



seeking God in silence

Magazine
December
2013

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 December 2013

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Thoughts on JM, now and into the future

Forty years is a significant time in the life of any individual or organisation. The 40th anniversary celebration at the Lumen Centre in London in May was a wonderful acknowledgement of this. It provided a space to look back over the years and start to think about what the future direction of the Julian Meetings might be - in particular how we might appeal to a younger generation. The opportunity during the day to network and learn about the practice of other groups revealed some interesting points, not least the number of groups that meet in private houses.

Open to all who come

For our central London Julian Meeting, meeting fortnightly in the church tower room of St James's, Piccadilly, the situation is very different: the space is completely open, and anyone can walk through the tower door, climb the short spiral staircase, and draw aside the curtain to enter this space and join us. This has always been very much in keeping with the whole ethos of St James', where a radical welcome is extended to everyone who enters the church, no matter what faith or none they profess.

Open to all faiths, or none

Openness to God and one another lies at the heart of what we do. And this same openness, extending across the faith traditions, I found in my teacher in prayer Sister Elaine MacInnes, a Roman Catholic nun - and, after many years in Japan, also a Zen Roshi. So when Wanda Nash's book *Silence as Meeting Place* appeared in 2010, I immediately noted its significance and contacted her to obtain a copy. The coming together of people of different faith traditions and none to sit in silent prayer has also been a part of our St James's meetings over the years and was a particular interest of Penelope Eckersley who set up the group in the early 1980s. Thinking about the future of the Julian Meetings after 40 years, might this be where God is calling us?

No specified approach

A constant thread in the JM Magazine over the years has been the concern over the lack of teaching of a specific approach to silent prayer, and various attempts to remedy this. Like many others, I suspect, I have learnt from both within and outside the Christian tradition, in the understanding that silent prayer, as Wanda Nash said in her book, is indeed common to all faith traditions.

United in simplicity

This breath-centred prayer, however we understand it, unites us all in its simplicity. The wind blows where it will ... As Sister Elaine's teacher Yamada Koun Roshi used to explain: 'The outer garment is of a different form and colour, but what is underneath - the heart - remains the same. And this heart is not embellished with any thoughts or philosophies; it is pure fact, in the same way that tasting tea is a fact. It tastes the same to Buddhists as it does to Christians; there is not the slightest difference.'

What we can offer?

I'm very aware that some people reading this may disagree; but I'm also sure that for many young people growing up in today's interconnected world, this is simply self-evident. The lack of specific mantra, or mudra, in our sitting in silence means that we can be open to whoever comes to sit with us, without imposing anything on them. Surely, this is something we can offer people who are searching for a contemplative dimension to their busy lives today, whether they are part of a particular faith tradition or not?

We know that Julian of Norwich in her cell on King Street had a window on the world to counsel people who came to seek her help and advice. Perhaps the Julian Meetings can provide a similar open space to welcome all who come in the Spirit of Christ - and wait on God together in the silence.

Nick Hamilton

Unintentional Drifting

In her introductory section on 'Beginnings' of JM (*Circles of Silence* ed. Robert Llewelyn) Hilary Wakeman writes of the three criteria for Julian Meetings: that they be Christ-centred, based on contemplative prayer and, at least potentially, multi-denominational. These criteria, or values, are the engine-room of JM, enabling members to be Christ-centred in silent contemplation.

As Hilary writes, most Meetings 'move into a common pattern of starting with a brief reading, having half-an-hour's silence and ending with a prayer said together.' In JM, as with all movements and organisations, it might be helpful every now and then for each group to look at itself and ask whether it is still being true to these values or whether, as sometimes happens, there has been some drift.

It can be helpful to ask ourselves some practical process questions. How do we begin a Meeting? What are the group dynamics? Is there a lot of cheerful greeting, engagement and hugs? With a cuppa? How significant is the choice of reading? Is it spiritually reflective? Is it engaging? Is it inclusive? How short or long is the reading? Where is God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit in the reading? What does the silence feel like? Is it deep? What are the sounds of the silence? How are we gathered together at the end of the meeting? Do we feel centred to re-engage with the world? How do we depart?

Julian writes much about love in her *Revelations of Divine Love*. What does she mean when she writes of the reciprocal love between God and each human being 'a love made by the essential goodness of the Holy Spirit; a love that is mighty through the might of the Father and wise through the wisdom of the Son.' And, after more than 15 years reflection on the 'showings' she gathered it all into the well-known phrase 'Love was his meaning ... and in this love our life is everlasting.'

This serves to remind us that there is a difference between this deep spiritual love of which we have only an imperfect experience and understanding, and schmoozy hugs which may serve to distract from the journey to centredness which is at the heart of contemplation. A re-visit to Circles of Silence and Circles of Stillness is a salutary reminder of how profound our founders were. And there are many other books which have lasted well and to which we can return with gratitude. A favourite of mine is *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* translated from the French by Kitty Muggeridge.

A gentle activity of group self-questioning may serve to re-commit members to the essential Julian values of Christ-centredness, contemplative prayer and multi-denominational awareness.

Jennifer Tann

Retreat in a Quiet Garden

Enfolded in love

*brimful and spilling over;
deep gratitude for being.*

The garden stretching out,

*drawing the eye from clipped grass
and shapely yews to the fields beyond.*

Birds soar, carried on thermals

from the hill; the stream ever moving;

I watch and wonder in stillness.

Togetherness in community;

shared space, shared food,

shared worship, and reflection.

Shared silence and stillness. Grace.

᠑.᠙.

St Christopher

It is sometimes difficult to justify, even to oneself, the benefits of sitting still; of tapping in, however imperfectly, to the depth and mystery of God. Such practice renews perspective, calms, assuages anxieties, slowly and imperceptibly changes me. Good for me, but why don't I get up and do something? I found the best answer yet to such questioning this summer in the church of Llanynys near Ruthin in Wales.

It is a remote and lonely building, standing silent in a quiet lane. On going inside the south door one immediately sees a larger than life size medieval wall painting of St Christopher. Such a painting is extremely rare in North Wales. Painted around 1420 it was covered over with whitewash during the Reformation and was only re-discovered in 1967. Some of the colour retains its freshness, though the gold leaf on the halo around the Christ Child's head is lost.

The position of the painting is traditional and helped those who sought the saint's aid when they set out on a journey or offered their thanks for safe return. And it was believed that he who looked on the saint would neither faint nor fall that day.

But it was not the traditional meaning of this St Christopher that attracted me. Aided by a stout knobby staff with green leaves sprouting from its tip, he is splashing confidently through waters teeming with strange fish. He is looking cheerfully up at a spritely Christ child perched high on his shoulder.

Now you have to be strong, confident and well-balanced to carry someone, even a child, on your shoulder through swirling water, stepping sturdily out on the rock strewn bed of a river. To gather and grow that strength and balance what better preparation is there than to sit still?

Janet Robinson



The Power of Silence

The essence of meditation is stillness and silence. Silence is both external and internal. External silence is hard to find in our world today. We are bombarded by trivia and distraction through the media.

Erich Fromm puts this very well in his book 'Psychoanalysis and Religion':

"We have the most extraordinary possibilities for communication in print, radio and television [one would add nowadays the Internet as well], and we are fed daily with nonsense which would be offensive to the intelligence of children were they not suckled on it."

We are surrounded by noise and have become so used to it, that absence of noise feels strange and unfamiliar, therefore even threatening. We need to find the courage to create pockets of external silence in our day, additional to our periods of meditation, where we don't talk to others, in person or on the phone, where we don't listen to the radio, TV or music. Be brave, switch off the radio, switch off the phone and dive into the silence! Do this especially in the hour or half hour leading up to meditation.

Preparation before prayer/meditation is important. We can't expect to sit and meditate, stilling the mind, if just before we have been involved in conversation – heated or otherwise - watching TV or listening to the radio. We need to insert a period of external silence before we sit down.

For whatever our soul was thinking about before the time of prayer [meditation] inevitably occurs to us when we pray as a result of the operation of the memory. Hence we must prepare ourselves before the time of prayer to be the prayerful persons that we wish to be. (*John Cassian*)

The first step in meditation is therefore to actively withdraw into the silence by letting go off external noises, by

withdrawing from any sense perceptions at all:
“A mind not distracted by external things and not dispersed through the senses returns to itself.” (*St Basil*)

By sitting still and focusing on our mantra we allow ourselves to become aware of the silence that lives at the Centre of our being. This silence is not just an absence of noise, a mere absence of sounds, but a creative energy, that then allows us to become ‘pro-active’ out of our own creative impulses, rather than ‘reactive’ to external stimuli.

Inner silence creates the awareness we are missing in everyday life:

“Silence is really about being fully attentive to who we are and where we are and what is going on inside ourselves and outside ourselves...it is about being peacefully attentive, not self-consciously, but simply attentive, aware.” (*Laurence Freeman*)

Sitting still in silence also forms the foundation for stability, standing on firm ground, spiritually and psychologically rooted. This is a rootedness that lasts not only the duration of your meditation sessions, but will become an attitude of mind. This will transform your life and allow you to live and act permanently from that deep centre of silence at the core of your being.

Kim Nataraja

Kim Nataraja is a member of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), and Co-ordinator of WCCM's International School in London. She is a Benedictine oblate and an experienced spiritual director.

The very best and utmost attainment in this life is to remain still and let God speak and act in you. Meister Eckhart (1260-1327)

The Maze

Greys Court at Rotherfield Greys, near Henley, is a lovely house now in the care of the National Trust. From 1937 it was owned by Sir Felix and Lady Elizabeth Brunner; Lady Brunner continued to live there until she died in 2003 at the age of 98. During those years she created a remarkable garden, or rather a series of gardens, each one opening out of another through doors or gates.



I visited Greys Court earlier this year and whilst exploring the garden I came to the Maze. The story of how Lady Brunner was inspired to create this starts when she attended Robert Runcie's enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury. She later recalled 'he gave a sermon in which he likened the search for truth, to finding your way in a maze...'

Her response to this was to create a maze at Greys Court, although in reality it is more like a labyrinth. It was dedicated by Robert Runcie on 24 October 1981.

In the centre is a sundial with a quotation on each side of the plinth: a lovely place for a 'Julian' to wander.

Anne Stamper

Credo

*'Credo' says the heart
Upheld in cradling hands
The heart has its reasons
No reason understands.
Mind's flashing messages
Fork and fall part.
At the centre stillness.
'credo' says the heart*

Robert Gittins

*Let there be life
Said God...
Let there be God
Say I....
Let life be God...*

Siegfried Sassoon

*We come to God.
Not by navigation
But by love*

Saint Augustine

*Life. Love. Light
In life is marvellous
Homeliness.
In love is gentle
Courtesy.
In light is endless
Kindness.*

Mother Julian of Norwich

ITs all happening in IT at JM!

NEW – The Julian Meetings Bulletin Board.

The Julian Meetings Bulletin Board or Discussion Forum is open. This is a private Board only open to Julian Meeting Magazine subscribers, so you do not need to worry that everyone on the world wide web will be able to see it.

We have lots of good things on the board already, especially our Books corner so register and have a look around.

If you can use email, you will be able to work the Bulletin Board – it is very user friendly and there will be lots of help should you need it.



You will be able to meet Julian Meeting members from around the world. We hope it will put isolated members in touch with each other and be a place where we can all get to know each other better, share resources, including photos and publicise our meetings and other events.

Those of us who have been trialling and developing it love it. We do hope you will join us.

Not sure what a Bulletin Board/Discussion Forum is? Have a look at the website, register and you will soon get the hang of it. You won't come to any harm!

Here is the web address

<http://www.thejulianmeetings.proboards.com/>

We look forward to meeting you there.

Want to ask a question first? There is a guest facility to ask pre-registration questions on the website. Or email julianmeetingsforum@yahoo.com

New – A Julian Meetings QR code.

A QR code is the little black and white box you are starting to see everywhere. Scan it with your mobile phone and it takes you to a website. In our case our Julian Meetings website. You will start seeing it on our literature and on the inside cover of this magazine.

You can put it on your own Julian Meeting posters and leaflets. You can download a copy in various sizes from the Bulletin Board.

New – Website History Page. On our JM website at <http://www.julianmeetings.org/40.html> we have a page with an article by Hilary Wakeman, a precis of Angela Ashwin's talk at our 40th Celebration at Lumen and a timeline showing how The Julian Meetings have developed since 1973. Plus pictures of the Lumen event.

We hope you will enjoy all these new things.

More to Come

If you have ideas about how we can develop our use of IT – there is a place on the Bulletin Board where you can discuss them. We welcome your ideas. Meanwhile the Core Group and Council will continue looking at how to implement other ideas from the IT Forum at Lumen.

Ann Moran

*The answer was always quietly there,
only our questions drowned it out.*

*David Steindl-Rast
'A Listening Heart'*

Vices and Virtues

In 2005, the nation chose its 'New Ten Commandments' (20, actually) provoked by a Channel 4 programme presented by Jon Snow. Yes, there were differences but the end result showed some startling resemblances to the original. And there were twenty instead of ten:

Be honest. Don't kill. Look after the vulnerable. Respect your mother and father. Enjoy life. Nothing in excess. Be true to your own God. Treat others as you would like to be treated. Be true to yourself. Protect your family. Try your best at all times. Look after your health. Don't commit adultery. Live within your means. Appreciate what you have. Never be violent. Protect the environment. Protect and nurture children. Take responsibility for your own actions. Don't steal.

The then Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, was intrigued by the New Commandments, and didn't see them as a radical break with the past. 'Almost all the New Commandments are back there in the Bible. The only really new one is "Be true to yourself",' he said.

Gerald Priestland was Religious Affairs Correspondent for the BBC from 1977 - 1982. In his younger days he was a BBC Foreign Affairs Correspondent. In 1980 he gave a lecture to the students of Manchester Polytechnic on Virtues and Vices. He looked at the ten commandments, the seven deadly sins compiled by St Gregory the Great in the 6th century and the seven virtues.

The traditional sins and virtues

The seven deadly sins are: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony.

In the Catholic catechism, the Seven Catholic Virtues refers to the union of two sets of virtues. The four Cardinal virtues, from ancient Greek philosophy, are Prudence, Justice, Temperance (or Restraint), and Courage (or Fortitude). The three Theological virtues, from the letters of St. Paul of

Tarsus, are Faith, Hope, and Charity (or Love). These were adopted by the Church Fathers as the Seven Virtues.

Modern sins and virtues

The highest of Gerald Priestland's modern virtues was stillness:

'It is the Quaker belief that the Inward Light of God is present in all of us, if only we will let the mud settle and the light shine through; and that when we examine our problems in that light, it will show us what is right and what is wrong. We do not need a checklist of vices and virtues. What we need above all is a capacity for stillness...'

'Well, I have suggested **trust** - trust in God. So it follows that **mistrust** of him is the opposite - though let me add speedily that honest doubt in the sense of seeking but not yet having found, is to be respected.

The way to trust, I am convinced, lies through **stillness**. And who would question me today when I put **noisiness** among the ungodly qualities?

Nobody, I think, would deny **violence** its place in the devil's team; or **non-violence** among the horses of the Lord. **Love**, of course, pulls in harness with it - and pulling in the opposite direction, **hatred**. Hatred, I think is very close to envy, so I need not include that.

I must say I have a good deal of sympathy for poor old - often misunderstood - **lust**. ... If we must have a sexual virtue (and I think we should) then I choose **fidelity** - with **infidelity** in the opposing team.

Which brings me up to five-a-side. **Integrity** I've already tipped, for it encompasses openness, honesty, sincerity, spontaneity, and I wish I could make it include joyfulness as well. At any rate, it puts **dishonesty** (or hypocrisy, if you like)

Continued overleaf

among the villains.

For my last virtue, I would like to find something to oppose the modern equivalents of **gluttony** - not just greedy eating and drinking, but greed for material possessions, and greedy squandering of the earth's resources. This would be the ecological, conservationist virtue: small is beautiful and 'Spare that Tree'. **Frugality** or restraint might do - moderation even - confronting **wastefulness**.

Nothing but tradition obliges me to stop. I have half a mind to squeeze in **cruelty** and **selfishness** as vices - **generosity** and **modesty** as virtues; but I think they may be relatives of one or another that I have named already. So I will rehearse them again:

My seven deadly sins are:

Noisiness: Violence: Hatred: Infidelity: Dishonesty: Mistrust in God's Goodness: Wastefulness

And my seven modern virtues:

Trust in God's goodness: Stillness: Non-violence: Fidelity: Integrity: Love: Restraint'

(Gerald Priestland. My Pilgrim Way. 1993)

*quotations are taken from *Vices and Virtues*, a lecture given by Gerald Priestland to students of Manchester Polytechnic on 25 June 1980. Published in *My Pilgrim Way: late writings*; edited by Roger Toulmin, published posthumously (1993) by Mowbray (a Cassell imprint).

The book contains Gerald Priestland's thoughts on the heart of Christian faith, on peace, the Trinity, vices and virtues, matrimony, conscience, relations between Christians and his courage in the face of death. I discovered it in my local library and kept it for months.

Gail Ballinger

Thoughts after 40, and nearly 80, years

The August Julian magazine brought back many memories and thanksgivings, making them live again. In 1973, when Hilary Wakeman's first letter appeared in the press, I had read of Evelyn Underhill who had done enormous work in bringing 'listening' - as different to supplicating, or demanding - into ordinary personal prayer. She helped to take it out of the monasteries and into the practice of everyday Christians. I had encountered silent prayer during retreats. Also through Robert Coulson's work, which grew into the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer and still thrives, and for several years I'd been gathering groups to practice it. So Hilary's letter was read with great relief and jubilation!

Since those early days, the journey of 40 years has been filled with ever-increasing wonder and conviction, supported at all times by the Julian Meetings Magazine. I wonder if now we have come to a time when it might be possible, in view of this journeying together, to introduce something of a discussion forum to the magazine? Could it be used to pool ideas that provoke written responses, and further debate? The growth of silent 'wordless' prayer has been so boosted by JM that we have almost a plethora of moving, sometimes 'soothing', words and extracts. Has it almost become 'comfortable'? Maybe there could be space to expose ideas that go over the edge a bit. For instance, much of today's culture concentrates on facts and technical data which have to be Known and Correct: **but God is Unknowable**. Have we grown up enough - spiritually - to explore the God-Nature beyond where our comfort zone allows, and so take God with us into the immense disquiet of our contemporary world.

Should we start at the difficulty of living with that 'Unknowing'? We yearn to be sure, and secure, and in-the-Right. And yet I find, as the years go by, this assurance is becoming less and less important, certainly less urgent. It's heartening to hear Jesus warn his friends that there was plenty they still did not

know, and read St Paul when he insists we can only see things 'through a glass darkly'.

I, personally, have had to give up - leave behind - any notion of 'Being Right'. As every question has so many sides to it I can't *know* which one is 'right'. So I can happily walk away from endless arguments about who, or what, is Right. All the wars and quarrels that ever were, began with an assertion of Being Right. That takes a lot of thinking about.

A short quote from Yehuda Amichai:

'From the place where we are *Right*
- flowers will never grow;
the place where we are *Right*
- is hard and trampled like a yard.
But doubts and loves dig up the world, like a mole,
and a whisper will be heard . . .'

If I am living with the Unknown, the Unknowable, the basis of every thought and action has to be an expectation of the unexpected. Anything is allowable. So I decided to spend my last birthday-before-being 80 in an unexpected way. The day coincided with the 'Big Sleep Out', an annual event in aid of the homeless (sadly there are many in this city). Folk spend the night in sleeping bags in the Cathedral Inner Close, or even sleep inside the Cathedral. So I invited some friends to spend my birthday party with me by sleeping in the North Transept. We lay beneath its great Norman arches and the hanging Christos, watching moonlight and sunrise through the stained glass windows. What a Wonder!! And we really were in touch with the Unknown on several levels!

Our Cathedral has a 15th century tripos that is usually kept locked as it is so vulnerable to vandalism. This week the daily Eucharist was celebrated in front of it: our congregation of eight filled all the seats. The centre of the tripos is a stunning picture of Mary holding the young Child on her lap and trying to interest him in an apple - an apple of Eve, symbolizing self-will and sin. But the Christ Child turns away from it, putting his back to it, and instead leans toward Joseph who is

offering him a luscious pear. That takes a lot of thinking about too.

We recently celebrated the feast day of Bernard of Clairvaux - that wonderful 12th century spiritual teacher. The bit that lives with me is his outline of *'The Four Degrees of Love'*

The 1st degree of love: love of oneself for self's sake;

The 2nd degree of love: love of God for self's sake;

The 3^d degree of love: love of God for God's sake;

The 4th degree of love: love of self for God's sake.

That too, takes a bit of pondering, doesn't it?

I think of the enormous honour, privilege, astounding wonder and unknowing, in the fact that God should allow and create my birth; and also give me a self that is totally unique.

And this is so for every one of us. How then can we *not* nurture, and shape, rather than repress such a gift? Margaret Spufford wrote in her great book "Celebration", as she is observing the chaotic things that happen both inside us and around us, she concludes: 'Learning to live with the disorder as creatively as possible has, in the end, formed the person I am. I cannot, in the last resort, regret being the person I am.'

No wonder Jesus is turning away from the ancient symbol of the apple!

Personally, I should really appreciate and enjoy any ideas prompted by the above. There may be readers who would like their comments published in the JM magazine: that would be great, and might kick-off a new trend. If you would prefer to contact me directly via JM official addresses, that also would be welcome. Thank you.

Wanda Nash
Winchester

For internet users, the JM Bulletin Board is an ideal place for such discussion - see page 12 for details

BOOK REVIEWS - BOOK REVIEWS

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

(Richard is a poet in his own right. His books include *Invocations* (Wild Goose Publications) and *In The Stillness*: 16 poems based on Julian of Norwich (Dilettante)

HAPHAZARD BY STARLIGHT: a poem a day from Advent to Epiphany

Janet Morley

SPCK 2013 £9.99

ISBN 9780281070626

This book takes us on a journey through Advent to Epiphany, from 1st December to 6th January. A companion volume to *The Heart's Time* (Janet Morley's Lent book), it follows a similar pattern with a poem a day and the author's insights. Her reflection on each poem draws on the Bible and the other poems in the collection. Not all the poets are Christian, but nonetheless each has something to say to our Advent waiting condition and encourages contemplation.

They are very skilfully chosen and succeeding day's poems complement each other. The author's daily commentary reveals a knowledge of poetry in its many forms and a deep acquaintance with both the poems she has chosen and the biblical associations she makes. Each day ends with a question to ponder or act upon.

The poets include William Blake, Charles Causley, Gillian Clarke, Emily Dickinson, T. S. Eliot, George Herbert, Elizabeth Jennings, P. J. Kavanagh, Jane Kenyon, Philip Larkin, Denise Levertov, Edwin Muir, Sylvia Plath, Shelley, Tennyson, R S Thomas, Rowan Williams, Waldo Williams

and many more. A helpful introduction suggests ways of using the book including in a group.

The title is taken from U A Fanthorpe's poem *BC:AD*:
... 'walked haphazard by starlight/straight into the kingdom of heaven'. The cover illustration, a painting by Lisa Graa Jensen, is stunning and worth attention in its own right. I found I wanted to sit and look at it for a while before reading my daily portion. [see www.lisagraajensen.com Snowy Night. Follow the Bridgeman Art link.]

Gail Ballinger

THE PRACTICAL MYSTIC: Evelyn Underhill and her writings

Edited and Introduced by Raymond Chandler

Canterbury Press 2012 £19.99

ISBN 978 – 1 – 84825 – 128 – 1

Evelyn Underhill, a renowned spiritual writer of the 20th century, is particularly well known for her works on mysticism and prayer. She was a spiritual director, retreat conductor and University Lecturer, and also wrote novels and poetry.

In this book Raymond Chandler has compiled extracts from her writings and set them out in themes. Although I had heard of Evelyn Underhill I was not familiar with her work and his introduction at the beginning gives a good insight into her life and the way her writing developed.

What is Mysticism?

This chapter considers the way all mysticism is about the passionate longing of the soul for God. A mystic is not a person who practises unusual forms of prayer but someone whose life is ruled by this thirst for God. This chapter looks at the five stages which lead to advanced mystical experience and I found it quite demanding, particularly as the language is academic and the subject very profound.

However, '**Mysticism for all**' and '**Union with God**' look at the way the mystical experience is open to all as we try to come closer to God and unite our human nature with his

divinity. Evelyn Underhill includes references to some of the writings of Julian of Norwich.

‘The Spiritual Life’ offers advice for the spiritual life and includes setbacks and difficulties when faith is challenged and comfort seems to have gone. Here the author uses some of her letters of spiritual direction. These do reflect her high-churchmanship but she had sympathy and practical advice for individuals and I am sure readers will find that some of this resonates with their own experiences.

Community of Christians

Here we find connections with our Julian Meetings, as sharing in contemplative prayer links in with being part of the whole body of believers.

Similarly **‘Shared Worship and Sacraments’** shows the importance of believing and worshipping in a Christian Community, of whatever denomination.

Faithfulness to private individual prayer and the way it contributes to the life of the praying church is explored in the section on **‘Prayer’**.

Written with great intellect and learning, this is not an easy read, and at times I found it quite challenging. It also reflects the spirituality of her time, which today may seem a little out-dated. However her passion for faithfulness in our Christian life is something we can certainly take from this book, both as a lesson and an inspiration.

Christine Rapsey

(see page 26 for an extract from this book)

THE ONE DAY CREATIVE RETREAT ACTIVITY BOOK

Mark and Mary Fleeson

Lindisfarne Scriptorium Ltd 2013 £3.99

Mary and Mark Fleeson have lived on Lindisfarne - Holy Island - since 1997 and run the Lindisfarne Scriptorium. Mary is a calligrapher who also offers workshops and retreats.

Her previously published books include not only her own beautifully illustrated books, eg Life Journey, but also

colouring-in books. These use outlines of her characteristic Celtic inspired designs and incorporate prayers, meditations and reflections. I have used these when I have led Painting and Prayer Retreats.

This little book takes further this idea of colouring-in as an aid to prayer, by using the canonical hours to give a framework for a day retreat incorporating drawing and colouring.

There are eight sections, each with prayers, a biblical reading, an opportunity for reflection and then the characteristic line drawings to colour, or pages on which to create your own designs.

Thus you can have a Painting and Prayer retreat in your own time in your own home or you can buy a set if you are leading a retreat for others to use.

Anne Stamper

THE BLISSFUL BRAIN: neuroscience and proof of the power of meditation

Shanida Nataraja

Gaia (Octopus Publishing Group), 2008, £7.99
ISBN 978-1-85675-291-6

Dr Shanida Nataraja is a neuroscientist, with a Dutch Catholic mother and an Indian father from a Hindu background who are both regular meditators. She has a BSc in Human Science and Neuroscience and a PhD in Neurophysiology, both from University College London, and has done extensive research into the effect of meditation on the brain. The result of the research is *The Blissful Brain*. This book came to us to review from a JM member who attended a quiet day led by Shanida's mother, Kim.

This book is surprisingly readable, clearly explained, and with good use of everyday and simple life experiences to illustrate the science. It opens with a chapter on meditation in which the author looks at what it is, with both eastern and western medicine and methods of meditation; she is well versed in centering prayer and *lectio divina*.

Shanida considers the role of meditation in health, and potentially in health care, giving a lucid account of how the brain works, illustrated by clear charts and drawings. She moves on to bridge science and spirituality, asking if we are 'hard wired' to need religious experience. She concludes with two ways into meditation: one based on Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), the other a Christian mantra meditation.

Shanida regularly meditates and practices yoga, and has participated in an 8-week MBSRcourse (see JM Magazine April 2013 page 10)

There is a short summary of each chapter on the website www.blissfulbrain.com ; the first chapter can be downloaded in full.

<http://www.blissfulbrain.com/Aboutthebook/Overview.htm>

(On page 8 is an article on 'The Power of Silence' by Shanida's mother Kim)

Gail Ballinger

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Not everyone can buy our review books in a local bookshop. It helps to know of alternative sources, and we have found that the bookshop at Sarum College, which specialises in spirituality, would be happy to post the books we review post free (they normally charge for postage) if the buyer mentions seeing the book review in The Julian Meetings Magazine. The college teaches an MA in spirituality. Online ordering will be available shortly.

Tel: 01722 326 899 Email bookshop@sarum.ac.uk

<http://www.sarum.ac.uk/bookshop>

Sarum College Bookshop, 19 The Close, Salisbury, SP1 2EE
Sarum College also has a good subscription library.

An extract from ‘The Practical Mystic’ reviewed on page 22

Extract from “The Community of Christians” (page 152)

‘Faithfulness and Goodness – they are doggy qualities. Fancy that as a Fruit of the Spirit! But then the Spirit is Love, and doggy love is a very good sort of love, humble, selfless and enduring. Faithfulness is the quality of the friend, refusing no test and no trouble, loyal, persevering; not at the mercy of emotional ups and downs or getting tired when things are tiresome. In the interior life of prayer faithfulness points steadily to God and His purposes, away from self and its preoccupations, specially spiritual preoccupations. It was a very faithful soul who said, “We ought simply to hate thinking of our own spiritual lives.” You cannot imagine a nice retriever fussing about his own inner state, carefully inspecting his sins, or worrying about whether he is being directed quite right. He just trusts his master and his own sense of smell and carries on.

‘The indwelling Spirit of God is never a source of trouble and scruple, but a stabilizing power, a constant. “When I go up to Heaven Thou art there; when I go down into Sheol, Thou art there also” – when I am exultant and when I am depressed. Light and dark to Thee are both alike! The friendship of God is like that, and He asks the same faithfulness from us in return. It takes a brave and loving soul to understand and respond to this sturdy faithfulness of God, for there is nothing sentimental about it. “Thou of very faithfulness hast caused me to be troubled”, says the Psalmist. The faithful father and teacher does what is needed, not what is nice. He will even risk losing the child’s affection rather than fail the child’s real needs, giving stern tests when tests are needed, withdrawing apparent support that courage and initiative may be learned, giving the distasteful duty, withdrawing the dangerous joy; bit by bit producing in the soul a fidelity that shall answer His own.’

