

THE
JULIAN
MEETINGS

A decorative floral ornament featuring three stylized flowers. The central flower is larger and has a circular center containing a cross. It is flanked by two smaller flowers. Wavy lines extend from the sides of the central flower.

Magazine

April

2012

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 April 2012

CONTENTS	PAGE
JM Council Meeting November 2011	2
Deep Blessings a reflection by Pastor Steve	5
Mystic quotation by Karl Rahner	
A Gentle Lightning poem by Brian Morris	6
Forty Years On - celebrating our 40 th anniversary	7
Loud and Clear by Sam from the Prison Phoenix Trust	8
A Julian Study Day + JM at a 'Prayer for Life' event	10
A Julian Quiet Day	11
The Science of Silence report by Yvonne Walker	12
Prayer is Like A poem by Lynne Chitty	13
A Julian Day Out by Janet Rice	14
Responses to the request for help with Cerebral Fleas	16
The Prayer Stool a poem by Bishop Graham Kings	17
Quiet Day a poem by Shirley Fry	18
What does YOUR Meeting Do?	
Books and resources by Gail Ballinger	19
Book Reviews: Falling Upward <i>Richard Rohr</i> ; How Did I Get to be 70 When I'm 35 Inside? <i>Linda Douty</i> ; The Contented Life <i>Robert Atwell</i> ; Writing the Icon of the Heart <i>Maggie Ross</i> ; Landscapes of Prayer <i>Margaret Siff</i> ; Desert Wells <i>Alice Bates</i> ; Meditating with Scripture <i>Elena Bosetti</i> ; Every Place is Holy Ground <i>Sally Welch</i>	20-26
JM Magazine and contact details	27-29

In November 2011 The Julian Meetings Council met for the day at Abbey Baptist Church in Reading.

It was a valuable chance to meet together, particularly for the new people who have volunteered to take on JM jobs. So much of our interaction is of necessity via e-mail, since we are scattered across the country, but it is no substitute for meeting in person.

*We spent the morning on JM business before enjoying a sociable lunch time. We were then joined by some members of local Julian Meetings and by Wanda Nash. Wanda has published a book of the material of hers that we serialised over several issues. A number of us had read the book - *Silence as Meeting Place* - and, after Wanda had explained why she felt it was so important, several of the Council gave their responses to it. We then had a general discussion on the subject before sharing a time of silence together.*

*Since we had serialised most of the material in the book we thought you might be interested in two of the responses that were given to **Silence as Meeting Place**:*

Response from Janet Robinson

I find it easy to agree with the idea of Silence as a meeting place of faiths – in fact as a meeting place in other situations as well. I would probably say this because I am an Attender of the Society of Friends (Quakers) so silence is a natural way of worship, as is not asking others what are the tenets of their faith.

As Julians, I think we have all noticed as we go deeper into contemplative prayer that the effect spills out into our active lives. So the heading “What stillness means” and comments within that resonate with me.

I realise that most faiths have what we might call a “silent arm” – a branch of the faith that attracts those inclined to

silence. We must remember that not everyone is. Many find silence frightening and alien – religious and non-religious, clergy and laity alike – so if we are trying to build up an inter-faith community of silence, we must realise that we certainly would not take everyone with us. I have no fear of “betraying” my version of faith. I was taught long, long ago at a C of E school a saying of Gandhi: “There are many ways to reach the roof. You may use stairs, a ladder, a rope or a bamboo. So many are the ways to God.”

But the real difficulty for me – living in a deeply rural part of Britain where people of other faiths are very few – would be to implement the idea. Indeed, it is hard enough to encourage members of the various Christian churches in the town that silence might be something they would like to try.

We did for a while have an English Buddhist at our Julian meeting until she moved away. There is now a Buddhist stupa, and therefore probably a meeting place, fairly near in the Black Mountains and maybe I could explore that. But it is going to be more fruitful where there are differing forms of faith and if I were in a multi-cultural city I would be most happy to try.

Response from George Mitchell

When I started reading Wanda’s book, I recalled Bishop John Tinsley’s Presidential Address at the Bristol Diocesan Synod in 1985. He was responding to, and reflecting on, a General Synod report “Towards a theology of inter-faith dialogue”. In it he said: “I believe God is calling his human family to share one history; that God is calling us to a greater ecumenism than the local ecumenism of Christian unity. God is calling us, I believe, to a salutation in Christ of other religions, and I say salutation because I mean a genuine greeting.”

He went on to acknowledge the fears and dislikes, the thought of other religions as perverse and diabolical, which

many people felt. He quoted one person who had said to him, "You can't have a dialogue with a Muslim, bishop, you can only convert him."

In some ways things have progressed, but in others the fears and prejudices continue. The whole of my ministry has been in places where inter-faith contacts did not arise. Neither of the two Julian Meetings to which I've belonged have had an inter-faith dimension - Christian ecumenical, yes; world ecumenical, no. One member of the present Meeting has been on a personal spiritual journey of discovery: while she has become a worshipping member of her local Church, she would say something like, "But I'm also a Buddhist", and she attends a Buddhist prayer group.

So there is a long way still to go in inter-faith relationships, but Wanda has pointed clearly to a way in which the wider ecumenism can be expressed. In silent prayer together there is potential for trust to grow and for God's love to be expressed and experienced in the mutual silence. Wanda has done us a great service in writing this book, and in the challenge to new thinking, and praying, which it brings.

I have one regret. In her introduction to world faiths, Wanda has given us a variety of quotations from their spiritual mothers and fathers. Except, that is, for Christianity, where speculation about Jesus and the Kabbalah and stress on the Gnostic writings is given to us. Why not similarly to the others, give us quotations from people like Julian or Teresa or Thomas Merton, instead of just listing their names with others writers?

There will be some who will see her as a heretic, and so will write off this important and challenging piece of thinking - and that would be a great pity.

Silence as Meeting Place by Wanda Nash
ISBN 978 1 873372 34 0

Deep Blessings

*For you my soul in silence waits·
I let go of all thought of control,
I let go of all thought,
I let go·
I am waiting to be made whole in you,
I am waiting in you,
I am in you·
Pour yourself into me,
you who are already in me,
I who am still·
A bare tree,
blue stillness,
the moon rises·*

Pastor Steve

*Copyright © Steve Garnaas-Holmes, Unfolding Light
www.unfoldinglight.net used with permission*

**Our sole possession is our Solitariness before God;
our only security is in God's immediate Presence;
our future is in the mysticism (mystery) of God's nearness.**

'To be a mystic is open to everyone: the devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic' or will cease to be anything at all.'
Karl Rahner (d. 1984)

nb: the term 'mystic' can no longer be confined to those who experience visions & ecstasies, those rare people who are hermits or professional religious; a modern mystic is one who is prepared to wait in the Silence, the darkness and the Unknowing before God, rather than continually badgering Him with information and petitions.

(This was used to introduce the silence at a study day)

A Gentle Lightning

It was like a gentle lightning.
Not like the first time, ten days before,
when we had gone together
out of Jerusalem, along
the road to Bethany, with storm-clouds
massing over the hills.
No rain fell;
not that day: but at the darkest moment,
as the clouds seemed to kiss the hill-top,
and we could scarcely see
each others' faces
a single flash of lightning. That was
the last time we saw him,
hands raised, as though in blessing.
I've seen oxen and sheep struck, and always
there was evidence; a scorched carcass
with burn-marks down the legs.
But that day, nothing. Just
the momentary tearing of the cloud,
the light too bright to see, that closed
our eyes; the path to heaven
we could not walk yet.
And after it, the pain of joy unhealed.

This time, it was different. A morning storm;
no dawn, no sunrise. A gloom as thick
without as that within
our hearts.

No words, we'd used them all.
But in the silence, suddenly, a glow
that filled the room, from radiant faces,
fired with new life, and a warmth
that drove away the clouds like summer mist.
A gentle lightning; one that did not burn,
except within the soul. Not quickly given, then gone,
leaving a greater darkness; growing
like a song within the soul,
gentle as dew,
leaping from heart to heart:
a new language,
to sing, beyond all words,
the love of heaven.

Brian Morris

Forty Years On

The Julian Meetings began in 1973, so in 2013 we will
celebrate our 40th Anniversary on Saturday 11 May.

We are planning a day event in central London, at Lumen
URC in Tavistock Place, adjoining Regent Square. This is
just a few minutes walk south of Kings Cross Station.

The keynote speaker will be Angela Ashwin, author, retreat
giver and long-time supporter of the Julian Meetings.

Besides the address the day will include a time of silence
together; time to share news with old friends and to make
new ones; hopefully a display of JM memorabilia.

The programme is yet to be decided in detail, so if there is
anything you would like to suggest for the day, do let us
know by the start of June.

Loud and Clear

by Sam, director of the Prison Phoenix Trust

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem Mary and Joseph were probably cold and exhausted and would have preferred less drafty accommodation. But from these less-than-ideal conditions came forth an amazing life.

Many people in prison tell us about the less-than-ideal conditions they face as they try to touch the divine, commune with God, or realise their true self. In one crowded prison a group of prisoners found their usual yoga room unavailable one week, so they asked their teacher to hold the lesson in the only space left: the toilet. By all accounts it was a great class!

A more common challenge – perhaps the biggest one - is how to meditate with noise all around you. Rich from HMP Parc wrote recently, “Is peace in meditation essential? The wing sometimes gets loud at night when I’m meditating. I try to cut it out, but most of the time I just give up and end up waiting for peace and quiet. This can be annoying too. Any tips how to blank this out? Or should I just leave it and try again the following night. Which is gonna probably be noisy again.”

The challenge is not to rearrange things outside, but to shift your expectation. It is not going to be quiet out there on the wing, so how do you meditate with the noise? I’m sure you can remember a time when you almost jumped out of your skin at a loud noise, like a clap of thunder. Yet at other times the same unexpected noise is far less startling. So we can be not so disturbed by noise.

The continual noise of voices, TV and music is a bit different. It is easy to load it with feeling and to get involved – resisting or waiting for it to go away. By focussing on your breathing over a period of time, you can begin to slow down your normal, automatic responses. You come off ‘auto-pilot’ and

are aware of responses and tendencies without needing to react to them.

There is a way to meditate in the noisiest of environments. First of all, allow yourself to sit still, without moving, for the amount of time you have given yourself. Don't worry about what your state of mind is. Just be content with sitting still amidst all of the noise. The noise is okay and you don't have to do anything to change it. As you sit, just keep the mind on the breath going in and out. Don't worry about the noise or if your mind gets pulled away by it. Just bring your attention back to the breath when you notice. If you get disturbed by the noise, treat your annoyance in the same way as you do the noise.

It is just another 'something'. Stay still, and bring attention back to the breath. Rest in the breath, alert to it, and allow the noise and whatever happens in your mind to carry on, while your attention is with the breathing.

Many of you say you have learned to accept noise and that after a while, there is not any distance between you and the noise. It is just a thing happening, not something happening to you. You know then, that we are never separate from other things. Our intimate connection to each other and the pull to participation in this wonderful whole is part of the great message of Christmas.

This is an edited version of an article in the December magazine of the Prison Phoenix Trust and is used with permission. The Prison Phoenix Trust supports prisoners in their spiritual lives through meditation, yoga, silence and the breath. It recommends breath-focused stretches and meditation sensitively tailored to students' needs. This safe practice offers students ultimate peace of mind. The PPT encourages prisoners and prison staff through correspondence, books, newsletters, free taster workshops and weekly classes. www.theppt.org.uk

A Julian Meeting Study Day

The Lechlade Julian Meeting are eager to grow and stretch out in the prayer of silence. They found that David Self's five 'talks' have helped them immeasurably, and feel a booklet with these talks would be so helpful, and not just for those who are newcomers to contemplative prayer.

They held a group study day in a member's home 10.30am - 3.30pm on a Monday. Different members each led a session on one of David's 'Talks', and the day included 30 minutes of silence and

lunch. "We found one day was just not long enough!"

Comments following the day:

- ♦ 'Thin' spaces / places seems a good way of describing last Monday.
- ♦ It was a place we talked in oneness, felt God's presence, stillness, peacefulness, and benediction in our lives. There was balanced and non-judgemental communion in prayer, praise, worship, listening and laughter. It was a joy.
- ♦ It was a Golden Gift, direct from God.

Julian Meetings at **PRAYER FOR LIFE**, a Diocesan Spirituality Day at Southwark Cathedral last November

Bishop Christopher welcomed 300 people, followed by five minutes silence. There was much on offer: morning, midday and evening prayer; two speakers, David Runcorn and Allison Milbank; and workshops both morning and afternoon. The Julian Meetings (one of 10 organisations with stalls) had a lot of interest both from people who knew about JM and those for whom it was new. Our introductory leaflets were popular, and we had inspection copies of publications, plus old magazines to give away. A list of London-wide Meetings was very useful to give to enquirers.

It was a very good way to promote JM so do look out for similar events where you live. Many thanks to Mary, Eileen and Jane, who helped man the stall.

Ann Richards

A Julian Quiet Day

was held in October 2011 at

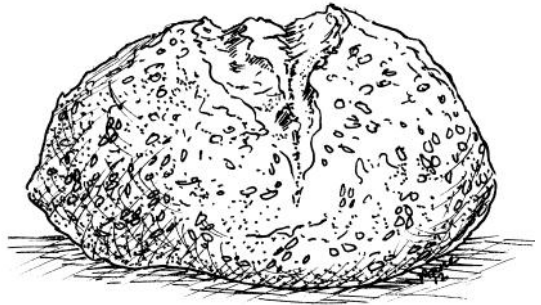
The Church House, South Tawton, Devon.

Members of Okehampton and South Tawton

Julian Meetings were amongst those attending.

The focus of the day was on using our senses to bring us into a greater awareness of God's presence in the present moment.

A loaf of homemade bread was placed alongside the lighted cross, as we recalled that Jesus used ordinary tangible objects to remind us of who he is. "I am the Bread of Life and the Light of the World."



Bread encompasses all the senses – smell in baking, taste in eating, touch in kneading and breaking, sight in appreciating and sound in hearing those words "bread of life".

During the day we used music, objects and pictures to stimulate our senses, rather than our minds, to take us to a deep place of stillness. In neglect of our senses we can become insensitive to God's presence in our present –so often lost as we dwell on the past or look to the future. In cultivating and practising the experience of stillness we can grow ever closer to the heart of God in our daily lives.

We ended the day by breaking the bread as a sign that we were one community sharing in the body of Christ and in his presence with us.

The day was led by Susie Ursell and David Youle, both members of the Exeter Diocesan Exploring Prayer team.

The Science of Silence

There I was, dozing under the duvet, listening to the Today programme on Wednesday 4 January when up came a piece on Silence - yes silence. The BBC Culture Correspondent, David Sillito, was investigating whether meditation can tackle stress and be good for your health. He interviewed Michael Chaskalson, who is running a programme of mindfulness-based stress reduction at the LSE. David attended it for eight weeks. The process sounded like secular meditation focusing on breathing.

These days meditation is a popular subject for study by neuro-surgeons, particularly in the USA, and has been scientifically proved to be a way of combating stress. US Marines are trialling it under the title of "mind fitness training".

The scientific results of studying the brain of a Buddhist monk showed more than normal activity in the area of the brain consistent with openness, kindness and happiness.

After eight weeks of mindfulness meditation, David had a brain scan which showed lack of activity in the front of the brain consistent with that of a meditating Franciscan nun.

David's conclusion, apart from surprise at being compared to a Franciscan nun, was that meditation's changing image is being driven by neuro-science.

Yvonne Walker

For your information:

Michael Chaskalson is said to be one of the foremost teachers of mindfulness in the UK. His website is www.mbsr.co.uk

The Mental Health Foundation offers mindfulness courses on line and around the country. See their website: www.bemindful.co.uk

*There are two types of mindfulness training:
MBSR - Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
MBCT - Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy*

Some NHS doctors are offering these courses to patients for stress reduction instead of prescribing pills.

Do you have any knowledge or experience of mindfulness meditation? Do write to the editor if so.

We will review the book "Mindfulness - a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world" by Mark Williamson in a future JM Magazine.

Prayer is like

Sitting in a café, waiting to order,
Menu read,
Selections made
But not a waitress in sight.
Fidgeting, reading and re-reading the choices.
Tired of waiting
Ready to complain
Ready to leave
When suddenly, she's there at the table, all smiles
Armed with a pen, and a pad, and a pot of coffee.
'Welcome, what can I get you?'
She says as she fills up your cup.

And you notice the sign
'Please place your order at the counter'

And gingerly say – 'Nice coffee!'

Lynne Chitty

A 'Julian' Day Out

It was over coffee at our last Julian Meeting that it dawned on me how little I really knew about Julian of Norwich, in spite of our studying her writings. Where did she meditate, write and pray? What happened when she saw her life-transforming vision?

Pat Chandler and I decided to find out more, and on a Friday morning we took a train to Norwich, clutching our little home-made map (Thank you, Norwich Council website) on how to find St Julian's Church. It nestles rather incongruously amid a host of 1960's industrial buildings and some newer flats and houses.

The Julian Centre

The Julian Centre, attached to the church, is bright, warm and welcoming. There are tables and chairs and a well-stocked library, which I am longing to return to and spend a day browsing. Our attention was immediately drawn to a huge painting of Mother Julian in her cell, as she experienced the vision of a beautiful boy child arising from a foul corpse on the floor. There is a printed sheet explaining every detail of this work by the Australian artist Alan Oldfield.

We looked at the goods for sale, and bought a couple of items, and gathered up some literature to read later. Then we went on to our main objective, the adjoining church. How sad



that the actual churchyard now has to be locked, as the activities of drug and alcohol users has made it unsafe.

The Church

The church was fully restored after it was bombed in the second world war. It is a little haven of white washed walls and beautiful stained glass windows, with nothing to distract the mind from its sense of tranquillity. The outside world seemed far away. After lighting candles we sat for a while, each with our own thoughts and prayers.

We then passed through to the reconstruction of Mother Julian's cell, which is similar to that in which she is said to have spent over thirty years. We did not use the available heater, as we wanted to feel as she might have done on a cold and foggy November day. The atmosphere was so calm and inspirational.

We lit more candles, prayed long and hard for our church, and talked about the kind of life this extraordinary woman must have lived all those centuries ago.

We came away with a lot to think about, and research into. I am sure we shall both view the Julian Meetings in a new light. If you happen to be in Norwich with time to spare, just below the castle is Rouen Road, and down a little turning to the left, almost out of sight, is the tiny church with the huge message. Do go!

Janet Rice

In our core silence, through our beholding, we realise our shared nature with God; we participate in the divine outpouring upon the world: incarnation, transfiguration and resurrection become conflated into a single movement of love.

An extract from Landscapes of Prayer by Margaret Silf, (see review on page 24) Used with permission of Lion Hudson PLC

Our thanks to those who sent in their Suggestions for dealing with 'Cerebral Fleas'

Return , O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you. Psalm 116:7

A brother complained to a hermit about his wandering thoughts. The hermit answered, 'Keep sitting in your cell and your thoughts will settle down. Hitch a mother donkey to a rail and her foal will dance and prance around, but it always returns to her. The same thing happens for the one who sits patiently in his cell seeking God. His thoughts may wander occasionally, but they will return to God.

Return, O my soul, to your rest.

*From 'By Way of the Desert: daily readings'
by Bernard Bangley*

I recommend Robert Llewelyn's booklet 'The Positive Role of Distraction in Prayer'. First published in 1975 it has been reprinted several times since.

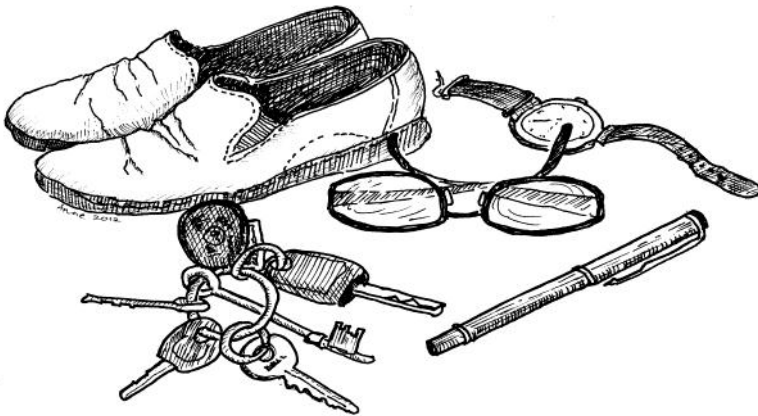
"If some thought should come to mind while you are attempting to pierce the cloud with your arrow of love and longing, you must say to the thought, 'Get down again.' Even holy thoughts must be put on one side in this way or you will find yourself being scattered and fragmented interiorly.....

One way to help you practically is to choose a word, preferably of one syllable such as GOD or LOVE. Clasp this word to your heart with a tight band. Make it your shield and spear to beat upon the dark cloud and strike down all other thoughts by driving them into the cloud of forgetting."

*From 'The Cloud of Unknowing for Everyone'
by Elizabeth Ruth Obbard*

The Prayer Stool

I leave aside my shoes, my ambitions;
undo my watch, my timetable;
take off my glasses, my views
unclip my pen, my work
put down my keys, my security;
to be alone with you
the only true God.



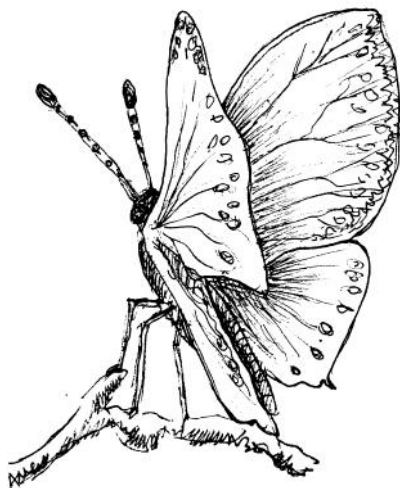
After being with you,
I take up my shoes to walk your ways;
strap on my watch to live in your time;
put on my glasses to look at your world;
clip on my pen to write up your thoughts;
pick up my keys to open your doors.

Bishop Graham Kings

This reflection was used at a recent Julian Meeting, with the first verse as the lead in, and the second verse as the lead out. It is taken from 'Fling Wide the Gates', details overleaf.

Quiet Day

Sheep in the meadow
Butterflies abound
Cool earth beneath my feet
Calmness all around
What a blissful sense of peace
A blessing to be here
Oasis in a busy world
Far from noise and fear
How should I use this time?
Open to the Lord
Lifting up my face to Him
Listening for His word.



Shirley Fry

This is from 'Fling Wide the Gates', an illustrated anthology of Sherborne Poets. It is available for £4.50 inc. postage from Shirley Fry, 11 Joscelin Court, Priestlands Lane, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 4EY. All the proceeds support two Christian Centres, one in India and one in Mazambique.

What does YOUR Meeting do?

A letter came about the December Bradford JM item:

The Bradford JMs doings are a perfectly valid and good way of praying - but it's not contemplative prayer by any stretch of that phrase. If people are being taught that the Bradford practice is contemplative prayer, it will do great harm to JM's aims - the teaching and practice of contemplative prayer.

Clearly Bradford do not follow the usual pattern of gathering in a circle, using music or a short reading as a lead-in and lead-out, with 30 minutes or more of silent prayer in between. Perhaps, if your Meeting also does not follow this 'usual' pattern, you could let us know what you *do* do? It would help the JM Council to know how differently Meetings approach contemplative prayer.

BOOKS

Not everyone has a local bookshop and sometimes it is difficult to obtain books that will become friends on our contemplative journey - perhaps something that has been reviewed in the JM Magazine.

Borrowing books

You could first try your local public library. Staff will help if you ask and will do their best to obtain material if it is not on their shelves, perhaps from a neighbouring library.

Libraries do have on-line catalogues so if you have access to the internet you can browse their stock to see what is available and reserve titles.

Your diocese / denomination may also have resources that you can borrow.

Buying books

If you cannot buy from a local bookshop, then do try The Centre Bookshop, The London Centre for Spirituality The Church of St Edmund the King, Lombard Street, London EC3V 9EA

It has an excellent stock and they will mail anything post free, and also search for out

of print books.

You can order books by phone or via the website.

Tel: 020 7626 5031

www.spiritualitycentre.org

The Sisters of the Love of God

- an Oxford-based Anglican contemplative community - publish books and pamphlets. New books and pamphlets are reviewed in the JM Magazine, but they also have a very good backlist of established titles, especially their fairly short pamphlets.

JM Resources List

We have recently revised the Julian Meetings list of resources, which includes books, e-books, DVDs audiobooks, websites and magazines. If you would like a copy it is available, as are all JM publications, from Pat Robinson (see page 28) It will also be available to read or download from our website www.julianmeetings.org

Book reviews

If you'd like to review a book for the magazine please get in touch with Gail Ballinger: gailballinger@blueyonder.co.uk

The Spirituality of Aging

Here are three books which tackle this important subject in quite different ways.

Richard Rohr looks at the whole spiritual life to help those new to the path as they look forward and longer term pilgrims as they look back on their journey so far.

Linda Douty gives a variety of responses from questionnaires about adjusting to the unexpected as you grow older.

Robert Atwell encourages us to explore the retirement years as a time to discover the essence of life.

FALLING UPWARD: a spirituality for the two halves of life

Richard Rohr

John Wiley & Sons, USA, 2011, £13.99Kindle edition £8.92

ISBN 978 0 470 90775 7

The book title relates to the trampoline effect of our failures and falling down contributing to the bounce upward so that our failings can be the foundation of our spiritual growth. It's a tough lesson to take on board that "we grow spiritually more by doing it wrong than by doing it right".

The author states "Maybe we should just call this book Tips for the Road, a sort of roadside assistance programme". But this book is not for the faint hearted. "The familiar and the habitual are so falsely reassuring and most of us make our homes there permanently. Someone has to make clear to us that homes are not meant to be lived in - but only to be moved out from."

The author considers life like a container. Concentrating on the exterior in the first part of life, we start by establishing our identity, home, relationships, reputation, security and

success. Later on, we may move towards the container's contents: *the task within the task*. This shift enables us to stop our human *doing* so that we can enjoy our human *being*. "There is a God-sized hole in all of us waiting to be filled. We move from the starter kit of 'belief' to an actual inner knowing." Sharing his own experience and drawing on jewels of wisdom from a wide cultural field of myths, great thinkers and sacred texts (the bibliography is a treasure chest for further reading) Richard Rohr shows how heartbreaks and disappointments in early life are actually the stepping stones to the spiritual joys which are in store for us.

This is a book for reflection rather than a straight-through read. It would be good to discuss in a house group. There are passages to lead in to silent prayer and the final chapter, a meditation on a poem by Thomas Merton, "When in the Soul of a Serene Disciple", is something I shall return to again and again.

Yvonne Walker

HOW DID I GET TO BE 70 WHEN I'M 35 INSIDE?: spiritual surprises of later life

Linda Douty

Skylight Paths Publishing USA 2011 £14.99, Kindle Edition £8.99
ISBN 978 1 59473 2973

Yes, that really is the title of this book which discusses the challenges and surprises of aging . Linda Douty tells it how it really is, not how we are supposed to feel, by using the responses to some fifty or so questionnaires and follow-up interviews to provide authentic experiences and some new ways of thinking about the challenges and surprises of the aging process. As an experienced spiritual director, the author does not run away from the unspoken fears,

disappointments and losses which emerge as life grows shorter.

Starting with the need for openness to accept surprise, take risks and adjust to the unexpected, the book covers a wide range of topics including the emergence of the authentic self, physical limitations, changes in relationships with people and with God... This is a wise and practical book, deeply spiritual yet down to earth, facing head-on the scary challenges that appear as life shortens.

Each chapter ends with four or five questions providing food for thought and reflection or as an aid to group discussion. The chapter "Surprises of the Sacred" has themes on images of God, rethinking prayer, discernment, and trusting the mystery. It would be an excellent resource for a Quiet Day. The final section shares the wisdom, insights and gifts of aging that the people interviewed were keen to pass on. I thoroughly recommend this wise and practical manual for growing old gracefully. Refreshingly direct, it has a grounded authenticity because it comes from peoples' own experience

Yvonne Walker

THE CONTENTED LIFE: spirituality and the gift of years
Robert Atwell

Canterbury Press 2011
ISBN 978-1-84825-076-5

This book grew out of a lecture to a group of older people who wanted to talk, not about death and dying, but about life, and living, and what they could contribute to society.

The author considers the challenges and opportunities that confront us as we grow older. He encourages us to go deeper, and to take risks, and to find the value 'being' as well as 'doing'.

The chapters cover retirement, living, memories, forgiveness,

becoming, happiness and a finale. Each chapter starts with a quote, includes specific examples, and ends with questions for reflection. It is not a 'heavy' book but one to take slowly. It encourages thought, and often action, about matters practical, emotional and spiritual, and helps us approach areas of life that we may have avoided confronting before. Gratitude for the good things in life, and hope and optimism also shine through. Well worth reading.

Deidre Morris

WRITING THE ICON OF THE HEART.

Maggie Ross

BRF 2011 £6.99

ISBN 978 1 84101 878 2

I really took to this author, new to me, through this book and also her blog <http://ravenwilderness.blogspot.com>. She is a professed Anglican solitary who divides her time between Alaska's wild landscapes and Oxford. This collection of her essays have at their heart her desire to communicate the prime necessity of silence; silence that feeds, informs and brings us into the milieu of God. She states that "Religion is an attempt to gesture with words that which is beyond words" and she is often sharply critical of the Church: "If religion refuses its servant role of bringing the worshipper ever more deeply into silence, if it points to itself, it muffles the silence. The dialogue becomes a noisy monologue; religion dies." But she extols good liturgy, believing that it is self-effacing and draws one further into "the beholding of the face of God." Some of the essays are light-hearted, wry, and honest and all are beautifully written. There is no false piety for she shares her weaknesses and faults. This book aids contemplation and offers illuminating insights - often dwelling on the meaning of a single word - which have made me stop and think deeply. She promises a more comprehensive study. I look forward to it.

Janet Robinson

LANDSCAPES OF PRAYER: finding God in your world and your life

Margaret Silf

Lion Hudson 2011 £9.99

ISBN 978-0-7459-5528-5

Looking for a prayer picture book to give as a present, I found this beautifully illustrated book by Margaret Silf, in which she explores nine landscapes of prayer: garden, mountain, river, seashore, forest, urban jungle, desert, cave and night sky. Each landscape is given in three parts: an introduction, Bible passage, and questions for reflection. The text is generously inter-spaced with beautiful photographs whose colour quality is breathtaking. The photographers are credited, but I also wanted to know *where* they took their photographs!

The book invites us to wander through some landscapes of the soul, lingering to explore the soul-space, taking time to be fully present to the mystery of God, entering and uncovering deeper layers of God's presence in our lives. The whole book invites the reader to silent contemplation.

This book is such a gem - I had to buy a copy for myself!.

Yvonne Walker

DESERT WELLS

Alice Bates

Darton Longman & Todd

ISBN 978-0-232-52790-2

Set in contemporary culture, the ten original short stories in this book each illustrate a passage of scripture in a very refreshing and original way. A good storyteller draws us in and engages our imagination. Alice Bates certainly has this gift and these modern day situations challenge us to look afresh at the way we love or fail to love those around us.

These stories remind us of the love which God pays to each one of us. They give an insight into how we can show that

same love to others by really paying loving attention to their needs or situation.

Each story stands on its own and, on one level, can be enjoyed by anyone with a faith or none. There are notes and questions in a separate appendix which make it ideal for use by home groups or for individual study.

This book helps us to look at these chosen passages of scripture in a new light; it prods us to 'move on' from some of our set ways of thinking and that is something we all need at times!

Chrissie Rapsey

MEDITATING WITH SCRIPTURE John's Gospel – using the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*

Elena Bosetti

The Bible Reading Fellowship 2010 £7.99

ISBN 987 1 84101 823 2

Written by a theologian, this book presents some helpful insights into St John's gospel, and considers the biblical background to the stories chosen. But this book is not an exhaustive commentary - "the aim of this book is to soar on eagle's wings towards the contemplation of the Word made flesh". To do this Elena Bosetti chooses the method of *lectio divina* inspired by the methodology, proposed by Father James Alberione, of the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Each of the twelve sections takes a different episode from the Gospel, for example the baptism, the calling of the disciples, Jesus and Nicodemus. Each section analyses the text and fills in the biblical background as necessary to illuminate the passage. This is followed by what the author describes as "Dialoguing with the word" where the reader is invited to imagine themselves in the situation: she suggests questions and feelings one might have which prompt the meditation referred to in the title. The section ends with a "Pause to

ponder” and provides a prayerful response to the reading. This is an ‘intellectual’ approach to *lectio divina*, with more commentary on the text and guidance on using it than is usual. However I found the book provided a new way of reading and thinking about the familiar texts.

Anne Stamper

EVERY PLACE IS HOLY GROUND

Sally Welch

Canterbury Press 2011
ISBN 978-1-84825-075-8

I wish everyone, regardless of religious convictions or lack of them, could read this inspiring book. So many people, often the younger ones, find it difficult to relate Bible teaching to our everyday world. Sally Welch’s vivid descriptions of home, community and church, combine with familiar objects like a front door, kitchen tap, the local pub or garden items.

This book adapts to every age group - young children at school; a family taking a walk together; a rebellious teenager; a non-believer asking how God's teaching fits in to life today.

Sally shows that Bible teachings are not remote concepts, but deeply woven into our everyday life. She gives observations made during a short walk, (a ‘pilgrimage’) with Bible readings, a prayer, focal points for reflection and an invitation to go further with each journey of discovery.

Each themed chapter answers questions, such as: "What am I learning about this time?" "Where can I find it in the Bible?" "How does it link up with my own life and surroundings?" "How will I look at things from now on?". Each ‘pilgrimage’ can be made in reasonably quickly, if time is short, or can be developed into a longer contemplative activity.

This book is particularly for those seeking that pilgrim's path through life and needing to feel God's meaningful presence and guidance.

Janet Rice

