



Magazine
December
2023

The Julian Meetings Magazine December 2023

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Each writer expresses their own views, which may not be held by the Editor or by the Julian Meetings Council.

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*

For more information,
visit our website at
www.thejulianmeetings.net

This QR code will
take you directly to it



We do not charge for this magazine.
We do invite readers who enjoy the magazine, or value our promotion of contemplative prayer, to make a donation towards the cost of it.
A suggested donation of £4 per magazine would be much appreciated.
Please see page 31 for details of how to donate.

In the Beginning IS the Word

(Thinking of the reading for Christmas Day, the opening verses of John's gospel, I found myself hearing them in my head but in the present tense, not the past. It gave an amazing immediacy to the reading. Try it for yourself.)

In the beginning is the Word, and the Word is with God, and the Word is God. He is with God in the beginning. Through him all things are being made; without him nothing is being created. In him is life, and that life is the light of men. The light is shining in the darkness and the darkness does not understand it.

Here is a man sent from God whose name is John. He comes as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men may believe. He himself is not the light; he comes only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every person is coming into the world. He is in the world, and though the world is ever being made through him, the world does not recognise him. He comes to that which is his own, yet his own do not receive him. Yet to all who do receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but of God.

The Word is becoming flesh, and is making his dwelling among us. We see his glory, the glory of the one and only, who comes from the Father, full of grace and truth.



“So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for ...” Egypt? Armenia? Sudan? The USA? Europe? Anywhere but ‘home’.

Today millions of refugees, who fled just as Jesus and his parents did, live without ‘home’, and often without hope. And so the Christmas story continues

There

There, in that other world, what waits for me?
What shall I find after that other birth?
No stormy, tossing, foaming, smiling sea,
But a new earth.

No sun to mark the changing of the days,
No slow, soft falling of the alternate night,
No moon, no star, no light upon my ways,
Only the Light.

No grey cathedral, wide and wondrous fair,
That I may tread, where all my fathers trod.
Nay, nay, my soul, no house of God is there,
But only God.

Mary Coleridge

The lead-in for a Julian Meeting earlier this year

Devote yourself to the art of discerning the divine presence and become a witness to this presence; learn to pray to your Lord without ceasing.

Do not value anything above the love of Christ! Christ is also in you, and in prayer you will find his presence in you.

If you truly want to live in the presence of God, your prayer should be silent, personal, and hidden, according to the example given to you by Jesus.

The Rule of Bose

*Our paths may cross
in lonely desert spaces,
or crowded city places,
on mountain steep,
or urban street,
but our paths will cross,
and you will offer
to lighten our load,
walk our road,
ease the pain,
take the strain.*

*Our paths shall cross,
when you will call,
and shall we turn,
can we learn
to hear your voice,
make the choice?*

*Our paths will cross...
Our gain or loss.*



How much better is silence; the coffee cup, the table.
How much better to sit by myself like the solitary sea-
bird that opens its wings on the stake. Let me sit here
for ever with bare things, this coffee cup, this knife,
this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself.

Virginia Woolf

Beginnings and Endings

We had a time of silence, lasting 20 minutes, during the closing worship at our 50th Anniversary Gathering this year. This was the lead-in to the silence:

The Christian Life is a journey with others; people together, sharing our lives, our hopes, our experiences, our struggles.

There are always arrivals and departures.

New travellers bring fresh experiences, different horizons.

With joy and hope we welcome them, ready to learn, make room and go on together.

With gratitude and pain we farewell others who go, in answer to the call of God, into new options, to another place or move ahead of us on the road through death.

In welcome, and in letting go, we seek the presence of God's Spirit. Always the bond and the separator, always the comforter and the distributor, always a presence of love.

Neither more with the arrival nor with the departing than with those who stay.

Pioneers and Settlers receive the Spirit's blessing.

John Rackley



Welcome to Phil and Jonathan

Phil Wield We are delighted that Phil is taking on the role of database, membership and meetings manager. He will be keeping track of our magazine mailing lists and meeting registrations. Plus a great deal of other essential behind the scenes administration without which the JM network could not function. Phil has extensive experience of database management and administration.



Jonathan Smith We are pleased to welcome Jonathan, who will be overseeing our communications, both printed and online. One early result of his involvement is detailed on later pages, along with some other changes to what we offer and how we do things.

Thank You x 2

Our first Thank You is to **Peter Rowe**, who has been our book reviews editor for a number of years. He has done an excellent job, and we are very grateful for all the skill and discernment he brought to the role. Sadly, ill health means that Peter has now retired from this role. We pray that God will bring him and his family comfort, support and healing in his retirement.

Our second Thank You is to **Pat Robinson**. She has been sending out our publications to all parts of the country for well over 12 years now, and has done a marvellous job. Pat has wrapped parcels large and small, and thankfully still has an excellent local post office! She adapted to dealing with on-line orders, as well as those that came through the post. Pat is a keen gardener, so will now have more time and energy to devote to this.

Could you replace either Pat or Peter?

Book Reviews Editor

Collates a selection of book / CD etc. reviews for each JM Magazine

Method:

- * Liaise with publishers for review copies of suitable books
- * Welcome suggestions of possible books for review from any other source.
- * Welcome unsolicited reviews, accepting them if suitable.
- * Keep a list of potential reviewers who have a variety of backgrounds (this currently exists).
- * Welcome suggestions for new reviewers,
- * E-mail reviewers details of books available to review.
- * Send books of choice to reviewers, and receive their reviews in due course.
- * Check the review for full publishing details, and for content and length (350 words max.). Edit the review if necessary.
- * E-mail reviews to the Magazine Editor for inclusion in the magazine. They may be further edited if this is necessary.
- * Receive a 'Read' PDF from the Magazine Editor for forwarding to those publishing houses whose books have been reviewed.

Usually there is room for 6 / 7 reviews per issue.

We do not normally publish negative reviews.

We do not usually review books on theology, bible study, church history or liturgy.

Keep in mind the readership and avoid being over academic. Yes, there are academics who read the magazine, but they are likely to see other reviews. Think about what might be helpful to a wide variety of people. Many people value books which include material suitable for use as a 'lead-in' to silence at a Julian Meeting.

The Publications Distributor

Holds the printed copies of our publications and posts these out when orders arrive by post or via the online shop.

Has enough space to store the publications, envelopes etc.

Has access to a post office to send a range of parcel sizes.

Is a well-organised person who can deal with both paper and online orders; can parcel up orders efficiently; can handle payments and pay in cheques; can keep track of stock and advise if any items are getting low and need reprinting.

Because so much of our material is available free online, this job has reduced in size but is still a vital service for those who need printed copies of booklets, publicity etc.

Please contact Deidre Morris (see page 38) if you would like more information on either of these roles.

We would still welcome help with:

Website management – WordPress.com / Woo Commerce

This includes a distinct role of Shop Manager, and various roles connected with the blog:

Editor – to publish / manage posts, inc. posts of other users.

Author – who can publish and manage their own posts.

Contributors – who can write and manage their own posts but cannot publish them.

Social Media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SoundCloud, YouTube, Vimeo, Anchor Podcaset

Domain registration and management including email addresses - One.com and 123Reg

If you've relevant experience of any role's technical aspects, even if not of the specific software, could you help us?

You will be asked to provide references, and invited to join the JM Council.

If you would like to know more about any of these roles, please e-mail Ann Moran: it@thejulianmeetings.net

What's New in JM

Read our magazine back numbers

We are putting on our website an archive of JM magazines from 2011, in the Heyzine format. So you will be able to browse through 12 years of JM magazines, at your leisure.

Subscribe to the website

You can subscribe to our website page Blog & Articles. Go to the page and enter your email address in the box. You will then receive an email every time there is an update. We will be making more use of the Blog in future.

All our resources in one place.

We have put all our booklets in a Heyzine library - see the website for the link. We have also put all our resources, downloads, Audio, Video, on a new Resources page on the website, as well as on the individual pages About Julian Meetings, Contemplative Prayer and Meditation and Starting a Meeting.

Donations for Meeting Registration

We have decided to stop charging an annual registration fee for each Julian Meeting and instead rely on the generosity of Meeting members to make a donation. Meeting first contacts will receive a letter with this magazine explaining the changes and what they need to do to ensure their meeting remains 'live' on the register.

Donations have always been a major contributor to our finances, so we greatly appreciate all your donations, large or small - please keep contributing to the on-going life of the Julian Meetings



Local advertising leaflet

The website now has a free downloadable A5 leaflet that can be personalised with the details of your local Julian Meeting. It has the information from our tri-fold leaflet 'Waiting on God' but in an easily printable and foldable form, and with space to include you own Julian Meetings details.

The next two pages show you the front and back pages of the leaflet. The centre pages have the other information from our 'Waiting on God' trifold leaflet.

Self Publishing on Amazon

Our Communications Manager, Jonathan Smith has researched the possibility of a self publishing account on Amazon. This is possible and could have many advantages.

We need someone to host the KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing) account on Amazon. This will not affect your normal Amazon account. You will not need to prepare the publications. You will need to give KDP your personal contact details and your NI number for tax purposes. It is unlikely that there will be any personal tax implications.

Jonathan will give you all the information and support you need. Please contact him on

communications@thejulianmeetings.net

We recently registered Meetings at:

Groby

Leicestershire

Up Somborne

Hampshire



Julian Meetings are groups of people who meet regularly in order to grow in the practice of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition

A Julian Meeting is usually 6-15 people of various denominations, both lay people and clergy who meet regularly for Christian contemplative prayer. They may meet in a house, church, hall or chapel.

We also have some Meetings online and a few mixed ones. The latter may sometimes meet in person and sometimes online, or the meeting is both live and online.

What we do.

A brief reading, and / or piece of music, leads into (usually) 30 minutes of silent contemplative prayer.

The silence may be followed by a time for tea / coffee and conversation.

Julian Meetings do vary. Our main guide-lines are that:

- * Each meeting centres on contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition;
- * It welcomes people of all denominations and faiths, or none;
- * It welcomes those seeking a place for silent prayer.

We teach no specific method, but our 'Basics of Contemplative Prayer' booklet gives guidelines, as does our website. We do encourage people to seek what is right for them; to discover how they can integrate contemplation into their daily prayer life and how personal and group contemplative prayer can enrich each other.

Those who attend Julian Meetings may take part in the life of their own church, but some have no formal church links.

Holy Ground

What constitutes holy ground? Is all ground holy, or is some more holy than others?

This poem unpacks the sacredness of the dirt under our feet - what questions does it unlock for you?

The soil crumbles in between my fingers,
But there lingers a sense of the deep,
The creep of roots out of sight,
Crawlies that live below the light,
And the sleep of a million, million layers pressing ever downward.

I press my fingers into the dirt,
And the little stones and thorns and spikes hurt
A little bit, but nowhere near as much as I feel alive.
I thrive in the grittiness where everything thrives and trees survive
In the hive of creatures and creepers and clay.

The soil is washing away and breaking down
While we build another city, extend another town,
But it is here, with my hands lost in sandy loam
That we are closest to home,
Closest to the God who shaped us,
Like I'm shaping this mound, and waiting to be found
By the spirit who moves over this ground
The bit of compost in my back yard,
Where suddenly feeling connected doesn't feel so hard.
And I take off my shoes for a moment,
Because the bush isn't burning,
But there's a glimpse of glory in the bird-sound
And I think I'm standing on holy ground.

*You could spend a few minutes thinking about the earth around you - in a garden, a plant pot or the local open space.
If you can, put your fingers into the soil, feel the grit between your fingers, and pray.*

And be still. And be still.

Tim Baker

*I lift my eyes
to the quiet hills,
to a calm that is mine to share;
secure and still
in the Father's will
and kept by the Father's care.*

We sang Timothy Dudley-Smith's hymn at church recently, and it struck me that this verse expressed so well what a Julian Meeting can feel like.

Following April's article on prayer and walking, I was sent this extract from a Diocesan leaflet suggesting different types of prayer people might try.

Prayer walking — alone, paired, or in groups: praying for the places, and the people who live, work, learn or play there, as you walk the streets of your Parish.

People may do this often in places where they walk regularly, or there may be a planned route to cover the whole of the parish every few months or at least every year.



I was also told of a diocesan member of staff whose job took him all over the diocese. If the roads were not too busy, he often prayed for each parish as he drove through them. He would know some of the problems they were facing, or some of the good things that were happening, and all could be put into God's hands.

He needed no text, for the order for compline was always the same, and he knew it by heart. As an invariable prelude he said silently the Jesus Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*. Each petition was slow, measured, geared to his breathing, and as his mind and body stilled, the troubles and distractions of the day began to fade from his thoughts. And in that vacated space silence unpacked itself and, through the static and hiss, a deeper silence came, like the depths of the sea.

Rev. Richard Coles

This was not from one of Richard Coles' spiritual books, but his first foray into detective fiction. I wonder what his non-church-going readers made of it?

Prayer, descending into the depths of God, is not there to make life easy for us. Prayer: not for any kind of result, but in order to create with Christ a communion in which we are free.

Brother Roger

Wisdom consists in doing the next thing
you have to do,
doing it with your whole heart
and finding delight in doing it

Meister Eckhart

Julian of Norwich - a gifted, tenacious journalist?

Amid a worldwide miasma of lies, 'alternative facts' and obfuscation, who can we trust to tell us the truth? Whose voices report faithfully from the front line?

This year marks 650 years since the medieval mystic, Julian of Norwich, was given a message 'for all the world'. It was reported with integrity and kept safe down the years because, according to the late Sr Benedicta Ward, it was intended specifically for our time.



On 8 May 1373 Julian received visions of the crucifixion. She pondered their meaning for some 40 years, living as an anchoress, or hermit, in a cell at the side of St Julian's church in Norwich. She set out her understanding of all she had been shown in 'Revelations of Divine Love'.

Dangerous

It was a dangerous and perforce secret mission. While the medieval church was preaching sin, punishment, purgatory and hellfire, Julian was writing about God's unconditional love and merciful compassion. She wrote that God was never angry, that he looked upon his darling children 'with pity, not with blame', had forgiven us for all wrongdoing, past, present and future, and was for ever coming towards us with his mercy and love. Julian knew full well the risk she was taking. Had she been discovered she would have had to recant or be burnt at the stake.

Persistent

I see Julian as a brilliant journalist – the best of her kind. She had the integrity to risk her life for the story, as do many modern-day journalists. Julian is a reliable witness, a diligent fact-checker who dared to say, at a press conference with

God, 'Sorry, I didn't quite get that point. Would you mind clarifying it?' Add to her extraordinary courage and integrity a thoroughness and rigorous attention to detail and pains-taking efforts to describe precisely what she was shown, as she understood that every detail counted.

Not an easy task

Julian confronted the toughest questions, getting to grips with the puzzling and sometimes disturbing knowledge entrusted to her – deep, mysterious themes that take some unravelling. What to make of 'sin is behoovable' – translatable as 'appropriate' or 'necessary' or 'sin shall be a glory' - when you support the church's condemnation of sin? She wrote it all down faithfully, with no fudging. The answer, she discovered, is that the pain caused by sin can become a source of self-knowledge and humility and an acceptance of God's forgiveness and love.

An honest witness

Julian's best known saying is 'All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well', but she is no Pollyanna. She lived through war, plague, famine and social unrest. She viewed the world through the little window of her anchor-hold, to which people brought their cares, seeking kindness and understanding. Trust is hard to win and easy to lose. Julian's honest voice is a witness who helps us, in a world of pain and uncertainty, find the courage to dare to trust that we have the certainty of God's love.

Margaret Coles

*An edited version of her article in 'The Times'
(13 May 2023) and used with permission*

In the 650th year since she received her revelations, Luke Penkett reviews two new novels about Julian of Norwich. *Luke was until recently the Hon Librarian and Archivist of the Julian Centre in Norwich. He is now the Hon Secretary of the Margery Kempe Society and Curator of the Margery Kempe Centre in King's Lynn.*

I, JULIAN by Claire Gilbert

Hodder and Stoughton 2023.

Hardback ISBN 978 1 399 80752 4. Price £18.99.

Paperback ISBN 978 1 399 80754 8. Price £9.99.

Also available in Kindle from Amazon. Price £11.49

Claire writes ‘The powerful, poetic book *Revelations of Divine Love*, in which a woman writes in English of visions she saw in May 1373, to a standard comparable to Geoffrey Chaucer, is the inspiration for my story.’ She adds, ‘My story, then, is a work of my imagination. But I have tried to make my guess work plausible’ (321). It is a story, lauded by such scholars as Janina Ramirez, Nicholas Watson, and Rowan Williams. Hopefully this book will introduce many new readers to Julian, and inspire those who know her slightly to return with fresh eyes to *Revelations of Divine Love*’

FOR THY GREAT PAIN HAVE MERCY ON MY LITTLE PAIN

Victoria Mackenzie

Bloomsbury Publishing 2023.

Hardback ISBN 978 1 5266 4788 7. Price £14.99.

In this, her first book, Victoria has brought together two famous women mystics of the 14th century. People to whom Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe are just names are enjoying finding out about them. Hopefully, they will go on to read *Revelations of Divine Love* or *The Book of Margery Kempe* and discover a whole new world of aspiration, hope, engagement and love.

Victoria researched her subjects well. Readers can learn much about Julian, Margery, and their era from her book: there is a reference to the *Ancrene Wisse*, which readers of *Revelations* and the *Book of Margery Kempe* may not know. It is well-presented, in three sections, drawing on the Penguin Classics translations and including poetry, prayer, and drama (at the eventual meeting). My hope is that, with bite-sized chunks of fiction, *For Thy Great Pain* might serve as a springboard into meditation and contemplation in our Julian Meetings.

The 11th Step: What is it? What does it have to do with JM?



The 11th step is one of the twelve steps created by the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in the mid-1930s. It has been used by a number of other addiction recovery programmes ever since.

'Step 11: Sought by prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the

power to carry that out.'

AA is a spiritual programme, but not a religious programme, organisation or church. Members are encouraged to find the God of their own understanding - a Power greater than themselves.

Origins

AA grew out of the Christian religion, initially influenced by the Oxford Group (not the Oxford Movement) and later the

Jesuits. The Jesuits sent a priest, Fr Ed Dowling, to see the founder of AA, Bill Wilson, as they suspected that the 12 steps were based on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.

This was not the case, but Fr Dowling became Bill's spiritual director and an influential, non-alcoholic, member of AA. *

The AA founders quickly realised that, to spread their message of recovery as widely as possible, they had to be open and welcoming to people of all faiths and none. Their priority was helping alcoholics recover from their addiction, not promoting a religion or a religious practice.

The World Community of Christian Meditation has a section of its website and meetings dedicated to the 11th step. **

The 11th Step and JM

JM is not a recovery programme: it is based in the Christian faith. But it is a good fit for those in recovery who are looking for a way to practise the 11th step. JM has a natural affinity with 12 Step programme members, both in its organisational structures and principles, as well as in the practice of contemplative prayer and meditation.

I went to a lecture by Lawrence Freeman, WCCM leader, at a local Roman Catholic church. The church, a large one, was packed. I recognised many of my AA friends in the audience. I had a similar experience when Martin Laird, author of 'Into The Silent Land' gave a lecture in an Anglican cathedral. No doubt the audience also included members of Narcotics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous.

* see an article at <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/the-spiritual-exercises-and-the-12-steps/>

** <https://www.wccm.org/content/christian-meditation-as-an-11th-step-practice/>

Musings on the JM Magazine

We receive comments about our magazine from both ends of the spectrum. Some people love it and read it from cover to cover. Others, including some first contacts who should be circulating the magazine to their members, ask if they can come off the mailing list as they never read it. I am sure there are many people in-between these extremes.



One simple question is:
'Do we need a magazine? What is it for?'

Possibilities

One suggestion is that much of the content of the magazine can be distributed on the website on a more regular basis. Subscribers to the website Blog/Articles page will receive an email notification every time something is posted.

We do appreciate that not everyone has access to the internet, nor wishes to use it. But a majority of people are now happy to use it, even if it is not their preferred way to receive a magazine.

With the August magazine we enclosed a letter to our 78 subscribers without email addresses asking if they had one we could use (it simplifies our admin) and if they still wished to receive the magazine. We had 20 replies. The vast majority did not have or wish to use an email address although all very much valued the printed magazine and wished to continue receiving it.

Continuing print edition

For those who wish to continue to receive a print edition of the magazine we could produce a collection of the website articles at intervals. It would still be print but would probably be presented differently.

Your comments and suggestions

Many of these ideas have come from people at the 50th anniversary, or who wrote in with their suggestions in advance of the event. (see below)

If you have any views on this idea, or any other suggestions to make regarding the magazine, please e-mail or write to the editor Deidre Morris (details on page 38). We will take note of all your comments and suggestions.

From one Julian Meeting

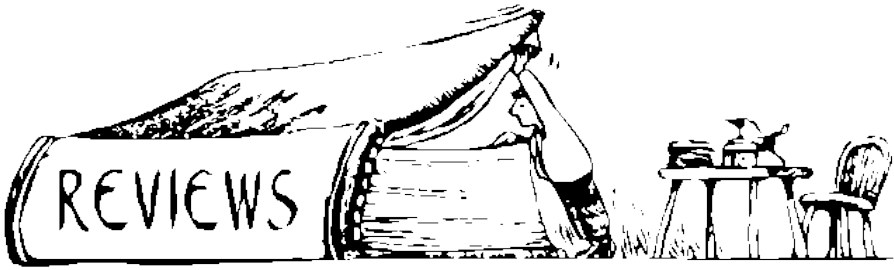
Would the JM Council consider producing a monthly UK newsletter via email which would enable the latest news to be communicated sooner than in the magazine – produced only 3 times a year? This would save on costs of both production and postage of the magazine. Very few people in our group read the magazine and it is more difficult to share the information with other people. Within a newsletter it would be possible to have various links which would make it easier to email the relevant people on the JM Council.

For instance it would help to know
about new groups starting
what events are planned.
planned changes to the website.

To preserve the silence within amid all the noise. To remain open and quiet, a moist humus in the fertile darkness where the rain falls and the grain ripens....

When the conflicting currents of the unconscious create engulfing whirlpools, the waters can again be guided into a single current if the dam-sluice be opened into the channel of prayer – and if that channel has been dug deep enough.....

Dag Hammarskjöld



JULIAN OF NORWICH'S LITERARY LEGACY

Luke Penkett

Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd.2023

Hardback ISBN: 978-1-913657-80-2 Price: £19.99

This book is beautifully produced and has a useful foreword by Graham Usher, Bishop of Norwich.

It is a study of Julian as a writer and the author is specifically dealing with the short text known as *A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman*.

Penkett makes it clear that he is concerned with Julian's literary background, vocabulary and style – and her first readers and listeners – rather than with her history, theology and spirituality. The information on the provenance of the MS of Julian's short text which is included in a mid-fifteenth century anthology, probably collected together by Carthusians, is particularly interesting.

Whilst Julian herself claimed she was "unlearned" the author shows that, not only did she know her Bible, but she appeared to be familiar with early patristic writers such as Augustine and was influenced by many medieval religious texts, including the *Cloud of Unknowing*. It is suggested that she must have spent hours in her anchorage reading such works or having them read to her.

The analysis of Julian's vocabulary and style is meticulous and exemplary. In the final chapters Luke Penkett suggests that she must have written with a listening audience in mind, since reading was often a group activity, or that the text would be used for *lectio divina* and meditation. The author's

listing of the words and passages marked in the margins of the manuscript shows how its readers used and valued the text.

I am not sure that this is a book which would immediately assist readers to deepen their life of prayer. Nonetheless it does give a richer meaning to Julian's words and thought and would delight anyone who is interested in the composition of this well-loved and brilliant spiritual classic.

Janet Robinson

SEEING THE LIGHT

Kenneth Steven

Canterbury Press. 2023.

Paperback. ISBN 978 1 78622 536 8. Price £10.99.

In this latest collection of Kenneth Steven's poems, many reflect the stanza:

Learn to look for the little things
that weigh nothing at all,
but fill the heart with such light
they can never be measured.

Many of the poems recall images or memories from early life - glimpses of little events which hindsight shows to be so important in becoming who we are. At times it is almost like looking through a family photo album.

One sequence of nine poems takes us down the River Tay and its tributaries - geographically, autobiographically and historically. Another pair of poems links 6th century and 20th century Skellig Michael. Unusually, there are 13 sonnets, not a form Kenneth Steven has used much before, but whose strict form suits their subject matter.

Nature, people, memories and history all open out onto the mystery that is creation, and how we grow and live in that created and creative space.

With Peter having to step down as Reviews Editor, I had only two new reviews for this issue. I am therefore including 3 reviews from 2013, 2014 and 2016, all of which still have relevance today.
All three titles are readily available second-hand.

*This book was reviewed in 2013.
The poems cover the whole Christian year, and many are suitable for leading into a Julian silence.*

SOUNDING THE SEASONS

Malcolm Guite

Canterbury Press 2012. £9.99
ISBN 978-1848252745

This sequence, subtitled "Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year", is superb. Guite has created a cycle of sonnets which runs from Advent at the beginning of the Christian year to the Feast of Christ the King at the end. Within the overall cycle are sequences which mark the more significant seasons of Advent, Christmas-tide, Epiphany, Lent and Holy Week: a 15-sonnet sequence, for example, is devoted to the Stations of the Cross.

Malcolm Guite handles the sonnet form with great skill, using both traditional and new patterns. His use of rhyme and near-rhyme is excellent. Few poets would consider using 'tetragrammaton', the technical term for the vowel-less YHWH, as a rhyme word, yet he does so without its feeling at all forced. He uses other poetic devices unobtrusively but effectively, as with the alliteration in Luke: "The meek rejoice and prodigals find pardon,/ a lost thief reaches paradise through pain...". There is wit too in his word use: "We surf the surface of a wide-screen world/ and find no virtue in the virtual" (O Radix).

Each sonnet can stand alone, but they work even better together as a full cycle, and in particular the individual sequences cohere well. Accessible yet theologically profound, drawing the reader (and hearer) into the heart of faith, these poems lend themselves not only to private meditation but also to public liturgy, about which Fraser Watts contributes a brief, illuminating essay. There is also an appendix on the seven Great 'O' Antiphons (best known through their use in the hymn "O come, O come, Emmanuel") which Guite has drawn on for the Advent sequence.

Malcolm Guite is in the honourable tradition of the poet-priest (and musician, and much else besides), and in *Sounding the Seasons* he has fully integrated the two vocations to create a work which is highly accomplished both theologically and poetically.

Richard Skinner

This book was reviewed in 2014, but would clearly apply to anyone seeking silence.

QUIET THE MIND: illustrated guide on how to meditate
Matthew Johnstone

Robinson 2012 £8.99
ISBN 978-1-78033-118-8

On first glance, this looks like a children's book: a slim, high quality paper-back, opening landscape, with large colourful illustrations and not so many words. Simple. The author, in his introduction, talks about different *forms* of meditation and says 'the message and visual concepts of this book are simply about *sitting with intention while bringing focus and mindfulness to our breath*'. Written for beginners, all religions and none, it is a step by step, in depth guide about turning down our 'thought valve'. This author's definition, with the

title 'Quiet the Mind', plus my own study of the book, makes me think this book is more about learning to contemplate.

Relaxation, prayer, meditation and mindfulness have all been mentioned in our magazine in connection with psychotherapy/mental health. Prayer is about our relationship with God and this book describes a process to enhance mental health and turn down the constant thoughts, particularly negative ones, which 'can become exhausting and bring about stress, insomnia, anxiety and depression, if left unchecked'.

It's recommended to read the book twice before starting to meditate/pray. I sensed the author writing out of his own journey with meditation, and he certainly echoes my personal struggles. He describes all the difficulties and offers solutions, using delightful illustrations and simple sentences.

After 12 years of trying to pray contemplatively, I found this basic framework good revision. It improved my discipline to keep practising even for five minute sessions within a day, and I have felt the benefit. I found nothing in this book which sat uncomfortably with our four JM contemplative prayer principals: Stillness, Silence, Simplicity and Surrender, and it was easy to apply Christian symbols if needed.

Matthew Johnstone says, "If you learn to meditate, your whole body will thank you for it. You will feel more 'in the present', more youthful, more energised, have greater concentration, better moods and sleep more soundly!"

"Even when meditation is mentally turbulent, there is still benefit from sitting quietly". "There is no place quieter than the space that exists between each breath". What more incentive could there be to support our prayer lives? Maybe this book is helping reinforce the healing power of 'contemplative' prayer!

This is an honest and humorous, warm and encouraging book I would heartily recommend.

Fiona Elliott

This was reviewed in 2016, before Covid brought death so dramatically into all our lives.

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

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www.thejulianmeetings.net

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- * publicising your Meeting on the Meetings Map

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