is a photograph of a city at night, the colourful twinkling lights reflected across the shimmering watery foreground.

There are photographs on most of the 100 pages from cities around the world: many are unusual shots and unexpected perspectives which could also describe the writing. Each of the ten chapters covers interesting topics: At the city gates, At home, At work, On the move, The market place, Winners and losers, Give and take, Gathered together, The green amid the brown, From dawn to dusk and All things new. A profound quotation begins each chapter.

This book is deep and enchanting. As you read you are taken on a mindful walk around a city, to reflect on certain aspects of the space and life within it. Each chapter describes an aspect of city life, followed by a parallel Bible story, in a modern translation, as a teaching point. There are then questions to make you think, finishing with a number of reflections to ponder and pray.

Margaret has created a very inspiring read which encourages us to look both at things we enjoy, and things we find difficult, finding God in those situations, and reflecting on the experiences of Jesus. This would make it a useful tool for a small group or a very precious gift. An easy read, but one to take slowly, allowing time to digest.

Fiona Elliott

OUR LAST AWAKENING

Janet Morley

SPCK 2016 £9.99
ISBN 978-0281073542

You may be familiar with Janet Morley's books of poems with sensitive commentaries for Lent and Easter (*The Heart's Time*) and for Advent (*Haphazard by Starlight*). This book is similar in form: well-chosen high-quality poems with thoughtful reflections which help the reader get the most out of the poetry – but the theme this time is death.

The book ranges from the sense of mortality and fear of death, through the process of dying, to the time of grieving for the deceased or celebrating their lives. The final section is of poems of hope for what lies beyond the grave, and this is the most consistently and obviously “religious” section. In the other parts, some poems are not religious at all, and some are full of anger or despair.

Although I have read a lot of poetry, many of the works, and some of the poets, were new to me – far more than in Janet Morley's other two books. As always she is both alert to the literary nature of the poems she discusses and also profound, drawing the reader into meditating on what is being said without seeking to be at all “preachy” or to push a particular religious message.

This is not a devotional book, though many traditions in Christianity and other religions hold that it is coming to terms with death that helps to give meaning to life. It is a book to dip into, and to share with people who are mourning or are preoccupied with thoughts of death, whether they are Christian or not. Different poems will speak to people at different stages in their journey through life, mourning and dying.

Michael Cayley

THROUGH CORRIDORS OF LIGHT: poems of consolation in times of illness

edited by John Andrew Denny

Lion Hudson 2011 £9.99

ISBN978 0 7459 5547 6

I learnt of this book when I read *Treasured and Transformed* (see review page). John Andrew Denny was a musician and editor before he became seriously ill with ME over 20 years ago. In his introduction he describes how illness had limited his life and how receiving a copy of John Masefield's poem *Sea Fever* from a friend had brought change: he found something about its rhythms and images soothing, bringing some measure of relief and healing. He moved on to other poems and also learned to meditate. Eventually, he decided to gather together poems that other chronically sick people had found helpful, with a view to publishing them for a wider readership. He wrote an article for the *Church Times*, and a letter to *The Tablet* and various support groups, asking people to send him any poem that had given them succour and relief in chronic or serious illness.

The result is not so much an anthology as a community of poets sharing their path through suffering, though it would be wrong to suggest that all the poems are about suffering. It is more that what they say may lighten or enlighten ours. Contributions are from poets both classic: Shakespeare, George Herbert, Keats, Christina Rossetti and more modern: David Adam, Gerard Manley Hopkins, John O'Donohue, Emily Dickinson, Agatha Christie, and a number of poems by young sufferers of various chronic diseases. Poetry's compact nature can be a huge help, easier to take in than a novel in but at the same time it often has deeper layers still to be uncovered. The poems were chosen especially for their lyrical properties.

The book, skilfully and sensitively edited, is arranged under five headings. These show a progression from shock to grief to acceptance, learning to be still and appreciate what we

have, finding consolation in the cycle of the seasons, our spiritual growth and meditating with the poets on death. It has a comprehensive index; a suggested reading list, mainly other anthologies; a brief life of each poet represented, which often heightens the significance of their poem.

This book will have particular appeal to sufferers of chronic illness, and their families and friends seeking to understand. Sufferers of chronic illness are invited to contribute to a future new edition of the book a poem which has helped them, via a website www.poemsofconsolation.net The book can be bought via the website or from booksellers.

Gail Ballinger

PRACTICING SILENCE – new and selected verses

Bonnie Thurston

Paraclete Press 2014 £12.99

ISBN 978-1-61261-561-5

This poetry book is like a visit to a monastery; indeed Brother Paul Quenon writes “The voice could easily be recognised by a monk or a nun of long years of monastic life”. Bonnie Thurston, formerly a Professor of New Testament, now lives quietly in her home state of West Virginia writing poetry and theological works, giving lectures, retreats and spiritual direction. She follows the Rule of St Benedict and lives not far from the Trappist Monastery of Gethsemane Abbey where fellow poet Thomas Merton was a monk.

The poems in the first section are about Monasteries, starting with ‘Their light shines in darkness’. This is followed by the section ‘Vocation’, and then ‘Honarium’ follows the regular monastic day in the Benedictine tradition. The last sections: ‘Lectio Divina’, ‘Interior Prayer’ and ‘Anchorites, Hermits and Solitaries’ will speak especially to many Julians.

Her poems are short, rarely more than a page long. This poetry is a form of prayer, to be taken slowly and allowed to gradually unfold, to be visited again ... and again.....

Anne Stamper

**A LIFE GIVING WAY – A Contemplative Commentary on
the Rule of St Benedict:
*Esther de Waal***

Canterbury Press, 2013 £16.99
ISBN9781848255623

This is a companion volume to “Seeking God: The Way of St Benedict” (1984), written at a different stage of life. In 1984 de Waal shared her search for the values under-pinning a busy life as wife, mother, teacher, offering support and hospitality from her home in the cathedral close. She found in the Rule a way to balance the demands of work, study, rest and praise, and to develop relationships with family, community, world and God.

This book is written from the solitude of her home on the Welsh borders: de Waal in tune with the ebb and flow of the seasons – finding the presence of God, not in the hustle and bustle, but in the minutiae of daily life. She studies the text of the Rule, chapter by chapter, pondering the words in her heart, exploring the myriad of little treasures to be picked out from every sentence.

De Waal offers us this ancient wisdom, steeped in the scriptures, that always points us towards Christ. The vows of stability (Christ the Rock), conversion (Christ the Way) and obedience (Christ the Word) are explored. The opening words: “Listen, carefully...” invite us into a way of living our Christian commitment at this point in our lives today. We are shown the revolutionary nature of the text for the end of the fifth century, with its core values of equality, fairness, sharing and a rootedness in the place God has planted us. We are challenged to look at issues of authority – how to live under it, and how to accept leadership responsibilities. We are asked to reflect on our own lives: the cardinal sin of grumbling that destroys relationship, the offering of hospitality, the role of communal and private prayer, and ways to offer tough love to one who needs to be brought back into community.

Each element of the text impacts on the others to lead a

harmonious, balanced life: “Prayer without study will become uninformed; study without prayer will become simply an intellectual enterprise; work without both will be removed from reality.” (p142)

Ann Morris

THE EIGHTH DAY: SELECTED WRITINGS

Christian Bobin, Edited by Pauline Matarasso

Darton Longman & Todd 2015 £12.99

ISBN 978 0 232 53171 8

I was quite ignorant of Christian Bobin’s writings: this is his first work to be published in the UK, two books having been published in the USA. Bobin, aged 65, has been a fulltime writer for many years and his books sell in France in ‘quietly astonishing numbers’. He aims to live a life ‘without events’.

The whole book is remarkable: attractively produced, with a thoughtful preface and introduction which set the work in context, and then a luminous translation of what might be described as prose poetry.

Pauline Matarasso has selected short essays, and extracts from longer works, to give British readers a taster of Bobin’s themes and style. Some pieces are short paragraphs which need to be read ruminatively; some are almost surreal and one has to let go and let the thoughts seep inside one without analysis. The range of subjects is wide: he walks in the country; he writes perceptively about his father in a home for dementia sufferers; he writes a fairy tale; he creates short aphorisms that are packed with meaning and need sucking slowly like a boiled sweet. Everything runs past God but it is a God who can be ‘heard in music, in silence. In the bud that bursts, behind the cloud sailing by; in a gap-toothed mouth’

He regards silence as ‘the highest form of thought:

‘...and it is in developing this in us a mute attention to the day, that we will find our place in the absolute that surrounds us’.

‘Solitude is one of the principal goods of life, on a par with food and sleep’

I think Bobin is like Thomas Traherne; both are writers who remind us of the enchantment of the world, who enhance the ordinary and make unusual connexions which cause us to pause, observe and praise. It is a book I shall keep by my bed and I am grateful to him for reminding me to both look and see.

Janet Robinson

PATTERNS IN THE PSALMS

James Newman Gray

SPCK 2016 £9.99
ISBN 978 0 281 07604 8

Having enjoyed colouring in the designs of Mary Fleeson and Tracey Yates, I looked forward to reviewing this book as I would have to colour in some of the designs before I could write anything! Quotations from 30 psalms have inspired James Newman Gray’s designs. Many are from nature - fish, bees, a stag, fruit, birds, the sun, fields, landscape, fire etc. Some are man made structures - gates, a bridge, boats.

There is plenty of variety, but I found many of them, for my taste, too stylised. Some could have been a section of wall-paper, and some were so regular that they felt computer generated rather than hand drawn. This does not detract from them as designs to colour in - but I have found designs that are more ‘free-flowing’ encourage a prayerful attention in a way these did not. Some of the ‘interpretations’ of the word or image seemed to me to be inappropriate: ‘Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise’ is illustrated by a small, typically English, country house and garden.

However, many people will enjoy this Christian addition to the craze for colouring books, and may well find it more prayerful than I did.

Deidre Morris

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