

THE
JULIAN
MEETINGS



Magazine
April
2010

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 2010

CONTENTS	PAGE
News from the JM Advisory Group	2
The practice of Meditation	4
Keynote address by David Self	5
The Silence a poem by Elizabeth Mills	9
The Foolishness of Silent Prayer by Angela Ashwin	10
Two Prayers from <i>Lifting Women's Voices</i>	11
Spaces of Silence by Mary Coates	12
The Space Between a poem by Jenna	13
Quiet Days	14
Jottings from Julian Meetings	16
Shoot of Hope by Anne Stamper	18
Responses to 'Is This Really a Julian Meeting?'	20
Book Reviews:	23-30
Between Heaven and Charing Cross <i>Martin Warner</i> , For God Alone <i>Bonnie Thurston</i> ; Ety Hillesum <i>Patrick Woodhouse</i> ; Faith in the Fool <i>Angela Ashwin</i> ; A Book of Hours: at prayer with Thomas Merton <i>Kathleen Deignan</i> (CDs); Finding Silence <i>James Roose-Evans</i> ; Lifting Women's Voices <i>prayers from around the world</i> ; Prayers from Revelations of Divine Love <i>David McDermatt</i> ; Towards the Light <i>Dennis Duncan</i> ; Two books from the series '30 days with a Great Spiritual Teacher' <i>Edited by John Kirvan</i>	
JM Magazine information	31
JM Contact details	32

News from the JM Advisory Group

The Advisory Group residential meeting in spring 2009, facilitated by Jennifer Tann, considered how JM should go forward. One proposal was restructuring the organisation into a 'Core Group' and a 'Council'. The Core Group, who will effectively be the JM 'Trustees', to meet 2/3 times a year. The Council would be the Core Group + all the people who have significant roles in running JM, and would meet yearly.

Meeting at Reading, November 2009

This was the first meeting of the proposed Council. Deidre Morris welcomed everyone to Reading Baptist Church, and we then introduced ourselves, as no-one knew everyone. David Self gave a keynote address (an edited version of it follows this report) which was followed by discussion and a time of gathered Silence.

We thanked Chrissie Rapsey stepping down as Publications Manager, and John Copping who has looked after the Postal Group for six years.

Over our packed lunches we had chance to get to know each other better – it is good to put faces and voices to people you mostly know through e-mails.

JM update

After lunch Janet Robinson explained that the registration of meetings allows us to be reasonably sure that the meetings listed on the database really do exist, and that they all now receive the magazine and newsletter.

Anne Stamper reported that, at the end of October, we had 339 Registered meetings, with 13 new meetings added in 2009. 645 people pay for Individual Magazine subscriptions, and 33 people / organisations receive Complimentary copies. In 2009 Anne dealt with 8 queries by post and 211 by e-mail. There had been 5 queries about JMs abroad.

The website receives about 500 individual visits a month.

New structures

Janet explained the proposed new structure of Core Group and Council. The reduced expenses of a smaller Core Group would free money for the Council to meet each year. This will allow everyone working for JM to meet and discuss any and every aspect of our activities.

These proposals were discussed and it was agreed that the Core Group should be Deidre Morris, Janet Robinson, Anne Stamper, Gail Ballinger (Book reviews and book list) and Patricia Hughes (Treasurer). The Council would additionally include all others who do regular jobs for JM. Most are listed in the magazine, but unlisted people are Denise Parkin (does Magazine mailings with her Chester JM), Mike Tiley (liaison with other Contemplative prayer groups), Sandra Lee (Archivist) and Fiona Wallace.

JM Worldwide

Francis Ballinger explained that Meetings in Ireland and Europe receive magazines by post from UK. There are also meetings in USA, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Mexico: each has a national contact person to whom the magazine is sent in PDF format. It can have any local information and news included before being printed and circulated. Francis keeps in contact with non-UK JMs, though this proves difficult at times. When someone inquires, via the website, about JM outside the UK the message is forwarded to Francis.

JM looking forward

The Council also discussed greater promotion of The Julian Meetings, something all Council members (and all ordinary members of JM) can do, by spreading ideas locally, holding and supporting Quiet Days, or holding special events around Juliantide (May 8th). We shared ideas about Quiet Days, and considered the future of the Postal Group.

We felt it important that JM keeps a balance between openness and organisation. We are not a registered charity (which is why your donations cannot be gift-aided), but we may need to consider this at some future time.

Revision of general financial arrangements (e.g. demise of the cheque) may require us to make organisational changes.

We also need to keep in mind handing over to oncoming generations and getting younger people involved. The current organisers are 'self appointed', having volunteered to do a job when the need has been advertised. There is a useful mix of long-standing members and those who volunteer for just a few years, so there are always new people joining the team.

Deidre thanked everyone for coming and the meeting ended with sharing The Grace

The practice of meditation is the keeping of an appointment with ourselves, with all mankind, with all creation, with God. We may be in a crowded office, harassed by people, feeling ourselves stretched to the limit, yet we remain aware of others as part of the same eternal pattern, that God is in our midst. So gradually we become more aware of the hidden sub-text in every meeting and we begin to hear the words of secret silence.

*From Finding Silence by James Roose-Evans
reviewed on page 27*

At the JM meeting in November 2009, David Self shared with us his thoughts on contemplative prayer and JM. He is a retired Anglican priest, who has a long association with the Julian Meetings. This is an edited version of his talk.

Emily Carr, a great Canadian painter, was fascinated by the huge forests of British Columbia, glimpsing in them the glory of God. She would find a space in the woods, sit down, and wait. At first she would feel she saw very little. But as she waited, and looked, in the stillness she began to notice colours, shapes, movement of air and light, sounds of life. She learnt that you must be still in order to hear and see. Emily Carr allowed herself to be impacted through contemplating the forest with all its colours, immensity and seasons. In the stillness she allowed the forest to 'speak' to her. She allowed herself to be drawn more and more deeply into the forest and she tried to convey the meaning of that experience through her paintings. She allowed herself to be impacted by the sheer otherness of the forest.

Contemplation is a very human action, if we let ourselves become still. Watch a young child examining a stone, or a beetle. Jesus retained that capacity to look deeply into his beloved creation and use the most ordinary things to talk about the Kingdom of God.

Contemplation is deeply embedded in the Christian tradition. When Hilary Wakeman asked if anyone was exploring silent prayer the responses resulted in the Julian Meetings. After 35 years perhaps it is time for a health check. In a Julian Meeting, what exactly are we contemplating and how does it affect the way we behave as human beings?

Today there is a wide interest in spirituality of all sorts. In Ursula King's book *The Search for Spirituality – our global quest for meaning and fulfilment*, she tries to give an

overview of 'spirituality'. She shows the many ways we express our desire for meaning and wholeness, for just and peaceful societies. But transcendence as an aspect of spirituality is hardly mentioned. It remains primarily a human endeavour. So contemplative prayer can become a privatised spirituality with narcissistic tendencies, an emphasis on feelings and personal experience, a sort of sweetness which reassures and shields us from dread. Very mushy and certainly not what Emily Carr was on about.

Julian Meetings should be very clear that their foundation is Christian. Contemplation is a laying ourselves open to the presence of God. But what sort of God do we desire to open up to? Julian, a young devout Christian, asked to enter more deeply into Christ's Passion; to be more deeply purged of her sins; and to receive three wounds - true contrition, loving compassion, and an earnest longing for God. Her prayers were answered, but she then struggled for 20 years as she let them impact her faith and deepen her understanding. Only then did she write the long text of the classic we know today. Julian could be our example. What theology undergirds our faith and prayer? How does our contemplation lead us into the dark side of life? What, for a Christian, does the word spiritual mean?

In the Bible the Spirit of God is there at the beginning, brooding over the darkness. Human beings are made in God's image, so I presume our spirits can be open to a relationship with God's Spirit. In the NT the Spirit works with Mary to bring forth Jesus. The Spirit is also the risen Christ's gift to his people. In 1Cor. 2:14 the spiritual person is one in whom the Spirit of God dwells.

God creates and empowers that dimension of life that we term spiritual, animating believers with new life and understanding. Spirituality is not something a believer *has*. It is the way, the pattern, that people converted and loved

by the risen Christ grow together. The spiritual relates to God's active presence. Spirituality is not about inner experiences but a communal relationship under God. We grow to know and love God by being part of the Body of Christ.

We have the capacity of *relationship* – with others and with God. We enter a relationship by allowing the other to get to know us through story, permission and the growth of *trust*. We wait for the other to do the same, and find that we can never know another completely. We can never fully understand the mystery at the core of being, and this is most true of our relationship with God.

What is mystery? Not a puzzle to be solved, but the fact that the more we encounter another (especially God) the more there is that remains unknown, calling for our respect and humility. The disciples found that about Jesus. The more they knew, learned from and loved him, the less could they comprehend the mystery of his being. We, like them, are led to the foot of the cross and the astonishment of the resurrection. We are given Christ's Spirit to lead us into God's dynamic love, beyond our comprehension. And in that love, we encounter God's longing for us, seeking to draw out our longing for God.

The Spirit's gift to us is a longing, an ache, for God, which is the foundation of contemplative prayer. Contemplation is not an emotion, but the awareness of God, known and loved at the core of one's being. In contemplation we open ourselves to be taken hold of by this 'other' which yet seems to be home. *The Cloud of Unknowing* offers wise words on this. Despite our longing for God, a darkness or cloud often comes between us, and we must just wait in that darkness with our longing. We are to lay aside thinking because 'by love he can be caught and held, but by thinking, never.'

God deals with our true selves, not the false ones we

contrive to face the world. Whenever we pray we cannot bring before God our own self-image or 'good self' for he will deal only with the truth of us as we really are. Thank God for that, for how else can we be healed. In contemplation we seek the deepest ground of our identity in God. We will find ourselves in God's truth. In "prayer of the heart" we yearn for God's presence, and to hear and obey him. Prayer and humility go hand in hand. Only when we come before God alone and helpless can we receive his free gifts of mercy and grace.

Scary? Yes! Prayer *is* a dangerous, risky, adventure. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* When we come into God's presence, in sacrament or prayer, we draw near to the beauty and the truth that is God in holiness.

That is what we do in contemplation. We desire to become still in the heart - and know how wayward we can be, fluttering around in heart and mind. It is beneath the erratic thoughts of the mind, the waves of feelings that sometimes sweep through, that God's Spirit touches our spirits and hears our prayers. There we pray to be stilled. We cannot presume to draw near, for a whisper of the holy leads us to surrender any moral security we have. *Woe is me, for I am a person of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips. (Isaiah 6)*

We pray because God's whisper in our hearts is too deep for words. *Come.*

God is so gentle, drawing near in ways we can bear. *This is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him.*

So I turn to God in Christ, who abides among us - full of grace and truth.

God, of your goodness give me yourself, for you are enough for me ... if I ask anything which is less, always I am in want; but only in you do I have everything. *(Julian ch 5)*

The Silence

*The Silence which welcomes you
.....also enfolds you*

*The Silence which calls you
.....also loves you*

*The Silence which is present
.....remains forever*

*Allow it to be in your heart
....to dwell in your mind*

.....to remain in your very being

*Not only when, deep in the Silence,
you know you are enfolded and loved*

*But also, as you go about
your day to day business and activities,
may you know that ... then too
.....The Silence remains and ... then too
.....The Silence enfolds and loves you.*

Be present to the Silence

That the Silence may be present to you

And remain with you

This day and always

Amen

THE FOOLISHNESS OF SILENT PRAYER

Why on earth do we regularly spend time doing nothing, achieving nothing, and often feeling we are not much good at silence anyway?

A friend told once me that her teenage son simply could not understand why she sat down every morning with a candle, instead of doing something 'useful' like helping in the local soup kitchen.

Sometimes our own mind nags away too: 'What about all those urgent jobs? And what's the use anyway when my mind is full of distractions?'

Thus the voice of utilitarianism burrows its way into our consciousness, trying to convince us that, because quiet prayer is not ostensibly *useful*, it is not worth doing. It may help to remember that some of the very best things in life cannot be measured according to how productive or cost-effective they are: things like play, music, poetry, spending time with beloved people, enjoying creation – we could all make our own list.

And prayer, especially wordless prayer, is, for me, the supreme example of 'wasting time' with God because it is vitally important to do so. Of course, prayer does change things. It changes us for the better and enables us to be channels of God's blessing to the world. But that does not make it 'useful' like a commodity or programme. In the stillness we are simply making space for God to enter our lives and take possession of us. The rest is up to God.

Being fools for God

St Paul's bold and brilliant assertion that 'the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom', and that we need to become fools ourselves (1 Corinthians 1:25, 3:18), reminds us that being foolish in worldly terms is part of our job as Christians.

And if our praying feels dry or difficult we can take heart. It is at the point where we feel most in need of Christ that he is pressing most keenly to love us and work in us.

It is, after all, the 'poor in spirit' who receive the kingdom (Matthew 5:3), not those who are rich in success and control. So let us celebrate being 'fools for Christ' and carry on sitting there, in the silence.

Angela Ashwin

See page 26 For a review of Angela's latest book, 'Faith In The Fool – Risk and Delight in The Christian Adventure'

To Follow the Light

O God, you are with us in our fear.
You sustain us in our times of uncertainty.
You shine your light upon us.
Embrace us with joy.
Help us to follow that light in all ways,
At all times,
Throughout our lives.
In your name we pray, Amen.

Barb Hagen
Diocese of Montana, United States

Break into Our Parched Lives

Living God,
We long for your presence
as for water in a dry and thirsty land.
Come to us in our hour of need;
Break into our parched lives;
Inundate our hearts with fresh streams of living water.
Let us drink deeply and never be thirsty
Except to know you fully as we are known,
In Jesus Christ the living spring.
Amen

Joanna Udal
Khartoum, Sudan

These two prayers
are taken from
'*Lifting Women's
Voices*', reviewed
on page 28

Spaces of Silence

My piano teacher often reminded me of how important the silences are in music. I would play my practice piece: he'd listen intently. At the end he would say that I had not paid enough heed to the 'rests' – the times during which one or both of my hands didn't play. 'Silence is part of the music,' he would say, 'silence allows the music to breathe.'

Our culture is addicted to background noise — so used to the sound of traffic, we simply blot it out. We only notice the hum of the fridge or the central heating when it stops. We are frightened of silence: scared of the loneliness, the isolation, the nothingness it seems to imply. We're afraid to face some of the realities within us, stripped of the defences that words provide: fearful of being vulnerable before God.

We've got out of the habit of proper listening. Maybe we're scared of that too. True listening requires silence on the part of the listener, and implies engagement, commitment. It places demands upon us. For these same reasons we can be scared of really listening to God.

I am often struck by the silences in the Gospels. We are constantly told that, in the midst of a busy schedule, Jesus spends time alone in prayer. After a miraculous healing, he invites people to tell no-one. Witness is to be preceded by silence. Surrounded by a crowd accusing the woman taken in adultery, Jesus remains silent, writing in the sand.

At the heart of worship and witness is always the invitation to listen to the gospel story: to find the quietness to attend to it carefully. The great mysteries of our faith invite us first to silence, to encounter the living God and so come more fully to know ourselves. Silence allows worship to breathe; is at the heart of mission; is part of the music of Christian living.

Mary Coates,
Ecumenical Moderator, Milton Keynes
(an edited version of the article in The Door, Pentecost 2008)

The Space Between

The cascade of notes, the warp and weft of melody

... Gives way, and single liquid drops

... Fall delicately, exquisitely spaced;

... Beauty in the space between.

The torrent of words, the voicing of pain

Stops, and the silence lengthens

Till out of the birthing comes a new thought:

Insight in the space between.

At the height of the storm, the lull,

The sudden eerie, quiet, breathless pause

An awesome peace contained within the rage;

Power in the space between.

Fullness within emptiness,

movement locked in stillness,

growth pangs in pain,

we find God in the space between

Jenna

2009

**WORDSWITHOUT
SPACESARE
DIFFICULTTO
UNDERSTAND**

This was left written on the conference room blackboard during the JM retreat 10 years ago. It says 'words without spaces are difficult to understand'.

Quiet Day for Advent

The idea for a quiet day for Advent, on the theme of 'preparation and waiting', came from reflecting on Advent and how it's meaning tends to be forgotten amid the turmoil of Christmas preparations. We wanted the day to be simple, quiet and unstressed.

We met in church, and also had two rooms off the church set up as small chapels, so that people had a variety of spaces to use. We provided some books, and sheets of poetry and prose, on the theme of Advent, plus writing and drawing materials for those who wished to record their day in some way.

The day began with coffee; quiet background music helped to set the tone for the day as we left the busyness of Christmas preparations behind us to begin our time of silent reflection.

We opened with prayers and a reflective talk by a retired minister, a regular at our Julian Meeting. This was followed by time for reflection and contemplation.

During the hour lunch break we tried to keep the overall silence, but not too rigidly. Our 21 attenders enjoyed a simple 'soup and sandwich' lunch rounded off by home-made cake.

The afternoon session followed the morning's pattern, but with a different speaker, and we ended the day with the Eucharist.

We made no set charge for the day but asked for donations, which amply covered the cost of lunch and a contribution to heating and lighting the church.

Feedback from the day has been very positive, and people have suggested we have a similar day for Lent.

Marie

East Yorkshire Quiet Day

Our July Quiet Day at Wydale Hall was led by Peter Dodson, priest member of the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer. He is an international leader of retreats and author, among other books, of *Contemplating the Word: a Practical Handbook* and *Embody the Word: Being a Temple of the Holy Spirit*.

He gave very clear teaching and instruction for each of our two sessions, enabling us to experience what we were being taught. We were very grateful for this opportunity for teaching on contemplative prayer, particularly as six people who joined us had no experience of contemplative prayer and were seeking that 'something more' in their prayer life.

Quiet Day in North Yorkshire — place and space

In 2009 David Hope (former Archbishop of York) led a Quiet Day on a wonderful spring day of sunshine and flying clouds. The place was Bolton Abbey, in the Yorkshire Dales. His talks morning and afternoon were given in the parish church, created in what had been part of the original Abbey Church. This gave a great sense of prayerfulness surrounding us. We then had time and space to just be with God in the silence. Not only was there the church itself, but the ruins of the rest of the original Bolton Abbey to wander in. There was the river, with its play of light and sound. There were hills and woods to walk in. It was a wonderful day to spend with God.

§ If you are thinking of holding a Quiet Day, but are unsure how to go about it, the Retreat Association produces an excellent booklet (www.retreats.org.uk) or Janet Robinson (see JM contacts on page 32) can put you in touch with someone from the Julian Meetings who could offer help and encouragement.

Jottings from Julian Meetings

Our membership has declined due to frailty, ill-health and death, and we can no longer continue. I, and one other member when she is able, will try to attend our nearest Meeting, where I started my contemplative journey. It has been a wonderful journey and silent prayer has become part of my life.

(Surely this last sentence is the essence of JM — Ed.)

We have been meeting for just over two years. In the first year we had 30 minutes silence, as many do. During the second year we were increasingly reluctant to come out of the silence. When we did we said things like 'The time flew by', or 'Was it *really* 30 minutes?' So we have gradually extended the silence to 35, 40, and now 45 minutes — not sure if it may be 50 next time! It still seems to fly by. People have a real sense of 'going deep', which they value. If someone new to JM comes to join us I assume we would revert to 30 minutes, to be fair to them. Have any other Meetings extended their silence in this way?

Our meeting organizes an annual Quiet Afternoon, which starts at 3.00pm and ends at 7.30pm. These timings suit our members, for various reasons, and we have a very prayerful time.

(Perhaps other Meetings have Quiet 'DAY's at times other than the usual 10.00am - 4.00pm slot. It might be worth bearing in mind - Ed.)

I'd love to have news from Julian Meetings outside the UK. Is JM growing in their country? How did it start in somewhere like Mexico?

(How about it, all members who are outside Britain? Send me some items for the Magazine - Ed.)

Before Christmas our numbers had dropped to four. After some urgent prayer, four new members asked to join! It gave us such joy, as they knew at once that this was the group they wanted.

We meet in a small 400 year old Almshouse chapel, soaked in prayer. We are in the town centre, with traffic and people all around, but our silent prayer absorbs all the noise.

Two responses to page 8 of the December Magazine, following Wanda Nash's address on shared silence.

We had a non-Christian member of our Julian meeting for about 6 years. Sadly she had mental health problems and became so disruptive we had to ask her to leave.

Quakers currently welcome people of all faiths, or none, to their weekly meeting for worship. The meeting is not completely silent, but there is no verbal assent to any creed. I joined the Quakers to have more silent worship than just my Julian Meeting. Six years on I have mixed feelings. I have met people whose journeys were spiritually deep but different from my own and rooted in other faiths. Some Quakers today speak of Christianity as a failed religion and prefer not to use the word God. The emphasis on things other than the love and worship of God led me to leave. I think it is not a place for early spiritual formation, but could be a mindblowing experience for a mature Christian wanting to widen their view.

Shoot of Hope

After hearing David Self's talk at the JM Council meeting I looked up artist Emily Carr on the web, and was very taken with her strong paintings of the Canadian forests. Soon afterwards the following passage was read at Evensong:

Look, the Sovereign, the Lord of hosts,
will lop the boughs with terrifying power;
The tallest trees will be cut down,
and the lofty will be brought low.
He will hack down the thickets of the forest with an axe,
and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

(Isaiah ch10 & ch11)

About this same passage Henri Nouwen writes in *iGracias!*
I find this a hopeful message. Somehow, I keep expecting loud and impressive events to convince me and others of God's saving power; but over and over again I am reminded that spectacles, power plays and big events are the ways of the world. Our temptation is to be distracted by them and made blind to the 'shoot that shall sprout from the stump'.

In response I drew this picture — entitled Shoot of Hope — and I can see in it the influence of Emily Carr. I painted it at the time of the Copenhagen conference on climate change and it became a prayer for the world.

Anne Stamper



In the original painting the flame like a shoot is green

Responses to 'Is this really a Julian Meeting?' *(in the December 2009 Magazine)*

I was appalled by the 'Is this a JM?' – the only redeeming feature was the 30 minutes silence. But NO circle, no socialising or sharing? Lets hope someone in that JM sees the article and takes note!

S W

I am concerned about the article 'Is this really a Julian Meeting?' which comes across as an attack on a particular Julian Meeting. I think the members of that Meeting are likely (unless gifted with exceptional saintliness) to feel angered and humiliated by the article. This could lead to rejection of JM, even to loss of faith, so I believe the article should not have been published.

S D

I was disturbed by this item. The meeting was in a church - a service rather than a meeting - but with 30 minutes contemplative prayer. I thought it sounded lovely, unlike the letter writer, whose lack of spiritual information disturbed me. Was worship, prayer and engagement with God not possible? Was there evidence that it did, or did not, meet the spiritual needs of the local people?

Stephen Burns (in "Liturgy" 2006 ch2) examines the visual theologies conveyed by different places of worship. How they arrange chairs in an empty room says a lot about a Christian community and its relationship with Christ.

Meeting in a church rather than a room, they may have felt a more formal service was appropriate.

From her cell Lady Julian could look into the church to see the Mass and take communion. Would she have felt cheated by being in her cell, not in a circle?

My Julian Meeting follows JM's suggested pattern. We've met in a small oratory, a coach house, church hall, various houses and a very cold Parva. We had a service in a

church once, for a special occasion. Generally we chat at the end, but at times I want to leave whilst the silence still has hold of me, to leave enfolded in love and take it home with me.

For me a Julian meeting offers the chance to meet together for a time of silence in which we can be ready for an encounter with God. If the meeting had that, then I would say, 'YES it was a Julian meeting.'

S M

Is this really a Julian Meeting? This is certainly a prayer meeting, and a prayerful one. But, to me, NOT a JULIAN Meeting. JM is simplicity. Just shared silence and stillness before God, and *perhaps* sharing afterwards. Nothing more.

D M

'Is this really a Julian Meeting?' gave me food for thought. I first came to JM as an escape from noisy, excited charismatic prayer groups. The calm quiet before and after the silence was just right, and I was at home at once. But from 30 years wide experience of Julian Meetings, some parts of the article were troubling.

Being on the Advisory Group for many years, and part of many discussions on the essence of prayer, I found that every one needs silent prayer in their lives, but not everyone has to experience it in the same way. The basis of prayer is the need to approach God in our own way. Each Meeting is free to conduct itself in its own way, changing at times to suit its members. Sitting in a circle is best for me, but no RULE says we must. No rule specifies anything except the three basic starting points of JM. Firstly, the time of prayer must be Christ-centred. Secondly groups must be ecumenical in intention, even if this does not always happen in practice. Thirdly the majority of the time is for silent, contemplative prayer, with an optional lead-in and lead-out. Every Meeting will try to provide what its participants need in their time of silent prayer.

If the Meeting in the article is serving the desires of those

who choose to go, can we say it is wrong? There may be great value in the prayer, readings and homily before the silence, to calm thoughts and lead into a time of contemplation. We vary in our needs and approach to God. Those who value silence can use it in their own way, and all that precedes or follows will not detract from their time with God.

While on the Advisory Group I learnt that there are so many approaches to the use of silence. The freedom to conduct the meeting in an individual way serves the members and brings them the benefit from their prayer in a very special way. It was exciting to be involved in guiding the movement. Advisory Group meetings were stimulating; every member brought ideas from their own experience and outlook. We honoured each other's opinions and needs, and this is how the ethos of JM evolved. Freedom to be ourselves, but with the importance of contemplative prayer firmly in the centre of our lives. And it is this freedom to be individual that each group has within the Julian Meetings.

Let us value our freedom, and grant it to those whose ideas may not be ours. We can all be ourselves and God will welcome us all.

HB

I would have been very put off by the meeting that is described. I think the essence of a Julian Meeting is silence and desire. What distracts from this simplicity is wrong.

JD

From the editor: I notice that those who do not think it is really a Julian Meeting write very briefly, and little has been edited from their responses.

The letters who think it IS a Julian Meeting were all much longer, and some had to be quite heavily edited in places.

Thank you all for sharing your views on this topic. I had responses from both men and women.

Book Reviews - Book Reviews - Book Reviews

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND CHARING CROSS

Martin Warner

Mowbray 2-009 £9.99

ISBN 184706-538-4

ISBN 978-1-84706-538-4

When I finished this book I immediately wanted to read it again! It is such a rich source of illumination and insight.

The 'Prayers of Preparation' that a priest may use as he is vesting for the Eucharist date back to the 16th century.

Canon Martin Warner, Treasurer of St Paul's Cathedral, uses these prayers to structure his book. In each case the prayer, action or vestment addresses a different part of life.

The first chapter starts with part of the prayer for washing hands: *Give strength to my hands, O Lord, and wash away every blemish....that I might be ready to do your service.*

The chapter is called *Handling Reality*, and immediately takes us into how we deal with the material world. The author's examples range from being fitted with contact lenses to the film *Mary Poppins*; from the *Pitmen Painters* to being a school governor; from the handwriting of God to those who use sign language. All help the reader to see how everyday things relate to our faith.

Other chapters focus on further aspects of life that are common to us all: mind, fashion, commitment, celebration. Martin Warner draws on the everyday life around us. Of the millennium bridge, joining St Paul's and Tate Modern, he writes of the complementarity between what these two buildings enshrine: art and faith. His final chapter addresses the mystery of silence (something familiar to our readers) but even then he surprises with unexpected juxtapositions and insights.

The book's title is from Francis Thompson's poem *The*

Kingdom of God: in no strange land; whose final verses are:

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry; - and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter
Cry, - clinging heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

And that is what this book does, links heaven to the reality of now.

Anne Stamper

FOR GOD ALONE: a primer on prayer
Bonnie Thurston

DLT 2009 £12.95
ISBN 978-0-232-52760-5

I have read and liked Bonnie Thurston's poetry, so was delighted to find that she illustrates this book with it. She gives an excellent guide to the classic disciplines of voiced, meditative and contemplative prayer. A third of the book is on contemplative prayer, which she calls the prayer of waiting.

The title is from Psalm 62 'For God alone my soul waits in silence...' and waiting in silence is how she prefers to pray. Her recurrent message is that prayer is a relationship with God, a mode of being in which we are transformed: not about getting theory or techniques right, both of which nonetheless have their place in the book.

The author succeeds in being 'homey' and practical, though her learning is apparent and she does tackle subjects like the anthropology of prayer. I found the chapter on the body at prayer particularly good. Formerly a Professor of New Testament Studies, she uses her Biblical knowledge – which she insists must be 'heart knowledge' – to good effect. Several times I found myself thinking 'Oh, I see...'

Gail Ballinger

ETTY HILLESUM: a life transformed
Patrick Woodhouse

Continuum 2009 £12.99
ISBN 978 1 84706 426 4

Some readers will know "An interrupted Life", the published letters and diaries of Etty Hillesum. This young Dutch Jew recounts her journey of faith during Nazi persecution, a transit camp and, finally, Auschwitz where she died.

This book follows her life story, examining her personal transformation as she learns to pray and "to stop and listen to herself, to sound her own depths in order to find a basic tune, a steady undercurrent". This enabled her to reach a deeper dimension of living, a deep still centre. Here she learned to face up to her fear, to refuse to hate and to maintain a deep sense of goodness and beauty despite subjection to the appalling events of the Holocaust.

Her story of courage and faith explores the nature of God and how suffering and pain can be redemptive through hope, love and the refusal to hate. A perfect companion to her diaries, it can just be read as an inspirational biography of an extraordinary young woman who lived a spirituality of hope in the darkest period of the 20th century.

Yvonne Walker

FAITH IN THE FOOL
Angela Ashwin

DLT 2009 £12.95
ISBN 978-0-232-52770-4

Some years ago our hotly debated conference topic was, 'Did Jesus have failures?' The answer boils down, in the end, to what kind of God you believe in.

For many people, a barrier to spiritual growth is fear of getting it wrong. Of course, that's only possible if you believe there's only one right way – all too often, the way to which you've become accustomed. 'Faith in the Fool' gently challenges our assumptions – about life, about faith, and about the one on whom our faith is based. It reminds us that any statement

of ours is an approximation, at best, to the truth which lies both beyond us and within us.

The book's five sections explore common themes, relating to areas where we may encounter problems. Each short (4 / 5 page) chapter ends with points for reflection. Tackling one chapter a day, it would take you a month – unless you chose February! But you would miss so much. There are sections I need to revisit at length; some that have taken me back to things I'd consciously forgotten, and given them a new strength; some which are not for me at this point. It will be the same for you.

As I type this review, our new kitten is sitting between the keyboard and the screen. He follows every word as it appears, trying to bite some of them. He hasn't made the connection between the action of my fingers behind him and what has grabbed his attention. 'Faith in the Fool' will help us make – or remake – the connections between our faith and our daily lives. It's no co-incidence that, in our target-driven world, the first section explores 'The Value of Uselessness' – what do we mean by 'worth'?

If you want answers, this is not the book for you. But if you seek a companion – a wise, witty companion – to walk with you on the next stage of your journey, drawing your attention to points of interest you might easily overlook, and stimulating conversation, take Angela with you.

Brian Morris

A BOOK OF HOURS: at prayer with Thomas Merton.

Kathleen Deignan, CND

Schola Ministries, USA, 2009 \$20 from Amazon.com

These two CDs, one for dawn and one for dusk, each have seven meditations, one for each day of the week, drawn from the edited volume of the same name. (Sorin Books, 2007) Each day has a mixture of words and song.

Using this almost daily for three months, I was surprised to get fresh inspiration each time I listened, even when I found

the occasional devotion to Mary not to my Anglican taste. Some days the words and music really lifted me out of myself - as when Julian's words "all shall be well" were set to music. Apart from personal use on a daily basis, a group could use excerpts from the CDs either on their own, or as part of the introduction to a meditation.

Sometimes Thomas Merton can be hard to comprehend and somewhat enigmatic: these meditations provide an introduction. After careful listening new layers gradually emerge. If you normally take time every day to be with God, these CDs could be a good companion and stimulus. We all need to hear the message of God's goodness, forgiveness and love which these meditations proclaim.

Francis Ballinger

FINDING SILENCE: 52 meditations for daily living

James Roose-Evans

The History Press 2009 £8.99

ISBN 978 0 7524 5405 4

The author's wide reading and life experiences as a theatrical director, playwright, priest, author and teacher of meditation bring to this book a range of inspiring and original ideas.

These are thought provoking, deeply helpful and engagingly expressed.

Some of the short chapters are meditations on contemplation, suggesting ways and means to deepen the time of silence.

Other chapters are meditative musings on his reflections and experiences of places, and encounters with a wide variety of people and ideas.

To review it, I had to read the whole book at one go. I would advise you just to read the introduction and then glance at a chapter or two. If it speaks to your condition then use it as the title suggests - perhaps once a week in your time of prayer. Meditate upon the meditations and allow them to lead you into contemplation.

Janet Robinson

LIFTING WOMEN'S VOICES –

prayers to change the world.

***Ed.s Margaret Rose, Jenny Te Paa,
Jeanne Person, Abigail Nelson.***

Canterbury Press £17.99 393 pages

ISBN 978-1-85311-968-2

Over some weeks I used this book almost daily, and was touched by the words of other women approaching God. It may be as a prayer, praise, poem, meditation, litany, or lament, but so many of these pieces share deeply felt personal experiences. They echo some of my experience as daughter, wife, mother, woman. So often women are unheard in a world where men hold most power: their concerns are belittled, disregarded or set aside. Here they speak loud and clear.

Under the 'political' headings 'The Millennium Development Goals' and 'To Change the World', these women bring to God poverty, children, health, education, justice, equality, friend-ships, and prayer as they have seen and experienced them, and as they hope to transform them.

This book, developed from an earlier volume by American Anglican women, has most contributions from the USA. The offerings from 31 other countries give it a world perspective, enabling us to approach God 'in other women's shoes'. Some items could be used in a Julian Meeting, some (if modified) in more formal liturgy.

Their great value is to enrich and broaden personal prayer. As Jane Williams says on the cover, 'prayer ... is an active pledging of ourselves for God to use in the transformation for which we pray. The best possible response to this collection is to add your hearts and voices and pray with us.'

Deidre Morris

(Two prayers from this book are printed on page 9 of this magazine)

PRAYERS FROM REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE

David McDermott

Bright Pen (Authors Online) 2009 £7.99;
also e-book format – details at www.authorsonline.co.uk
ISBN 978-07552-1110-4

These prayers are an edited translation of Julian's work. Each chapter is summarised (this is similar to Clifton Wolters translation for Penguin, with which I compared the text) and then David McDermott has edited the text of each chapter, turning it into a prayer. Where chapters are long this results in some rather long prayers e.g chapter 74 from the sixteenth revelation. I particularly liked chapter 5 from the first revelation: the familiar passage about the hazelnut. I found the book rather wordy for contemplative use and not suitable for 'lead-ins' at a Julian Meeting. It would be best for personal reflective reading. It's availability in e-book format could be a bonus for some readers.

Gail Ballinger

TOWARDS THE LIGHT: prayers through depression to healing

Dennis Duncan

SPCK 2009 £8.99
ISBN 978 0 281 06141 9

Many readers know Dennis Duncan as Church of Scotland Minister, author of many devotional books, counsellor and teacher at the Westminster Pastoral Foundation, regular contributor of weekly meditations in the Daily Telegraph, Director of the Churches' Council for Health and Healing and President of the Guild of Health. In 2007, in his mid-eighties and following several personal crises, he suffered a period of severe depression.

Towards the Light is a devotional diary of morning and evening prayers which traces his journey towards the darkness, then the actual depths of the crisis itself, followed by his journey towards the light. In the last few entries he records God's call to write this book to "help others cope

better with their dark night" and recognises his very real fear at reliving his dark night in writing it.

The prayers express the real worries and fears of someone of faith who finds, in the doubt and despair of their depression, that there is nothing there. Utter dereliction and abandonment is expressed in a way that the reader can share. This is an accessible book that offers hope to those passing through a similar experience and encouragement to those who accompany people journeying through the darkness of depression.

Yvonne Walker

Where Only Love Can Go: the Cloud of Unknowing

ISBN 978-1-59471-158-9

True Serenity: the Imitation of Christ

ISBN 978-1-59471-157-2

Ave Maria Press/Alban Books 2009 £6.99

These two books, edited by John Kirvan and published by Ave Maria Press, are in a series called '30 Days with a Great Spiritual Teacher'.

Each starts with a brief introduction to the author and his work, plus advice on 'how to pray this book'. Each provides a daily brief morning meditation (c.200 words) drawn from the mystic's writings; a short phrase from it for use throughout the day; and a night prayer to gather all together at the end of the day. I found this prayerful approach to these classic titles very helpful and would recommend them both as an aid to prayer and as an introduction to the works.

An anonymous 14th century English monk wrote *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which is full of advice on contemplative prayer for a young man .

The Imitation of Christ was written by Thomas à Kempis, a Flemish monk, around 1418 and published in English in 1530. The work is a manual of devotion.

Other titles in the series follow the same pattern and include, among others, Francis of Assisi, Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila

The views expressed in this Magazine are those of each writer and are not necessarily held by the Editor or by the Julian Meetings Advisory Group.

Magazine Contributions

The Editor is always pleased to receive original articles, short meditations, stories, poems or artwork for the Magazine, but cannot guarantee that they will be included, and they may be edited before inclusion.

Book reviews should include the book's title, author, ISBN, publisher, year published, hardback or paperback, and price.

**Please send contributions for the August Magazine
by 25 May 2010**



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