

THE
JULIAN
MEETINGS



*seeking God
in silence*

*Magazine
December
2015*

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 2015

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The Rev'd Judy Howard was invited to write about Spirituality: Stepping outside the box as part of a blog reflecting Daring Greatly, the Theme adopted by The Revd Jenni Entrican, the current President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. We print it here with permission www.daringgreatly.org.uk

Daring Greatly through spirituality ... with the courage to step outside the box

I'm swimming. Coming here is to go down into the Jordan, to be immersed in the deep waters of God's self. I am baptised again and again. It is acceptance, forgiveness, release, renewal. Such blessing. As I swim I think about this title – 'Spirituality: the courage to step outside the box'.

What is the box?

I imagine a wooden planter or window box.

Some plants grow straight up and tidy, and usually in the middle;

some, near the edges, tumble over, obscuring those edges.

What is the box?

Is it big enough to hold the earth of tradition and discipline and practice? Will my roots go deep enough to find nourishment and stability? Will I stretch wide enough to allow my foliage to tumble over the edges?

Once upon a time I sat in a prayer meeting at college. I had learned the language, the 'ritual', the expectation, becoming a proficient club member, definitely inside a particular box. Rising to the dizzy heights of being president of the Christian Union I wondered whether the others would discover that I was a fake since I never converted people on the train.

I sit with my friend in the little Jamaican cafe. Ivy brings us

goat curry, rice and peas, and dumplings. I hold a dumpling, break it and we share it. An Emmaus moment. Christ hosts the space in time and place in the breaking of bread.

Shared Christmas

I have been invited to share the Christmas feast with my Egyptian co-granny. She is a devout Copt. Our grandchildren, her sons, and my daughter are there, and she has also invited another Egyptian couple. They are Muslim.

When the meal is over, and the younger ones have left, co-granny, her friends and I talk, share memories, and eat delicious cakes from Alexandria. The conversation drifts from English to Arabic. The other woman gets a scarf out of her bag, puts it round her head, takes her shoes off and sets herself ready to pray beside the television. Her husband is given a table cloth, to be his prayer mat, and goes upstairs to make a holy space. Co-granny clears the dining table, moving around her praying friend. Prompted by this prayer I sit and allow phrases from the psalms to pray me. Such hospitality; 'free to worship without fear' says the Benedictus. Prayers are over. We sit talking for a while. I get up to leave and in that moment co-granny invites me to pray for us, Christian and Muslim and me a woman.

Who has been the host of this feast, this space in time and place, this profound, natural shared holiness?

More sharing

It is an evening in May. I have been invited to speak to a group who are studying a course in Spiritual Journeys. The person running the course has sometimes attended a gathering where I celebrate communion once a month. She has asked me to share my journey of faith. She has also asked whether I would be willing to share Communion with

the participants on the course and if so, would there be qualifications to receiving communion?

She is eager for the group to share the experience that has been profound for her. How could there be excluding criteria for the nourishment of a life given freely by God?

Sixteen of us gather in a little wooden building, (maybe another sort of box!), on stilts on the edge of a valley. The group leader welcomes, introduces, and then asks each person to tell something of the spiritual path they are on, if any, and also what experience of Communion they might have had. All but one tell stories of belonging to main stream churches; Sunday school, choir, confirmation, or joining as young adults for some years. Then disillusionment. One woman speaks of the 'gap' that grew between her and what went on at the front of church as getting bigger and bigger until she dropped off the edge.



It's my turn. I tell stories of my faith journey. Then I spread a cloth on the floor in front of me; place home made bread and a cup of wine on it. I use words from a simple contemporary liturgy. This action, blessing, breaking, sharing, is so powerful it hardly needs words.

Holiness fills the space around us and within us.

We pass the bread and the wine around the circle, each giving, each receiving. There is profound silence.

Then people speak of what it has meant to them. Some weep.

The one person who has had no previous experience of participating in Communion and had always seen it as a primitive, cannibalistic activity, says, with tears in her eyes,

how deeply meaningful it has been. She could not have
imagined the experience of such loving acceptance.
Another Emmaus time, another Emmaus place.

What relief to realise that God does not need defending.
How absurd!

The things of God cannot belong in any box. All our boxes
belong in God

Judy Howard

*I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.
I must bring them also, and they will listen to my
voice.*

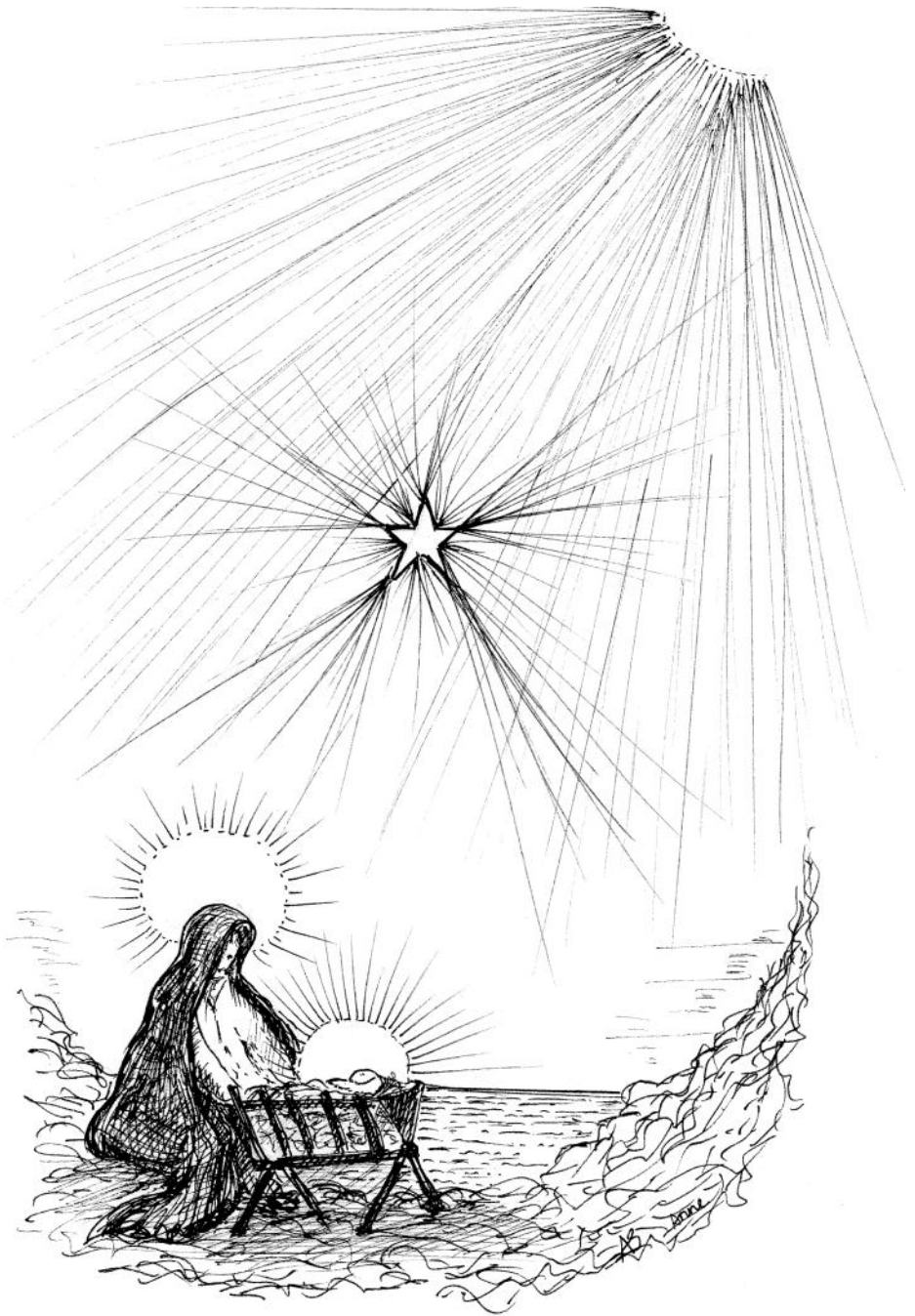
So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

John 10.16

This is not instruction for us
to go out and convert people.
It's a promise that the Good Shepherd
gathers us in a flock, a community
deeper than our making,
greater than our knowing.

Other races and cultures,
other religions and values,
other times and ages,
other species, other worlds - but ah,
we keep imagining
such a small flock, don't we?

Steve Garaas-Holmes
unfoldinglight@gmail.com



Silence

....and yet he opened not his mouth (Isaiah 53 :7)

*The temptation is always to say too much,
Compensate for His non-saying
With verbal tinsel and bauble tunes.
Unnerved by the dimming of angel glory,*

*Fading echoes of exuberant hosannas,
We dazzle with evangelical smiles,
Amplify earnestness to deafen doubt,
Then miss the pre-dawn silence-swaddled virgin*

*Birth. Quiet is the only adequate
Womb thick enough to shut out
The devil's noise, protect a life*

*Of listening. Silence and only silence is
Congenial humus for this seed that will burst
In resurrection through death's mute crust.*

by **Eugene H Peterson**

*Poem taken from 'Holy Luck: poems of the Kingdom'
by Eugene H Peterson.
Canterbury Press 2014 and reproduced with permission-
Reviewed in December 2014 JM magazine.*

Jubilate for Wanda

Wanda Nash died in June, and on 4th September her friends and family gathered in Winchester Cathedral to remember her, and to celebrate and give thanks for her life. They used a service she had written herself, called a Jubilate for Wanda.

Wanda Nash (1934 - 2015) had a long association with Julian Meetings and was a great supporter and encourager to the movement. She led retreats for us, and was the keynote speaker at the Julian Meetings Day in Salisbury in 2007 when she spoke of silence in an interfaith context. She is also remembered for Cathedral Stillness and Three Faiths Silence (Christian, Jewish, Muslim). Wanda wrote a number of books including *People Need Stillness*, *(DLT) Turning the Downside Up* (Zondervan) and *Tools for Stillness* (Grove Books)

The service booklet said: This is Wanda's
Jubilate

It has five parts: Praise, Repentance, Adoration, Yearning, Supplication (PRAYS). The word Jubilate means 'to shout for joy' so today we are giving thanks and shouting for joy in celebrating the wonderfully full life Wanda led, in helping so many people in so many different ways.



Reading 'The Journey of Life' (an ancient Hebrew Prayer)

For each of us life is like a journey.
Birth is the beginning of this journey,
and death is not the end but the destination.
It is a journey that takes us from youth to age,
From innocence to awareness,
From ignorance to knowledge,
From foolishness to wisdom,
From weakness to strength and often back again,
From offence to forgiveness,

From loneliness to friendship,
From pain to compassion,
From fear to faith,
From defeat to victory and from victory to defeat,
Until, looking backwards to ahead,
We see that victory does not lie at some high point along the
way, but
in having made the journey, stage by stage.

Readings on stillness

'Stillness' is about emptying myself of 'me' - as far as possible,
and replacing the selfishness, greed and competition
that has settled there,
with the grace and courtesy, wisdom and good cheer,
mercy and compassion of GOD, by Him and for Him.
And God, in His Mercy, goes on carrying out this purpose
in spite of my own repeated failings.

by Wanda

We need to find God

We need to find God and
He cannot be found in noise and restlessness.
God is a friend of Silence.

See how nature - trees, flowers, grass - grow in Silence.

Is not our mission to give God to the poor;
not a dead God, but a living, loving God?

The more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in
our active life.

We need Silence to be able to touch souls.

The essential is not what we say,
but what God says to us and through us.

All our words will be useless, unless they come from deep
within.

Words which do not give the light of Christ
increase the darkness.

by Mother Teresa of Calcutta

It was good to hear from the Rev'd Zephney Kennedy of the Presbyterian Church of Richards Bay, KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. This is what she shared:

This is a brief note to say that a handful of us have started to hold Julian Meetings monthly in the industrial city of Richards Bay in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

I am indebted to the August magazine for interesting and informative articles to assist in entering the silence and encouraging the contemplative practice of the group. I receive the magazine through my membership of the group in Cape Town, 1,100 miles away.

We are promoting JM through the Ministers' Fellowship in Richards Bay so that we remain ecumenical in the spirit of sharing beyond our denominational practices.

Richards Bay and its harbour are built around inlets and lagoons rather than a recognizable bay; these are connected to the wetlands and lakes of the coast by means of canals so that the wildlife moves around the waterways unhindered. The large wildlife include retiring hippos and crocodiles - signs warning of the presence of crocodiles are found along the waterways!

Warm greetings to the parent Julian Meeting groups who keep us on our knees, as it were.

Zephney

The joy of the Lord is your strength. NEH 8:10

Remember that for people who are in more remote areas of the world our website now enables them to subscribe to the magazine, download some of our information, or buy our publications just at the click of a few buttons. The wonder of modern technology! Any Julian Meeting can also advertise their meetings in the public meeting directory on the website:

www.thejulianmeetings.net

1 + 1 = MORE!

We were pleased to hear that Peterborough has joined the list of places that enjoy having more than one Julian Meeting. This gives people more opportunities to join our circles of silent prayer.

In some places one Meeting has grown too large in numbers, or the membership has become geographically widespread, so that it makes sense to split.

Often, as in Peterborough, the new Meeting is held in a different week from the existing Meeting. Where both Meetings happen once a month they usually try to be offset by two weeks, so that there is a Meeting once a fortnight.

The two meetings may meet on different days, although not always as the same day is easy to remember! They usually meet at different times of day, one in the evening and one in the daytime. This can widen membership a lot as some people - the elderly, parents of young children, carers, non-drivers - may find evenings are difficult but can make a daytime meeting. For those who work full time an evening meeting may be the only option.

In Peterborough the new Meeting is at 12.00 noon in the town centre, and this could enable, even encourage, some who work or shop in the town to join this Julian Meeting if none exists in their home area - or even if one does. The two meetings in the town have different venues, so one may be more convenient or accessible than the other for some people.

If your meeting grows too large, or people have to travel quite a way to come, it may be worth considering creating a second, complementary, meeting.

If your meeting has dwindled, and you need new members, consider whether changing the time you meet, or the day you meet, or where you meet, might make it easier for some new people to join you.

One Among Several?

Do you have a local prayer group which uses a different approach to prayer on a regular basis eg having meetings for intercession; a prayer walk; Ignatian prayer; Taize. If so, and particularly if they are an ecumenical group, might they consider including an evening of Julian silent prayer. If silent prayer is already part of their pattern, might they make their silent prayer evening a Julian Meeting? Silent prayer would continue to be just one element of the different ways the group uses to pray.

Why do this?

We have had a number of instances where someone has enquired about a local Julian Meeting, to be told there is none in the area. A while later they get in touch to say they have found a group for silent prayer, but it is not a Julian Meeting.

But sadly, many people do not find a local contemplative prayer group, even if one may exist, because the secret is so well hidden! Perhaps some prayer groups are so integrated with their own church that they cannot consider opening up to a wider membership, yet that could bring new ideas and broader perspectives to enrich the meetings.

Now we have the new database it is so much easier for people to track down a local Julian Meeting, but we can only list contemplative prayer groups that are registered Julian Meetings. If you have a local group that might be encouraged to consider registering as a Julian Meeting, the website has lots of useful information, links etc.



Any ideas?

If you have any suggestions or ideas for improvements to our website and what we offer via it, please get in touch. Any and every suggestion will be considered.

Come...
Be still....
And know....that I am God.

Be quiet and attune your heart to the Spirit
Who waits for you
And greets you with Love.
This day and every day
Amen

Dear Lord
Help me to be quiet and still
And to wait on You....
To listen for Your Voice, calling
In the wilderness of life
May Your Spirit be both My Rock
And My Shield
That I may walk in Your Light
And live in Your Truth
This day and every day
Amen

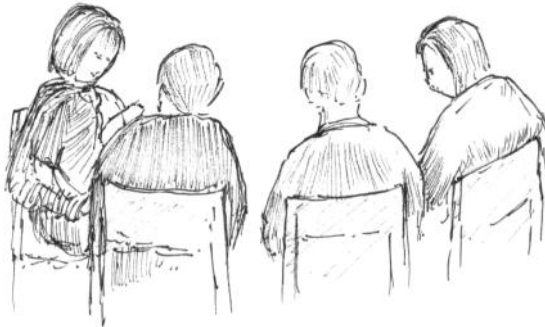
Quietly...
Go quietly...
That you may tread softly
And listen carefully...
For there is much to 'hear'
And there is a path to walk
That will follow in His Footsteps
And enable you to
Stay close
For in quietness and trust shall be your strength
This day and every day
Amen

Elizabeth Mills

Wise words from the 17th century

When you come to your meetings ... what do you do? Do you gather together bodily only, ... or rather do you sit down in the true silence, resting from your own will and workings, and waiting upon the Lord, with your minds fixed in that Light wherewith Christ has enlightened you ... and prepares you, and your spirits and souls, to maker you fit for his service?

William Penn 1677



Look not out, but within ... Remember it is a still voice that speaks to us in this day, and that it is not to be heard in the noises and hurries of the mind: but it is distinctly understood in a retired frame. Jesus loved and chose solitudes, often going to mountains, to gardens and to sea-sides to avoid crowds and hurries; to show his disciples it was good to be solitary, and sit loose to the world.

William Penn 1694

True silence ... is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.

William Penn 1699

William Penn (1644-1718) was an English Quaker who established a haven for his co-religionists in Pennsylvania in 1682-84. Through his efforts all people imprisoned in England for their religious opinions, including 1200 Quakers, were released in 1686.

Lord God

I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will,
Put me to doing, put me to suffering:
Let me be employed for you
or laid aside for you,
Let me be full, let me be empty:
Let me have all things,
let me have nothing.
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all
things to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, Glorious and Blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
You are mine and I am yours.
So be it.
Amen

(from the Methodist Covenant Service, held each new year)

Blessing

May the Christ who walks with wounded feet,
walk with us till the end of our road.
May the Christ who serves with wounded hands,
teach us to serve one another
May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart,
be our love for ever.
May we see the face of Jesus in every person we meet
and may every person we meet.
see the face of Jesus in us. Amen.

**THE LENT FACTOR: forty companions for the forty days
of Lent**
Graham James

Bloomsbury 2014 £9.99
ISBN 978 1 408184042

The Bishop of Norwich has compiled a Lent book of forty inspirational "brief lives". The rationale is straightforwardly incarnational: "If human beings are made in the image and likeness of God then we should expect to see God's nature reflected in our fellow men and women". This is borne out by the wide range of figures he has selected. Some have been strangers to personal faith, but each has "caused this believer to learn from them about the meaning of discipleship."

There are one or two usual suspects - Julian of Norwich, Charles Wesley - a clutch of artists and poets (John Everett Millais, John Miller, Charles Causley, U.A.Fanthorpe), a politician (Eva Peron), a theologian / novelist (Dorothy L. Sayers), numerous ecclesiastics and, marvellously, a total eccentric (Stanley Green). Also featured are some of Graham James' own family, including his daughter Victoria who died aged 6 months from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

I find some of those included do not come across as likeable or sympathetic, but this is all to the good. The danger would be in having everyone chosen for being full of sweetness and light, whereas we need grit in our spiritual diet. As Graham James says about George Borrow, although the 19th century author of *The Romany Rye* would make an uncomfortable Lenten companion, we would discover new things in his company if we were willing to travel with him, for "as with many travellers, he may have been seeking his own true self without ever quite making a satisfactory discovery. From its earliest days Christianity has always been a religion on the move...."

These forty brief lives are an excellent addition to our Lenten resources, but the book's value is more than just its contents. Because the author includes people with whom many of his

readers will be (I suspect) unfamiliar, and some very personal examples to boot, it in effect questions the reader: "Who would you choose to be *your* Lenten companions? What of God's nature can you see reflected in the lives of people, even the off-beat or obscure, who have influenced and inspired you?"

Richard Skinner

**WAITING ON THE WORD - a poem a day for Advent,
Christmas and Epiphany**

**THE WORD IN THE WILDERNESS - a poem a day for Lent
and Easter**

Malcolm Guite

Canterbury Press

'Advent' ISBN 978 1 84825 800 6 2015 £10.99

'Lent' ISBN 978 1 84825 678 1 2014 £12.99

Both available as e-books, priced as the paperback

From across four centuries and two continents, Malcolm Guite has gathered a variety of poems which, sometimes indirectly, reflect the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany (Waiting on the Word), and Lent and Easter (The Word in the Wilderness). The first offers a poem for Advent Sunday, and then for each day between December 1st and January 6th; the second runs from Shrove Tuesday to Easter Day. Some poems are well-known; other are less familiar works by well-known figures; some are by poets whose work, in most cases, deserves to be known more widely. Each is followed by a reflective exploration of the work.

These books call to mind words from a poem by R S Thomas (which does not feature in either) 'The meaning is in the waiting'. A day's reading may be as little as two pages, or as much as five; but you are likely to spend most of your time quietly reflecting on what the poet, and Malcolm, have said. Rather like the Vicar I once worked with who said, 'A good sermon should take ten minutes and last a week'; you are likely to find yourself drawn back to the readings by the

events of the day.

Inevitably, not every poem speaks as strongly or as clearly; each is a personal choice for the day, and tastes differ. But it is worth spending time with these awkward ones; digging below the surface; not 'hurrying on to a receding future' (R S Thomas again, in the poem set for the first Sunday in Lent). 'The meaning is in the waiting'.

These are books you may well return to in subsequent years; the familiar takes on a new meaning when you come back to it, and the unfamiliar may well resonate with new experiences. Both offer a different journey through times of waiting.

Brian Morris

These last few lines of his sonnet, and his comments on them, give a flavour of one day in 'Waiting on the Word.'

13 December

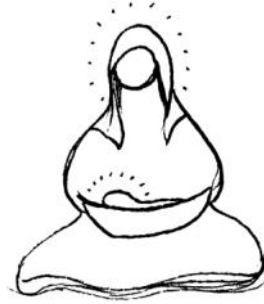
Launde Abbey on St Lucy's Day by Malcolm Guite

.....

St Lucy's sun still bathes these abbey walls
And in her garden rose stalks stark and bare
Shine in a frosty light that yet recalls
The glory of the summer roses there.
Though winter night will soon surround us here,
Another Advent comes, Dayspring is near.

.... It happened that on last St Lucy's day I was at Launde Abbey in Leicestershire That day I got up early ... and witnessed the moment when the bright low sun ... suddenly bathed and blessed the old abbey walls, the bare winter trees ... with glorious and somehow unexpected light. I walked in that light to the old rose garden .. and composed this sonnet.

At Christmas the God
who was everywhere
and nowhere
became the
God who is
now here.



Anne
09

Where Will You Be For Christmas?

Where will you be for Christmas?
Under the Christmas tree?
Sharing family presents
Joining the jollity?

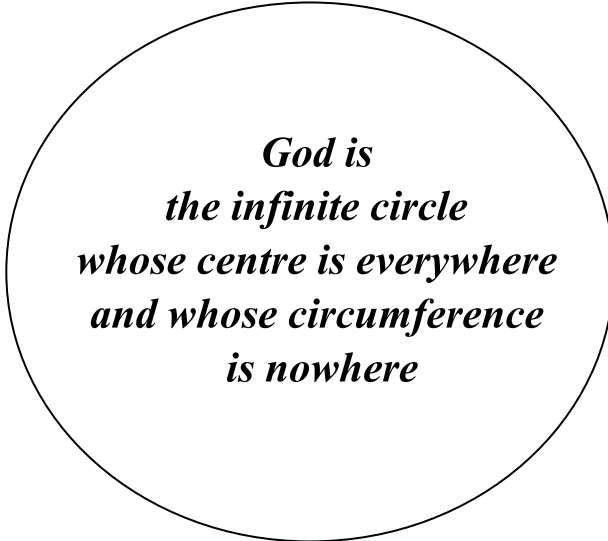
Where will you be for Christmas?
Singing in the choir?
Mulling wine and eating pies
And stretching by the fire?

Or perhaps you'll be abroad somewhere
Skiing down the merry piste?
Staying at a good hotel
Just joining in the feast?

Where will He be for Christmas,
Our Lord, the grown Christ child?
Huddled in a doorway
No longer meek and mild.

Reaching out to all of us
For each the choice is free,
'Come' the invitation reads
'And spend the day with me'.

Shirley Fry



*God is
the infinite circle
whose centre is everywhere
and whose circumference
is nowhere*

Two prayers from 'Centering Prayers' reviewed on page 24

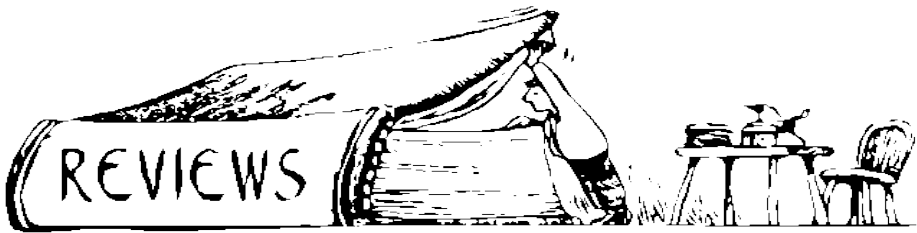
September 13

Resting in you, I remember myself, and in so doing I remember you. In this busy world, it is easy to forget. Today, I wish to rise in remembrance, receiving knowledge and wisdom in my heart. Although there appear to be many paths for my life, I feel drawn to this path of quietness in gentleness and surrender. Solitary in silence you kiss my soul and I feel more alive. *Amen*

September 16

Abba: Speak to my heart in the secret chamber of the Spirit where I feel love and know the taste of beauty and goodness. While I am yet a being of flesh and blood, I consent to the eternal plan for human destiny to become resonant beings of love. Even though I may not know what this means, I shall listen and wait.

My day to day living is full of many concerns and tasks. But you have left me a trail of living Words to lead me to yourself. Such Words are felt more than known. Explanation spoils the lion's leap. And you are leaping into my heart through silence and beauty and wisdom and love.



**THE COMPLETE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING with the letter
of Privy Counsel, translation and commentary**
Father John-Julian OJN

Paraclete Press 2015 £19.99
ISBN 978-1612616209

John-Julian's excellent introduction places the anonymous author of both works within the Carthusian tradition. This seems very probable as the Carthusians were devoted to contemplative prayer in the solitude of the cell, and they tend to write anonymously. Less likely is the theory that this is a treatise for one of their lay brothers now embarking on the solitary life as a priest member of the community, since both vocations are different and accepted in their own right.

The format has the text on the left hand page and on the opposite page notes and commentary. This I find excellent: references need not be searched for but are immediately to hand, both scriptural references and references to other texts

The translation itself is clear and readable. It has the usual emphasis on humility and perseverance, praying with a single repeated word to eliminate distractions and keep the self focused on God, hidden behind 'the cloud of unknowing' and inaccessible to the senses.

This method of prayer has been taken up in various ways by modern teachers of contemplative prayer, such as John Main and Thomas Keating. The original text enables us to discover that this modern teaching is based on a traditional method in use for many centuries. This guide to meditation contrasts with the more usual monastic 'Lectio Divina', the prayerful reading and pondering of Scriptural texts, and the Ignatian style of imaginative contemplation where a gospel scene is

envisaged in the mind and entered into personally by means of activating the senses.

The appendix contains a poem by John of the Cross and two modern takes on the way of prayer envisaged and promoted by the 'Cloud' . They are well worth reading and pondering.

As a seminal medieval text, one of the four English mystical writings from the same historical period by Julian, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton and the author of the Cloud, it is well worth reading. I think this edition could not be bettered for a clear translation and good notes. Not over academic, it is challenging enough for an intelligent reader and spiritual seeker.

Sr. Elizabeth Ruth Obbard ODC

THE CONTEMPLATIVE MINISTER: learning to lead from the still centre

Ian Cowley

The Bible Reading Fellowship 2015 £8.99

ISBN: 978 0 85746 360 9

I was drawn to this book by the title. As a clergy wife and long-time member of Julian Meetings it looked interesting, and I was not disappointed: much of this book is both inspiring and wise.

Ian Cowley, as Vocations & Spiritual Adviser for the Diocese of Salisbury, developed a programme for ordained ministers. This book arose from that, so its emphasis is largely for active ministers. However, a lot in this book relates to us all whatever our vocation or calling.

The book has many themes but it centres on finding the balance between 'being' and 'doing', and how the need for 'silent waiting on God' is essential in finding this balance. We are called first to a relationship with our Lord and unless that relationship is nurtured and sustained we will fail in our vocation. Alongside this Ian Cowley shows how we have to come to an understanding of our true selves: much of the

time our 'false self' drives our actions, particularly our need for control and approval. So part of our journey with God is discovering the qualities of holiness and integrity.

Ian Cowley is open and honest about his own experiences. As a South African he witnessed the oppression of his own people and shares insights of his ministry in this country too.

I think anyone trying to follow the contemplative way will find a lot here to guide and help them. My own response was 'Alleluia': here is someone who really understands the transformative power of silence and stillness before God and can communicate this to others - quite refreshing.

Chrissie Rapsey

LIVING CONTEMPLATION

Simon Small

2015 Create Space Independent Publishing Platform

Book £6.50, Kindle £3.95

ISBN 978-1508790488

Simon Small is an Anglican priest, retreat house chaplain and author of an excellent book on contemplative prayer, *From the Bottom of the Pond*.

Living Contemplation is a collection of reflections, anecdotes and parables ranging in length from half a page to almost four pages. The style is simple, but many pieces are profound. The emphasis is very much on finding inner peace, even in difficult situations; on focusing on, and discovering God in, the present moment; and on accepting that we will never end our spiritual exploration in this life – “The journey’s end is not of this world.”

If you like theological certainties or an evangelical approach to Christianity, this book will not be for you. Simon Small says at one point that he is not certain how historically accurate the Gospels are, but emphasizes their spiritual truth; and I think I can detect a strong Buddhist influence. This is very much a book for those who, in the Quaker phrase, are open

to new light, from whatever source it may come.

It is a book to read and savour slowly, perhaps one short piece a morning to prompt reflection in the hours that follow. It would also be a good book to take with you if you are going on retreat.

Michael Cayley

HOW TO BE HAPPY: relax kids

Marneta Viegas

Our Street Books, 2014 £9.99

ISBN 978-1-78279-162-1

This fun activity book is written from the perspective of the author's children. Marneta has taught meditation, and been in the business of children's entertainment, for years. She has developed Relax Kid's relaxation Classes, for which she has also set up a training programme. Her two children explain that their parents don't live together any more, which would make this book very relevant to some in today's society.

The book is designed like a scrap book, and is very colourful and easy to read. There are 52 positive activities for children, each covering 2 pages. The activities are grouped into nine sections: Family time, Make and Do, Being Kind, Moods and Feelings, School, Being Positive, Bedtime, Relaxing, Mind.

Though written for children, there is plenty for adults to take note of too. I particularly took on board some of the breathing techniques, 'noticing my breath and feeling how cool it is when I breathe in and how warm it is when I breathe out'.

This is a book of positivity, and encourages wellbeing and spirituality for little ones and big ones! There are ideas you may know, but many that you will never have thought of. It's a book that will bond those who play together and build relationships. It would make a great Christmas present, to give your grandchildren, or to keep to do the things together. The photos of the children are rather dated, which is the only down-side to this wonderful and refreshing book.

Fiona Elliott

CENTERING PRAYERS: a one-year daily companion for going deeper into the love of God

Peter Traben Haas

Paraclete Press (USA) 2013 £11.99, \$18.99

ISBN 978 1 61261 415 1

Many Julians use anthologies of readings as a source of lead-ins for group silence, or when praying alone. This is a year's collection of daily prayers, on a monthly theme, to help the reader enter into silent contemplation.

Each month has an introductory short passage starting 'It is as if God says to me'. I used September, which opens with: It is as if God says to me: Return to me and let me instruct you. Learn my wisdom that leads to freedom and my freedom that leads to love.

Each day there is a short prayer (some shorter than others) addressed to God and intended to lead directly into silence and stillness. alone. This collection could well complement a book of daily readings.

In the introduction Peter Traben Haas says: 'My own prayer is that the words in this book nurture you beyond the written word into the womb of silence experienced through some method of receptive prayer such as centering prayer or the Jesus prayer...that they might nourish a deepening experience of God's love, especially when read as a prelude or postlude to periods of contemplative prayer.'

Gail Ballinger

(see page 20 for two of the prayers)

LEARNING TO WALK IN THE DARK

Barbara Brown Taylor

Canterbury Press 2014 £14.99 hardback, £12.99 paperback,
ISBN 978-1848256156

For most people, darkness is associated with fear, evil and threat. The Bible often posits an opposition between darkness and light. And yet God created dark as well as light, and

Christian mystics have often written of finding God in darkness.

This beautifully written book by an American Anglican priest is a set of reflections on darkness - physical, emotional and spiritual - and calls us to explore and welcome darkness and its beauties. Much of the book recounts personal experiences of the author, including ventures into unlit caves and into an environment deprived of light. There are superb descriptions of the natural world. One of the most powerful chapters for me conveys how sight can keep us at a superficial level of attention - unable, for instance, to detect the different sounds of leaves of different trees.

On one level the book is a celebration of aspects of God's world which we often miss or shy away from. On another, it points towards the wholeness that can come from exploring our fears and our darker side.

I am haunted by a quotation in the book from the American writer Wendell Berry: "To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight, and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings."

Michael Cayley

<p>There are reviews of a book for Advent (a little late, perhaps) and two books for Lent on pages 16-18</p>
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