

THE
JULIAN
MEETINGS

A decorative floral ornament featuring three stylized flowers. The central flower is larger and contains a circular emblem with a cross and other symbols. It is flanked by two smaller flowers. Wavy lines extend from the sides of the central flower.

Magazine

August

2011

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 August 2011

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The final part of David Self's short course introducing people to silence and contemplative prayer.

Approaching Silence – Going Deeper

Becoming more self-aware with a deeper longing to be more available to God does three things.

We become more aware of the rest of God's creation. We are invited to increase our attitude of reverence and respect for all that surrounds us, seeing in them the mark of the Creator and so leading us to a deeper reverence for God. In particular we are also led to become more aware of others as God's people too, marred like us with sin and fragility, but also unique persons in whom God is at work. We are led to become more vulnerable to the joy and sorrow, the beauty and suffering that abounds in this world. We are led to participate with Christ in the Passion which seeks to heal this world. It is a path of wonder and humility.

We become more vulnerable to ourselves as we long to make ourselves more vulnerable to God. The Spirit of Christ is at work within us for healing, creating us to be instruments of his love for others. But God only works with truth and God wants all of us, not just the parts we feel comfortable with. Slowly our illusions about ourselves are removed. Slowly our sins are shown for what they are. Slowly we are taken into the parts of ourselves where we are afraid, where we are deeply wounded.

In such times the author of the Cloud of Unknowing gives wise advice. Do not look directly at the lump of sin or the turmoil, do not analyse it. Just offer it as it is by looking over its shoulder to the God who is always near. Offer it and ask the Spirit of Christ to flow through it. God wants to heal and transform the whole of our being and all our relationships.

The Spirit works at deep levels within to invite our trust in God to increase. Our sense of self-sufficiency is profoundly challenged and it is easy to get lost. Just as we need a guide when we enter an unknown wilderness, so most of us need a trusted spiritual companion through whom God can help us and show us how God is calling us forward in our praying and in our living.

O Spirit of God who speaks to spirits created in your own likeness: penetrate into the depths of our spirits, into the

storehouse of memories remembered and forgotten, into the depths of being, the very springs of personality, and cleanse and forgive, making us whole and holy, that we may be yours and live in the new being of Christ our Lord.

Who are we opening our hearts to? God is not another object whom we can examine. No words, no images, no thought can comprehend or encompass the nature of God. We must use words or images to communicate what understanding we have about God, but they are all indicators pointing beyond themselves to the One who has brought everything into being. There is an ultimate hiddenness and incomprehensibility of the divine life. Remembering that, we are led into astonishing wonder at the divine humility who comes to us in Jesus to bring us the love of God in a way we can approach and share. Through Christ we discover that relationship is of the essence of God. Each person in the triune God pouring themselves out totally to the other in joyous loving. We use words like Father, Son and Holy Spirit pointing to a God filled with the dynamic exchange of love, a mutual joy that overflows in energetic creativity and causes this universe to come into being as an object of God's creative delight. The Christian belief that we are made in the image of God means that we are given the capacity to relate to God who is beyond our understanding. More than that, we are being drawn by the costly longing of Christ's love to grow into his pattern of self-giving love, to share in its costliness, and so discover what it means to be truly human – together – as we are drawn into the dance of the Trinity.

Do I know what I am talking about? No, because words falter and we fall silent. We are dusty little things. In contemplation in this life we are led into the darkness of unknowing.

'For though we through the grace of God can know fully about all other matters and think about them – yet of God himself can no one think. Therefore I will leave on one side everything I can think and choose for my love that thing which I cannot think! Why? Because he may well be loved but not thought. By love he can be caught and held, but by thinking, never.'

(Cloud of Unknowing ch 6)

Drawn Deep

*A word,
A voice,
Crying in the wilderness of silence,
Drawing us,
Drawing us closer.
Listen!
He is calling;
Inviting us to linger:
To seek his voice in stillness
In the beauty of this place.
Feel him drawing closer,
Drawing deep, down deep,
Into the beating warmth
Of his embrace.
Word and voice dissolve
Into love.*

April McIntyre,

A very deep question

At our Ascension Day Eucharist, the celebrant began her sermon with the question

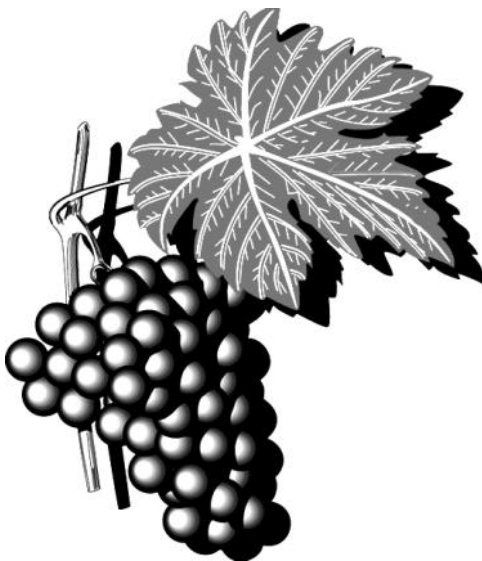
"What are the only man-made things in heaven?"

Her answer?

"The wounds in Christ's hands and feet, and in his side."

Thus it is with the wine.

Remember, friends, how wine is made - individual grapes hang together in a bunch, but the juice from them all is mingled to become a single brew.



This is the image chosen by Christ our Lord to show how, at his own table, the mystery of our unity and peace is solemnly consecrated.

St Augustine of Hippo, (354-430)

A Quiet Afternoon with Julian of Norwich

The Boxgrove and Tangmere JM usually meets monthly for 45 minutes. The first 15 minutes are for catching up on news, and then for 30 minutes we lay aside all distractions and sit in silence. We take it in turns to lead into the silence, and we leave in silence.

On Wednesday 18th May 22 of us shared an afternoon of peace and inspiration at Park Cottage, Halnaker. The Rev'd Mark Gilbert SCC, Vicar of St Wilfred's, Chichester, led us on the subject of healing, and the healing ministry of the Church. He spoke of how we can find healing in our own lives.

The healing of past wounds and present suffering involves restoring a balance, or wholeness, of body, mind and spirit. When the body is off balance dis-ease can often result. The restoration of balance, of wholeness, involves a renewal in us. St Paul calls us a 'new creation' when we accept Christ into our lives.

Fr Mark said healing involves coming to terms with suffering, so we often question why we have to suffer, and watch the suffering of others. Job was given no answer to the question 'Why?' as there is no definite answer. But something comes out of pain. The cross. Christ is there in the midst of our suffering. He bore our faults on the cross, and offers us renewal through forgiveness, which is the start of healing. We can be changed from someone who is negative and downcast to a person who is alive and full of God's energy. Christ carries us, and offers us love to pass on to others.

Healing begins when we recognise our selfishness: when we realise that we make mistakes and we accept Christ's forgiveness and love, we are on the road to becoming a truly restored and healed person.

This talk was followed by 30 minutes quiet time, to wander in

the garden, read, pray or just enjoy the peace and quiet.

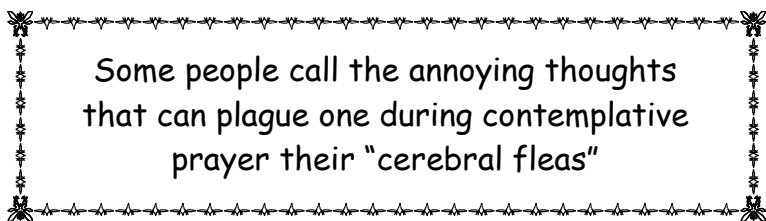
For his second talk, Fr Mark spoke of the power of Christ behind his works of healing. Medical staff are here to cure our ailments but Fr Mark is often asked 'Can you pray for me?' and also 'Can you anoint me?' Anointing means marking a person with holy oil to show that they are lifted up through prayer to Christ, in love. God works through us. We are channels of God's grace, and it is important for the church to bring people to Christ for healing.

After a second break Fr Mark spoke on the 23rd psalm. The sheep need the shepherd, who is Christ, and we recognise his voice when he calls and we follow him. Healing is a serious subject, but Fr Mark skilfully lightened his talks with jokes and light-hearted but meaningful anecdotes. One of these was Oscar Wilde's story of the Selfish Giant (see page 8)

Fr Mark also talked of the transforming power of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. He ended with the profound thought that our ultimate healing is when we are called home to be with God in his glory.

We finished with tea in Merle and Peter's conservatory, having been 'enfolded in love' all afternoon. Many thanks to all who enabled us to have such a special time together, for as Julian herself said 'Every act of kindness and compassion done by any person for his fellow human being is done by Christ working in him.'

Iris Watts



The Selfish Giant (an abridged version of Oscar Wilde's story)

Every day the children played in the Giant's garden, with its soft green grass, beautiful flowers and peach-trees. The birds sat on the trees and sang. "How happy we are here!" the children cried to each other.

When the Giant came back after seven years visiting the Cornish ogre he saw the children playing in the garden. "What are you doing here?" he shouted and the children ran away.

"My garden is *my* garden," said the Giant; "and nobody can play in it but me." So he built a high wall all round it. The children had nowhere to play, for the road was dusty and full of stones.

When Spring came, with blossom and little birds, the Giant's garden was still wintry, with snow and ice. The birds didn't sing in it, and the trees forgot to blossom, because there were no children there.

"Why is Spring so late?" wondered the Selfish Giant looking at his cold white garden; "I hope it comes soon." But Spring never came, nor Summer, nor Autumn. It was always Winter in the Giant's garden.

One morning the Giant heard a linnet singing outside his window, and delicious perfume came through the open casement. The Giant looked out and saw that the children had crept in through a little hole in the wall. In every tree he could see at least one child, the trees were covered with blossoms, the birds were flying about in delight, and flowers looked up through the green grass. But in one corner it was still winter, where a little boy was so small that he could not reach the branches of the tree: he was wandering all round it, crying bitterly.

"How selfish I have been!" said the Giant; "Now I know why Spring would not come here." He crept into the garden, but the children ran away, frightened, when they saw him. Only the little boy stayed, for he was crying so much he didn't see the Giant coming. The Giant gently put him up into the tree,

which broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them round the Giant's neck, and kissed him.

When the other children saw this they came running back. "It is your garden now, little children," said the Giant, and he knocked down the wall, and began playing with the children. In the evening they came to bid the Giant good-bye. "But where is the little boy I put into the tree?" he asked. The Giant loved him the best because he had kissed him. "We don't know," answered the children; "he has gone away. We don't know where he lives." Every day the children came and played with the Giant, but the little boy whom the Giant loved was never seen again.

When the Giant grew too old and feeble to play he sat in a huge armchair, and watched the children at their games, and admired his garden. "I have many beautiful flowers," he said; "but the children are the most beautiful flowers of all." One winter morning he looked out of his window and he looked and looked. In the farthest corner of the garden was a tree covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches were golden, hung with silver fruit. Underneath it stood the little boy he had loved.

The Giant, in great joy, ran into the garden to the child. When he came close he said angrily, "Who has wounded thee? Tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him." For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.

"Nay!" answered the child; "these are the wounds of Love."

"Who art thou?" said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, as he knelt before the little child.

The child smiled and said to the Giant, "You let me play once in your garden. To-day you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise."

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.

How our Julian Meeting keeps in touch

One member of our Julian Meeting is quite elderly and she has Parkinsons Disease. Daphne is very brave and gets out and about as much as possible, but the illness has recently made it difficult for her to join us at our meeting. As she does not want to lose touch she has decided to keep silence herself when she knows we were meeting.

Our custom is to have one of the group read a short passage from the writings of Julian or from the Bible or other suitable source to direct our thoughts, after which we have half an hour of silence. To make it easier for Daphne we now phone her at the beginning of the meeting and read out to her the passage we are all being offered at that moment. She then joins us in silence and says this is really helpful.

We thought we should share this simple suggestion as others might like to try if any of their members are unwell, or unable to get to the meeting.

Newbury Julian Meeting

One door closes and

A Julian Meeting has been held monthly at our local hospital chapel, as part of the regular pattern of services offered. But last year our swish new hospital was built, and the Julian Meeting was asked to find a new place to meet.

Also last year, the little local Chantry Chapel was completely refurbished, with a level floor, chairs, toilet and kitchenette. We asked if we might use the Chapel once a month, and we now meet on the second Tuesday morning in this beautiful, prayerful venue.

Although it belongs to the Church of England, it is very much a stand-alone place. It belongs to the town, rather than a denomination, so feels open and welcoming to all who come. We are so grateful that God opened this door for us when the one at the hospital closed.

THE JULIAN MEETINGS

This is the new JM poster
which is available in both
A4 and A5 sizes. It is
printed in blue ink on blue
paper, and leaves plenty of
space for your information.
We hope you like it.

**Contemplative Prayer
in the Christian Tradition**

www.julianmeetings.org

What a Difference a Day Makes!

When I was invited to lead a retreat at Parcevall Hall this year I chose 'An Exploration of Contemplative Prayer' as my title. The retreat was from Tuesday tea time to Friday lunch, so instead of the one full day available at a weekend retreat we had two full days, and this made such a difference.

Time and space

I have no theological training, and my way of exploring contemplative prayer was experiential. This is where the extra day made such a difference. I was able to include eight group sessions during the retreat, and still leave the afternoons free from lunch until 4.00pm tea or the 5.00pm group session. Thursday morning was also free from 10.30am.

These free times, and the shorter ones around meal times, allowed everyone plenty of time alone in the silence - to read, walk, pray, draw, photograph or just enjoy the wonderful gardens, the sunshine and the birdsong. It gave a sense of spaciousness and unhurriedness to the whole retreat.

Lots to try

All but two of the retreatants were members of Julian Meetings, so I used seven of the sessions to enable us to experience a different focus for the time of silence. I used words, music, a tactile object to hold in the hand, a mantra, song (words + music), a visual image, and scent. Few people had used all of these, and some were unfamiliar with most. So it was a learning experience for us all.

Chance to share

Although it was a silent retreat, I used the first part of each group session as a time for everyone to share, question or comment on anything that had arisen. This enabled all of us to learn from each other. Thus those familiar with using a mantra provided enlightening comments for those who were

unused to using this. People could say what they had found helpful, or unhelpful. Some shared what had come to them in the silence. Most people found this a helpful time, and it often included laughter. Except for the first two and the last session the sharing time lasted only 15-20 minutes, and was followed by our 30 minutes of corporate silence.

Experimentation and Affirmation

Many people said that it had been helpful to experience so many different ways to focus in the silence. For some there are things they will try again. For others it confirmed that their normal practice was right for them. I am sure we all came away with something special, just for us.

I had provided a variety of resources for people to use as they wished. A range of books, both theological and / or inspirational. A variety of visual and tactile resources, both natural and man-made. Drawing, colouring and collage materials for artistic experimentation. And a prayer focus in the chapel, for contemplation and intercession.

Shhhh!

We all valued the silence, both when gathered together and when on our own. And so much silence. The beautiful grounds at Parcevall Hall are open to the public during the day. As retreatants we could use them morning and evening as well, when our corporate silence prevailed. But many of us in the late morning and the afternoon had to curb the urge to 'Shhhh!' the day visitors, who were understandably chatting happily as they enjoyed their day out.

Deidre Morris

Some people asked what it was like to go on an 8-day or, even more so, a 30-day, silent retreat. If any readers would like to share their experiences of either of these in a future issue of the Magazine, do please send in your account to the editor (see page 27)

Birdsong

"God is everything that is good, as I see, and the goodness which everything has, is God." Julian of Norwich

Spring was slow to arrive this year but when it finally came I'm convinced I heard it. You see, there were no green shoots: it had been so cold. The woods had no carpet of wild flowers, as the ground was still frozen.

But God was there in those silent woods.

Then, one day, as if by magic, the air was filled with birdsong. At last, that long-awaited miracle had dawned upon the world.

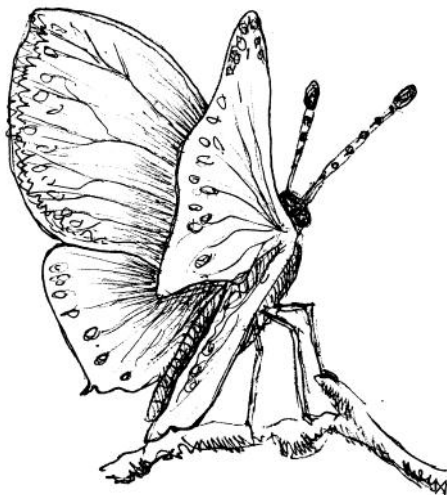
And God was there in that miracle of birdsong.

Mind you, the wind still had a cutting edge, but that didn't seem to worry the robins, the blackbirds, nor the song thrushes: nor for that matter the wrens or the blue-tits. But then they all knew something that was hidden from mortal eyes: the time had come to find a mate.

"There was a door
to which I found no key,
There was a veil
past which I could not see."

*But God was there in the wind
and in the trees.*

Later, we saw a Brimstone butterfly, usually the first to appear in spring. It's name captures it's colour, *brimstone* being the old name for sulphur.



And God soared upwards on that butterfly's wings.

"Alas, that spring should vanish with the rose,
That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
The nightingale that in the branches sang,
Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows!"

"God is everything that is good, as I see"

Eric Perry

With acknowledgements to author Edward Fitzgerald.

Teach me, O Trinity,
All men sing praise to Thee;
Let me not backward be,
Teach me, O Trinity.

Come Thou and dwell within me,
Lord of the holy race;
Make here Thy resting place,
Hear me, O Trinity.

That I Thy love may prove,
Teach Thou my heart and hand,
Even at Thy command
Swiftly to move.

Like a rotting tree
Is the vile heart of me;
Let me Thy healing see,
Help me, O Trinity.

Iolo Goch (14th century)

Julian in Context

A useful appraisal of Julian of Norwich comes from Kenneth Leech, an Anglican priest whose community based theology has contemplative prayer at its core and whose work draws from Julian and other classical writings in the mystical tradition. Not only may we learn more from them than many contemporary writers, says Leech, 'we might also find that they speak more closely to our condition'.

For Leech, Julian's dominant theme is the closeness of God, 'closer to us than we are to ourselves', a theme portrayed through simplicity, optimism, and earthiness. Simplicity is epitomised in the ordinariness and naturalness of prayer, 'it is what we are made for, and is open to everyone'. Her simplicity is an abiding corrective to the arid complexity which often surrounds Christian doctrine.

Optimism stands out in her attitude to sin: though she does not deny its prevalence, she believes that 'in every soul that shall be saved, there is godly will that never consented to sin, nor ever shall'. Her hopefulness, says Leech, is in stark contrast to theological pessimism which prioritises the Fall rather than Grace. For Julian men and women are more God-shaped than fallen, 'more truly in heaven than on earth'.

As for earthiness, she stresses the solidarity of all people in God, one encompassing all human substance including sensuality, sexuality, and spirituality. Here she stands in the Eastern Christian tradition with its emphasis that human nature is joined to God in its creation. At the same time, her confident enthusiasm is enabled by a Christ-like transfiguration through suffering: 'Julian's cheerfulness and laughter is not superficial heartiness', writes Leech, 'it is passionate because it is Passion-based'.

Such sentiments are not unusual amongst Julian scholars. What makes Leech's contribution distinctive is the attention which he gives to Julian's historical context. She lived in a

period of great personal and social distress. 14th century England was the era of the Black Death, of disease, economic hardship, exploitation, oppression and poverty, especially amongst agricultural labourers and urban workers.

It was also the age of militancy and social violence. Among the peasants and others who rose up in 1381, there was a thirst for social justice and for equality, a desire to see the end of serfdom and bondage. Historians suggest that the radicalism of the period drew its impetus from Christian tradition, especially writings by St Ambrose, St Basil, and St John Chrysostom.

Leech maintains that this backcloth is crucial to an understanding of Julian's theology. If God is the ground in which we stand, 'this must be seen to embrace personal and inward and also corporate and social dimensions'. That Julian lived much of her life in solitude does not detract from this; it 'was not a selfish, egocentric withdrawal', he contends, 'but a life of love, warmth, and care'. It was joyful and rooted in neighbourly affinity.

Leech's perspective points to the need for a contextual approach when using Julian's writings today. Without such an anchor the exuberance of her message can become distorted in cultic and self-indulgent ways. With one the relevance of her compassionate vision is likely to be clearly to the fore. In Leech's words: 'She is a wise guide for those who seek a spirituality grounded in the common life'.

David Bunch

David is co-editor, with Angus Ritchie, of
Prayer and Prophecy: The Essential Kenneth Leech

ISBN 978-0-232-52765-0;
Darton, Longman and Todd, 2009;
paperback, £19.95).

BOOK REVIEWS - BOOK REVIEWS

GOD AND DARKNESS: a Carmelite perspective

Gemma Hinricher OCD

Fairacres Publications SLG Press 2011 £4
978-0-7283-0184-9

This book begins by exploring the paradox that God's light is darkness and God's nearness is hiddenness. For Sister Gemma, Jesus provides the way through the darkness and confusion since God has come close to us in the death of Jesus. She explores what is meant by the dark side of God and the struggle for many in trying to discern His presence when He seems to be absent. She includes some personal thoughts and experiences but then goes on to explore more deeply by looking at Jesus' experience at the Crucifixion and also through two Carmelite saints: St John of the Cross and St Therese of Lisieux.

I found the book to be a source of hope and encouragement, especially for those times when we find ourselves struggling with spiritual darkness, wondering where God is in what we ourselves or those around us are going through. A most challenging and thought provoking read.

Helen Lems

JULIAN OF NORWICH: SAYING 'YES' TO GOD

George Tolley

Grove Books (Grove Spirituality Series S113) 2010 £3.95
ISBN 978-1-85174-757-3

In this excellent 28 page booklet George Tolley introduces the reader to Julian, her theology and spirituality. Drawing on Julian's text and the New Testament he looks at some of life's challenges and our need: our anger, fear, suffering and our need for prayer; each chapter ends with some themes for reflection.

Both in the text and 'Further Explorations' at the end he refers

to Julian Meetings. 'Julian urges contemplative prayer upon us. "The best prayer is to rest in the goodness of God knowing that that goodness can reach right down to the lowest depths of our need". Contemplative prayer does not demand solitude and in fact can often be easier when done with others. The important thing is that consciousness of human need is set in the context of being first and foremost centred in God.'

I would recommend this to anyone seeking to know Julian. It would be a valuable title to offer a new member of a Julian Meeting. If your Meeting has a small collection of suitable introductory material do add this.

Gail Ballinger

15 DAYS OF PRAYER WITH BROTHER ROGER OF TAIZÉ
Sabine Laplane

New City 2010 £8.95

ISBN 978-1-56548-349-1

This book, written by someone who knew brother Roger, is a good place to start if you know nothing about the Taizé community. It also helps us to recognise and respond to the pilgrimage of trust that encounters with Taizé excite.

The introductory section gives a very brief introduction to Taizé. Each following themed section begins with a quote from Brother Roger's works and continues with an expansion of that theme, ending with questions. This framework offers an opportunity to question and deepen the spiritual life of each reader. While often challenging us personally it also encourages us to look at our life together.

On first reading this book I was a little disappointed, feeling that there could be a bit more of Brother Roger and a bit less of the author. Having gone back to it again I realise that this book would make a very good companion for a personal retreat. It could be useful to a group wanting to explore their life in prayer individually and together, since it offers the possibility of a life and prayer changing experience.

Francis Ballinger

THE ANCHORESS

Jean Flowerdew

The Friends of Julian of Norwich 2010 £7.95

ISBN 978-0-9541524-3-7.

Jean Flowerdew writes knowledgeably about life in Norwich, past and present, in her story of a teenage girl (Jenny) who experiences a slip back in time following a fall. She finds herself still in Norwich but hundreds of years ago as events leading to the Peasants' Revolt come together and she meets Julian of Norwich.

I found the book enjoyable and easy to read. It might be most suitable for older children / early teens to read or to have read aloud. I liked the way the imaginative storyline provided a good introduction to Julian of Norwich and the times in which she lived, but with a twist that linked it to the present.

Helen Lems

FOR ALL THAT HAS BEEN, THANKS: growing a sense of gratitude

Rowan Williams & Joan Chittister OSB

Canterbury Press 2010 £9.99

ISBN 978 1 84825 053 6

Readers may be familiar with books by Joan Chittister, an American Benedictine nun and prolific author on prayer and Benedictine spirituality. In her introduction to this book she explains that the thanks and gratitude of the title can be expressed as alleluia. "One of the oldest anthems of the church, alleluia means simply 'all hail to the one who is', the ultimate expression of thanksgiving. It says that God is God - and we know it."

This book explores, in its own way, what for some of us is a daily practice of reviewing each day with gratitude, asking God to show us for what we are most grateful/less grateful (also known as the Examen.)

The book's introduction affirms that God's presence in our

lives requires times of contemplation and reflection, as well as learning to sing alleluia, in order to recognise God whether experiencing gain or loss, joy or sorrow. Gratitude calls us to see all life as life-giving. In other words this book is an “alleluia view of every present moment”.

Joan Chittister’s 18 brief and readable reflections, based on personal experiences or relevant stories, provide food for thought from a deep place of contemplation where God is at work in our lives even when we believe nothing is going on. I found the subjects where we would not readily give thanks, such as doubt, conflict, suffering, crises, death and darkness, most thought provoking. They gave insights into the reality of trying to make sense of what is often beyond the limitations of our vision. These short essays are an invitation to rethink life, to focus on growth and wisdom in the deepest parts of the self: in short, learning to live life with gratitude and to see God in all things.

The five longer reflections by Rowan Williams could have been from a different book and give it a rather disjointed feel. His reflections are more biblical and also more challenging. In *Genesis* he looks at themes of exile and covenant to explore how we become who we are. *Exodus’* theme is freedom from slavery in all its forms. In *Friday* Rowan Williams starts in a light-hearted way to consider the blessing of weekends and moves to a deeply touching reflection on Good Friday “its darkness and its hidden promises”. The book is worth buying for this chapter alone. Overall it is a resource for reflection and could be used for daily devotion

Yvonne Walker

If ordering the book please be aware that “Uncommon Gratitude” is the US title for the same book.

Readers who are on line may wish to look at Joan Chittister’s spirituality resource website: benetvision.org

FAITH

Margaret Silf

ISBN 978-0-232-52794-0

FRIENDS

Clare Catford

ISBN 978-0-232-52860-2

DLT Simple Faith Series, 2011 £4.99

This is a series of short (64 page) books for Christians. They are designed to help readers cope with those things in life that create pressure, confusion, anger, worry and stress, by helping them to find perspective and the simple truths of Christian wisdom that can help them through.

In *Faith* Margaret Silf considers the nature of faith in the contemporary world e.g. relating to God, finding meaning, trust, following Jesus, where is my life centred?

In *Friends* Clare Catford asks 'If friendships offer so much why are they often so low on our list of priorities? Could it be that as I learn to befriend myself, learn to meet my own needs, dare to ask for help, and share my own fears that I will attract and develop more solid friendships and deepen those I already have?' And what about my friendship with God?

Both these books are a helpful resource, straightforward and simple but still profound. I found them both helpful and easy to read.

Gail Ballinger

PRAYING WITH THE EARTH: a prayerbook for peace

John Philip Newell

Canterbury Press 2011 £10.99

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In his preface the author says 'This is the time to pray for peace, especially for peace within the household of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar. As Jews, Christians and Muslims we are painfully divided ... *Praying with the Earth*: a prayerbook for peace is an attempt to utter the longings for peace that are closer to the heart of the household and closer to the heart of all earth's spiritual traditions than our divisions'.

This inspiring book grew out of teaching a spirituality course on peace making in Casa del Sol, New Mexico with a Jew and a Muslim: all three reflected daily on themes of peace from their distinctive traditions, then moved into half an hour of meditative prayer after each teaching session.

It follows the format of his previous books *Celtic Benediction* and *Sounds of the Eternal*: morning and evening prayer for each day of the week, with an emphasis on stillness and listening. The pattern is:

a verse from scripture and a prayer of awareness
scripture and meditation with a short verse from a psalm,
Matthew's gospel and the Quran

silence

silent prayer for peace and a blessing

The Christian input is from the beatitudes in the following form:

Blessed are those who know their need
for theirs is the grace of heaven.

Blessed are those who weep
for their tears shall be wiped away.

Blessed are the humble
for they are close to the sacred earth.

Blessed are those who hunger for earth's oneness
for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the forgiving
for they are free.

Blessed are the clear in heart
for they shall see the Living Presence.

Blessed are the peacemakers
for they are born of God.

*The Casa del Sol Blessings of Jesus
based on Matthew 5: 3-9*

The artwork woven through the prayers is from the Hebrew, Christian and Islamic worlds of art.

Gail Ballinger

WISDOM

Andrew Zuckerman; edited by Alex Vlack

PQ Blackwell in association with Abrahams, New York 2008

USA 50\$, Canada 55\$, UK £30 (hardback)

“One of the greatest gifts we can give to another generation is our experience, our wisdom, the wisdom of an older generation.” *Desmond Tutu*

Wisdom, a project of the photographer Andrew Zuckerman, was inspired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu's words quoted above. Desmond Tutu was persuaded to support the project and he wrote to prospective contributors who were to be over 65 years of age. There are 50 in all.

Contributors are very varied and include Nelson Mandela, Judi Dench (actor) who writes about why she is a Quaker, Buzz Aldrin (astronaut), Ravi Shankar (musician), Dave Brubeck (jazz musician and composer of sacred jazz), Clint Eastwood (actor), John Hume (Irish politician), Mary Quant (fashion designer). A number of the contributors, like the playwright Václav Havel, have been political prisoners.

The full page photographs are stunning. Each contributor is photographed against a plain white background - 'It creates an environment that is entirely democratic and stripped of context.' Alongside is the contributor's thoughts on life and their 'take' on wisdom.

I was attracted to this book, which I borrowed from my local library, by the quality of the photograph of Judi Dench on the dust jacket.

The book's format is large and square. This is a coffee table book, a book to dip into; it is also a work of art and would make a wonderful gift. Why review it here? Because it challenged me to look more closely.

Gail Ballinger

Since its publication, Andrew Zuckerman has produced a wisdom series of smaller books with titles Wisdom; Peace; Love; Life; Ideas but I have yet to explore these.

