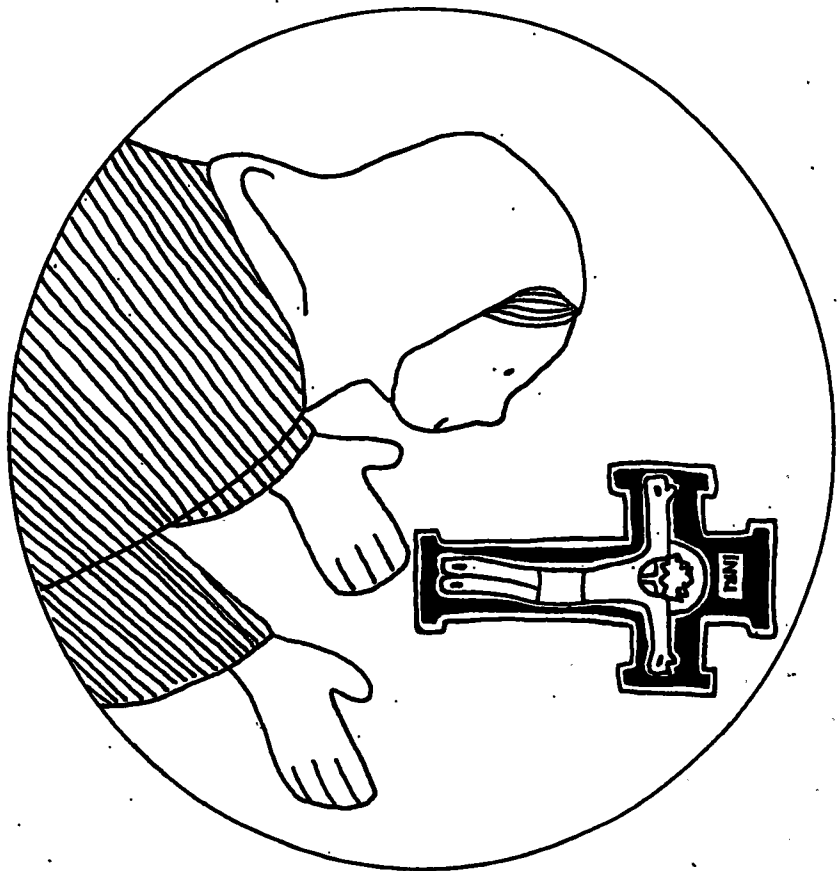


THE
JULIAN
MEETINGS



August 2008



EDITORIAL.

This is my last Magazine as Acting Editor. Thank you to all who have contributed. At this point, at the end of June, there is uncertainty about where future editions will come from, so please make contact with Deidre Morris, the Co-Ordinator, with anything you want to contribute, or any assistance you can give. The aim is to have an editorial team in place as soon as possible, so if there is any way you can help please also get in touch with Deidre

This edition looks particularly at our roots - about Julian, and about meetings, and how we organise. Julian Illustrations (all except the prayer gong) come from Elizabeth Obbard - her article starts on page 6, and the review of her book on pages 22/23, and Simon Small's article is on page 14/15, with review of his book on page 18.

Two letters have been included. Would anyone like to write any comments or questions for publication? We do not guarantee that they can all be answered or included - it will depend on available space.

** against quotations indicates that the reading comes from Enfolded in love, Daily Readings with Julian of Norwich, Edited by Robert Llewlyn, DLT Price: £3.50 Pages: 80pp ISBN: 52550 1*

Important Information **from the Julian Meetings Advisory Group**

Elsewhere in this Magazine, Janet explains the origins of JM and this article brings you right up-to-date, and beyond.

The Advisory Group

As the network of Julian Meetings grew, so the Advisory Group grew and now has 10 members. They each fulfil a specific role on behalf of the organisation:

Deidre Morris - Co-ordinator, and Editor of the British Newsletter

Pat Hughes - Treasurer

Anne Stamper - Database Manager

Tina Campbell - Subscriptions

Christine Rapsey - Publications

Janet Robinson - Pastoral Support

Francis Ballinger - Acting Magazine Editor and International contact

Gail Ballinger - Book reviews, Book List and Music List

Michael Tiley - Liaison with other prayer groups

Fiona Wallace - Artist, and hostess for meetings

In addition to the above, John Stamper is our webmaster, John Copping runs the Postal Group, and the Chester Julian Meeting actually do the mailing of the Magazine every four months, though none of these are on the Advisory Group.

Costs

All the above give many hours of their time, voluntarily, to carry out their various roles. They receive expenses – postage, phone calls, necessary equipment, travel to meetings – but their only ‘perk’ is a free subscription to the Magazine and the Postal Group.

All the ‘office’ work that the Advisory Group members do could be carried out by one, very competent, administrator – but this would cost JM a great deal more money, which would have to come from the membership.

As a necessary part of JM, and making it known and available, we have our website, our free ‘Waiting on God in the Silence’ publicity leaflet, and a database to access information about Meetings and subscribers. Our other publications and the Magazine are priced to cover their costs, with a bit left over to go towards JM’s essential running costs as listed above. Without the generosity of the many people who give us donations when they renew their subscriptions, our finances would be very tight indeed.

Being in touch

In the April Magazine Janet and Anne explained how they had spent much time, effort and postage in trying to track down ‘lost’ Julian Meetings in Great Britain.

Janet, Anne and Deidre have all had enquirers come back to them to say things like ‘The person says there is no longer a Julian Meeting there’ or ‘The person moved away last year’ or ‘I can’t get a response from that number, it appears to be no longer active’. We feel very bad about giving out, in good faith, contact details that are incorrect. The registration form asks for details of a second person so that we can get in touch with someone from a Meeting, even if it is not the named Contact.

Despite our requests that they do so, quite a number of G.B. Meetings have no subscriber to the Magazine, and so are out of touch with JM as a whole. They also make no monetary or other contribution to the wider network.

We need to be sure that the information we hold on the database about all the GB Julian Meetings is correct. We also wish to ensure that every Meeting is in touch with the network, knows what JM offers and what it needs, and makes a fair contribution to the costs of it.

Revised Registration arrangements

For these reasons the Advisory Group have decided that, from December 2008, every British Meeting will be asked to register their details annually, and pay a £6 fee for doing so.

This £6 should be paid by the Meeting as whole (not the contact person) so they need to agree, as a group, how they wish to raise this small sum. We felt that 50p per month per Meeting was not exorbitant. For their £6, every Meeting will:

- Be registered on the JM database
- Be listed (location only) on the JM website
- Have their details given to any enquirers from their area
- Receive a copy of the Magazine, and GB Newsletter for the whole membership to read and share.

In December, as with individual Magazine subscriptions, a form will be sent to each Meeting listing the details we hold about them on the database. We ask you to check these, amend if necessary, and return the form with your registration fee. This should ensure that the information we hold is up-to-date, and that every Meeting is included in the JM network.

Individual subscribers to the Magazine will not be affected, though their forms may carry the word 'registration' rather than 'subscription' in the future. We are very happy that people wish to have their own Magazine – the more the merrier!

God is the still point at the centre.

There is no doer but he.

All this he showed me with great joy, saying, 'See, I am God. See, I am in all things. See, I do all things. See, I never take my hands off my work nor ever shall, through all eternity. See, I lead to all things to the end I have prepared for them. I do this by the same wisdom and love and power through which I made them. How can anything be done that is not well done?'

God wants us to know that he keeps us safe through good and ill. *

A reflective description of what I imagine is a very typical Meeting - I like the idea of the gong.

Janet R.

Cirencester Julian Meeting

From June Prosser-Vane

We meet in a quiet, peaceful conservatory overlooking lawns, flowers and a variety of birds. I read in one of the Julian magazines of the use of a Tibetan prayer gong and was fortunate to be given one and we make use of it to begin our meetings. Its resonant sound brings us to a prayer for us to keep the silence and wait on God. This silence we keep for thirty minutes. On coming out of the silence we have time for discussion and refreshments and, weather permitting, a stroll in the garden.

Once a year we pay a visit to Burford Priory for a Quiet day. There we have a room for the day with use of their kitchen, library and grounds. The abbot gives us an interesting and often amusing talk. Before we leave we are invited to join their eucharist service in the chapel

We leave our monthly meetings filled with God's Holy Spirit – our souls quietened and refreshed for having made time in our over speeded demanding lives. We become aware of the blessing of silence.

I have learnt to love you too late, Beauty so old and so new! I have learnt to love you too late! You were within me, and I looked out into the world, where I sought you outside myself, and in my deformity searched for you there and ran after the beauties that you made. You were with me, but I was not with you. The beauties that kept me away from you had no existence except from you. You called and shouted and broke into my deafness. You flashed and shone and dispelled my blindness. You sent forth fragrance, and I drew in my breath and panted for you. You touched me and I burnt for your peace.

St. Augustine of Hippo, Confessions 10.27

JULIAN OF NORWICH - WOMAN OF FAITH & PRAYER

Elizabeth Obbard

Julian of Norwich is a woman who has had an enormous impact on the spirituality of our time, one who is just being rediscovered as a teacher and theologian of originality and depths.

At the age of thirty and a half Julian tells us that she had a serious illness which brought her to death's door, and an experience of the passion that made the sufferings of Jesus really real to her imagination and senses. Her book 'The Revelations of Divine Love' is the result of long pondering over all she 'saw' in those few packed hours when death seemed close and eternity dawning. It is most likely after this experience that Julian became an anchoress attached to the Church of St Julian in the medieval city of Norwich, where she wrote her book.

Hermits were people 'on the margins' of Church & society, therefore they could speak out as they had nothing to lose. They had no voice in the hierarchy or civil society. They were free to be who they were & to respond to grace as individuals.

Somehow Julian's book, which seems to have been lost in the ferment that was the Reformation was 'rediscovered' by a woman scholar at just the right time, when women were beginning to have a voice and be listened to. And it was immediately popular. Here was a book by an English woman, not a foreign mystic. One of us. And her message is one of hope & optimism, not doubt & despair. Julian's book breathes an atmosphere of common sense, a balanced mind, a loving heart, a closeness to the ordinary, that we all need to hear.

Julian (who most likely took her name from the church where her anchorhold was situated) was born in 1342, for she tells us that at the time of her near death experience in 1373 she was thirty & a half years old. It was a time of great suffering for the English people. The Hundred Years War was in progress, taking its toll of men & money. The peasants were finding it hard to make a living, and their frustration culminated in the Peasants Revolt of 1381, which was put down with great cruelty.

When Julian was seven, and again when she was nineteen and twenty seven, Norwich was visited by the dreaded Black Death. People died in droves, the first swellings of the disease in groin or armpit spreading quickly through the body, leading to death on the same day. So many died that heaps of bodies would be collected by the death carts going round the city at night,

calling for people to bring out their dead, who would then be buried in great communal pits. It is calculated that over a third of the population of England died of the Plague, one of them being Julian's contemporary, the wandering hermit Richard Rolle.

The Church was embroiled in the Great Schism, the pope moving from Rome to Avignon with various parts of Christendom supporting rival claimants to the papal throne. In England Wyclif translated the bible into English, for which he was condemned as a heretic. After his death Lollardy was declared a capital offence, and from her anchorhold Julian would have been able to smell the burning bodies of those tied to the stake in the Lollard pits of the city. So it was a time of poverty, suffering, civil unrest, war & revolt. All the more surprising then that Julian's writings are so imbued with joy and hope.

Norwich at this time was a city second only to London in importance, a centre of culture and trade as well as religion.

The county was rich from the wool trade and every town and village built magnificent churches. Norfolk was also a county of pilgrimage, with shrines at Bromholm, Walsingham, and Norwich itself.

This was the age of English lay spirituality, as religious life was at a low ebb. All the 14th century English mystics were either hermits or wrote for hermits: Richard Rolle, Julian, the anonymous author of the Cloud of Unknowing, and Walter Hilton who wrote the Ladder of Perfection.

At the age of twenty or thereabouts when a woman decided on her future, Julian most likely married. It used to be thought that she must have been a nun, but now this is considered unlikely. The Black Death had depleted religious communities & a large dowry was needed to take one of the empty places. Also, there is no mention in Julian's book of anything that would place her in a monastic milieu. She is concerned for her 'fellow Christians' of whom she feels herself to be one.

We are better to presume that Julian married young and perhaps lost husband (and children?) in the Plague or in infancy. She is conversant with the idea of God as Mother, most likely through her own experience of motherhood. Jesus feeds us and teaches us as a mother feeds and teaches her child; God wraps us in goodness as a mother wraps up her infant; Jesus is courteous & friendly in demeanour, not some judge who is easily offended...

The life Julian chose as an anchoress was a life popular at the time. Anchoresses occasionally taught small children or earned their living by church needlework. But they were basically 'sister' to the area where their

cell was situated, supported by gifts from the local people. The cell had three windows, one to communicate with a maid, one looking into the Church to follow the services and receive Communion, and a window of welcome, where anyone could come for help and advice.

Julian's cell was attached to a church in Norwich's commercial district, close to the river, so her life was not like that of a nun in a country monastery. She would have seen the seamy side of life, had contact with tradesmen, prostitutes, rogues. Her mildness is noticeable in that she condemns no one, and sees God as non-condemnatory too. A life of prayer & listening enabled her to see that sin is not always where we think it is, and indeed 'all shall be well' despite our faults and failings.

And in her cell Julian wrestles with the big questions of life: sin, the humanity of Christ, the place of suffering, what is love and how is it shown? our eternal destiny and God's Providence. Thomas Merton ranks Julian above St John of the Cross as a theologian, which indeed she is, not just a devotional writer.

If we want, Julian can be our friend and teacher, opening our eyes to new ways of seeing and understanding life, God and ourselves. She can teach us about the value of silence and prayer, of keeping going when there seems to be no feedback. And Julian is characterised by her wonderful sense of gratitude. God is good. The meaning of life is love. And in accepting one another prayerfully and non-judgementally we accept and love the whole of humanity. Truly 'All shall be well.'

Julian's showing of a hazelnut

He showed me a little thing, the size of the hazelnut, in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind's eye and I thought 'what can this be?' and answer came, 'it is all that is made.' I marvelled that it could last, for I thought it might have crumbled to nothing, it was so small. And the answer came into my mind, 'it lasts and ever shall because God loves it.' and all things have being through the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three truths. The first is that God made it. The second is that God loves it. The third is that God looks after it.

What is he indeed that is maker and lover and keeper? I cannot find words to tell. For until I am one with him I can never have true rest nor peace. I can never know it until I am held so close to him that there is nothing in between. *



From : Jesus, a Dialogue with the Saviour

By : Father Lev

You, Lord Jesus pray in me.

Let me be silent so that your voice alone may be heard.

If your prayer becomes mine, if I let You pray in me then all events and all creatures in the world will enter into my prayer and will be influenced by it.

How it all began

Janet Robinson

In the spring a Mothers' Union meeting in mid-Wales asked me to talk about the Julian Meetings. I was glad to do so but realised that I needed to remind myself about the origins of the "organisation". I learned of JM some sixteen years ago when I went to a meeting in Wells with my sister-in-law. Impressed by the concept I borrowed a copy of the magazine and requested more information. I canvassed friends and members of local churches and a gathering of about ten people met in our house. It was suggested that members of a group in Tenbury Wells – the nearest meeting to us at that time – might come over to tell us more and hold the first meeting with us. This was both kind and invaluable.

Since then our meeting has met once a month. Numbers have ebbed and flowed but our meetings are an integral part of our lives. Some five years ago I joined the Advisory Group in order to help with the magazine subscriptions and have since taken on a more pastoral role. However, I have only picked up snippets of the history of the movement as I have gone along. Suspecting that some of you may be in the same boat I thought I would recount something of what I told the MU. *Circles of Silence*, edited by Robert Llewelyn (Darton, Longman & Todd 1998) is an invaluable source.

First stirrings

Julian meetings came into being in 1973 in response to letters written by Hilary Wakeman to a number of Church papers. She had become aware of a gap in the worshipping life of the church. At that time many, particularly the young, were realising that the contemplative dimension of prayer expressed through silence played little or no part in Christian worship. And many were looking elsewhere, and especially to the East for ways to fill the vacuum.

Hilary, writing in *Circles of Silence*, commented: "Nobody could have planned such a crazy thing... It was 1973. Meditation was big – the very word for it was for most people synonymous with Eastern religions and the influence of the Beatles and transcendental meditation was still strong."

Hilary had gone through years of atheism and agnosticism back into Christianity. Having rediscovered the "wordless and imageless" prayer of her childhood she realised that the Church was not mentioning its own tradition of meditation. She felt that she wanted an ecumenical order based on the practice of contemplative prayer for ordinary people.

She wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who said he would always encourage such a movement but a group would have to make its own plans. She wrote to Cardinal Heenan, who said it might be better to join something that already existed. Metropolitan Anthony said he knew what she was aiming at but it had been tried before and had been a flop. So she wrote to the church papers, saying:

'Might there not be, on an ecumenical basis, a coming together of Christian lay people interested in, or already practising, contemplative or mystical prayer, with a view to becoming a new type of order: an association of lay people of all branches of Christianity who wished to dedicate their lives formally to God, married or unmarried, remaining in their own homes with their own occupations, living lives of simplicity and spiritual discipline, worshipping in their own churches but coming together from time to time....and showing forth in the world joy and peace and love...Would anyone interested please get in touch with me.'

Finding a common vision

Within a week she had 166 letters. She picked from each area one correspondent who seemed likely to be efficient and enthusiastic and wrote asking them to find a room in their city where they could meet on a particular date, and a bed for the night. When the plans were made the others who had written from that area were informed. In the last week of May 1973, leaving her husband to cope with the children, she drove to Oxford, Exeter and Chichester. She realised that it was all very naïve but perhaps a more formal organisation would not have worked.

Chatting with all these people she found that what they wanted was very different from what she had proposed. Those in Oxford did not like the word "Order" and did not want a Rule of life. But they were keen to start meeting regularly. At Exeter they did not want any advertising. At Chichester six enthusiastic people were keen to formulate a simple Rule and agreed to meet monthly.

Then Hilary spread her activities and went up north. Gradually it became clear that what people really wanted was simply to meet regularly with others who practised contemplative prayer. Many had met with incomprehension from their local clergy when they talked about it. Some had even been told that it was the "way of the Devil" and should be abandoned forthwith. Quite a few thought they must be going mad to pray in this way since no one they knew seemed to understand it. Their joy at getting together with the possibility of mutual support was clearly what brought them together.

Growing

In the autumn meetings were held in Cardiff, Cambridge, Kent and London and by March 1974 the movement had a magazine and a name. The word "Julian" came from every quarter. This was partly because the 600th anniversary of the "showings" of Julian of Norwich had been celebrated the previous year. And it seemed to be the right name as she was pre-Reformation and so seemed to belong to all of us. Also no one really knew if she was a professed religious or a lay person and for a group which would include both that seemed right. So we became The Julian Meetings.

Hilary wanted as little organisation as possible and hoped that each group would grow in its own way. Central organisation would be a convener – Hilary - and two advisers. And a thrice yearly newsletter was put together.

Every year a meeting combined with a retreat was held in different parts of the country with a speaker – like Martin Israel, a Cowley father etc. Latterly there have been annual Julian Days – at York, Salisbury and this year Peterborough.

Now I am almost up to date. The Advisory group has grown to ten – each person having a different role. Contact has been kept up mostly through the Magazine. Now we are realising that we need to be a little structured in our registration of Meetings, as the exercise which Anne Stamper and I undertook last year revealed that many Meetings had lost touch with us and we with them.

One important point which came out of my talk was that when I mentioned Julian of Norwich several people had never heard of her and others had assumed that we were formally linked with the Julian Centre at Norwich. Elsewhere in the magazine Elizabeth Obbard will tell us perfectly what I imperfectly told the ladies of Llanyre.

Henri Nouwen dedicates his Genesee Diary:

***To all contemplative men and women
who by their commitment to unceasing
prayer offer us hope in the midst
of a troubled world***

see page 21

I liked this vivid description of a Julian meeting with its individual running commentary of what can go on in the mind as one sits in silence. Personally I rarely use the silence for any intercession – unless it is urgent and immediate and then I offer it to God and let it go. I try not to try to be silent but just to be. I wonder how common some intercession is and what other Julian members think about it.

Janet R.

The Julian Group: Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire

Judith Goddard

It's the third Monday and we are all gathered at 10.30 a.m.
Dorothy did not come and Polly gave her apologies.
A new venue this time now to be a permanent home
Some of us have picked up a pebble to hold.
Leader Penny starts the tape recorder.
Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings" relaxes us completely.
She reads a Julian passage about God never being angry.
Being angry truly never being what he is about.
Silently I recall the angry God of the Old Testament
But this is not our Bible group where we debate.
I let that go as into the silence we fall
It is odd that as it enfolds us we seem more solidly rooted to our chairs.
The rise and fall of breathing can be heard
Our eyes are closed and yet the yellow sunshine penetrates
For where we are it is not dark even to the one of us who is blind.
I do not know what the others do in their silence.

I pray for some of them individually – Penny's arthritis, Millie's decreased mobility, Irene's knees, Enid and Gwen.

The silence deepens and it seems that our quiet time is over more quickly each time.

My husband says it would never be for him – having to sit still for any length of time just isn't possible as to him "silence like a cancer grows". But I crave the silence. Thoughts of the others fall away and we are all strengthened in the silent love of God.

We are brought out of our silence to the sound of music, have a final prayer and then have a discussion of what it means to be a Fool of God like St. Francis. Methodist Deaconess Sister Joan tells us because St Francis gave up all he had to follow God that meant in the eyes of the world he was a fool.

We say goodbye until next time, and I walk home smiling.

Tools for the Journey :

Remembering the Question

Simon Small

Contemplation is the way that I explore a question. And in exploring this question, all other questions of meaning are seen in a new light.

My practice of contemplation is formed and shaped by the question and only has meaning in relation to it. I have found that if the question loses focus in my mind, contemplation starts to feel empty and unfulfilling. I have a sense that something has gone wrong, without quite being able to say what has happened. The practice becomes arduous.

More than anything else, it starts to feel abstract and dry.

The question is of a particular kind. It is a question that has no answer, at least in the way we usually understand the term "answer". It is a question that is so fundamental, so enormous in its implications, that any set of words or concepts that might be offered as an answer would be embarrassed by their inadequacy. Yet to contemplate the question in silence and stillness can have an extraordinary effect upon the mind. The very "unanswerable-ness" of the question seems to cultivate a different experience of consciousness in which, mysteriously, contemplative practice may become contemplation itself.

The question is very simple: "What is this moment?"

This is one form of the universal question that waits patiently for all human beings to look its way. It unites us. It is the question that constantly surrounds us all of the time, but our minds are too full of our lives to see the awesome mystery of life itself. Yet to turn ourselves inside-out and see our lives through the lens of the Mystery, cannot but transform how we live.

If we pause and acknowledge that we truly have no idea what life is, what we are and, even, why anything actually "is" at all – everything changes. Just reading the last sentence, slowly, may give a sense of what such change tastes like.

So, for me, contemplative practice is first of all to pay profound attention to this moment and to see directly its unfathomable depths. It is to allow its unknown-ness to fill and quieten the mind. Paradoxically, it is to go into a deeper knowing than words and concepts can ever supply. It is to this place (on a good day) that contemplation takes me - often in times of formal practice and, increasingly, spontaneously in the course of daily life.

And it is my experience that in this place of waiting, when the mind is very still, one can become aware of an awesome presence and purpose in the depths of the moment. This is why contemplation is prayer. It is an experience of relationship too rich for words. Indeed, had words and concepts filled the mind the encounter could never have happened so directly. At best, the Presence would have been sensed dimly through their veils or squeezed, terribly misshapen, into their limiting form.

But because the question has, firstly, taken me into the mystery of the moment where all words must fall away, through Grace I may taste that to which they can only point.

There then comes a time when words, thoughts and the everyday world return and I find myself using the word "God" once more. There is, however, a reticence and a hesitation in its use, for in the light of contemplation it seems so inadequate and open to misinterpretation. And for reasons I do not understand the figure of Jesus becomes ever more central and present. I used to think that I understood who Jesus is, but now that understanding seems no more than useful words written in sand, which at best can only evoke something far too great for them to contain.

The question has become for me a gateway to that which the word "God" points. It awakens me to the truth that "now" is the only place I ever am and so the only place where God may be known. It is a question that reveals, rather shockingly at first, the extent to which I am usually lost in the world of the mind, dominated by the past and the future. The question awakens me to the truth of "now" and invites an exploration of its depths. The question gives an awesome setting and a sense of direction to whatever method of contemplative prayer I feel drawn to use, but does not specify the destination. It enables the journey to unfold in its own way.

Also, of course, it is a question that I can carry with me through daily life, gently humming away in the background, from time to time erupting into the forefront of the mind to give a new, vaster perspective on a situation or problem. This is contemplation in action.

To base religious practice around questions rather than answers offers another gift that may be particularly needed in the age in which we live. It demonstrates to the world that there is a strand of the Christian tradition that does not share the lust for certainty that can appear to dominate modern expressions of the faith. And through being utterly conscious of the majestic mystery of being, it is a path that can live with generosity and openness alongside other insights into the wonder of existence.

Listen To the Silence

Elizabeth Mills

Listen to the Silence.....

.....there is so much to hear.

Listen to the Silence.....

.....it will teach you.

Listen to the Silence.....

....you will find Love.

Listen to the Silence....

.....here wounds are gently healed.

Listen to the Silence....

.....it will bring your life alive.

Listen to the Silence.....

and Know the Peace of God which passes all understanding.

Listen, child.....and learn.

Learn from God – of God – with God.

Let His Holy Spirit guide you

Into the Ways of Truth, Love and Peace.

Listen.....for His Spirit is speaking.

Let not our noise distract us from hearing what is most precious.

Listen; listen within.....and learn.....and grow.

Let His Spirit fill your heart and your mind

And draw you closer to His Infinite Love.

Infinite Love – which waits patiently.

Waits Patiently for us to come; to listen and learn and Love.



As the body is clad in clothes, and the flesh in the skin, and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the whole, so are we clothed, body and soul, in the goodness of God and enfolded in it

He who made man for love, will by the same love restore him to his former blessedness -- and yet more *

A reflection from

'Seeking Faith, Finding God The Prayer of the Vulnerable'

John Rackley

Give us this day our daily bread Matthew 6: 11

At the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus trains our thoughts on God; he then expects his disciples to accept their own needs and vulnerability. We need sustenance: there are certain necessities without which we cannot exist. Discipleship is as much about them as a desire for God's kingdom to come and his name to be hallowed.

In this prayer Jesus will not let us forget that we are from the dust of the earth. Our bread and our bodies have a common origin. In the praises of the psalmists we may be little less than angels (Psalm 8: 5), but in their laments we are also vulnerable and fragile creatures (Psalm 103: 15-16). We may be called to sing the glories of God but we should not get above ourselves, for we all need the nourishment of God the creator (Psalm 104: 14-15).

A friend once confessed that she found this request an embarrassment, because she could not get out of her mind all the millions for whom it is a vain plea. She wondered how people felt, saying this prayer in the midst of shortage, drought and famine. She wondered whether the words mocked these people as they realized that their food was available only at the whim of weather and by the action or inaction of government and NGO.

She felt that, in our consumer society with its overstocked shelves and panic buying at the merest hint of a shortage, this call to God was profoundly odd, and she found it difficult to approach this part of the Disciples' Prayer with any sort of integrity. After all she knew full well where her daily bread would be – at her local hypermarket with all the other things she could get on credit. She applauded the earthiness of the request, and said that she wondered whether this was the point where many people started praying the Lord's Prayer rather than simply saying it – but she felt like a fraud.

I think that she understood the request more than she realized. We can see this when we examine the two words 'daily' and 'bread'. The Greek word used for daily is a unique one, so scholars have had a field day trying to get to its meaning. Here are some of their suggestions: bread for the day, tomorrow's bread today, continual bread, sufficient, each day's bread and necessary bread. They all struggle to arrive at the same idea. In this request we are not

asking God for a guaranteed diet that comes without problem for the whole of life. We are in fact asking for no more than we need on a daily basis and once again we are in the territory that Jesus explores in Matthew 6: 19-21, 25-34.

Jesus calls on his disciples to rely on the daily nurture and provision of God. As a Father in heaven, God can be relied on day by day. When we try to settle the future by our own plans and stockpiling, we move from the centre of our life of faith from the creator to the created. At the heart of this prayer is a call to a daily act of trust in God, trust for today's provision. This is deeply countercultural. It is not an argument against careful preparation in the light of the vagaries of the future, but it is a warning against trying to control the future from the present.

As for 'bread' , this is meant to be a catch-all word, describing the bare necessity and also the rich variety of God's provision. It reminds us that our basic need is not luxury, and raises the question of how much we can do without. We are challenged to consider whether we have made essential what is, in fact, peripheral to our well being.

It also tells us not to disdain the ordinary and the everyday. I may have food from the best restaurants one day, but if it is truly the Lord's provision, the toast on the table the next day should be equally welcome.

The issue is not only about food. The Lord provides in many different ways. We are called to an incarnational faith, so our daily bread may be in the offer of a lift, the phone call of a friend, a request to pray with us, a film, a new pair of shoes or time given to our church's outreach. Anything that nourishes what we need instead of what we want is 'daily bread'.

For reflection

Read Mark 1: 16-42 and discover the different 'daily breads' offered by Jesus that day.

Prayer suggestion

Start each day with the request 'Give us this day our daily bread' and end each day by thanking God for how the prayer has been answered.

From John Rackley - Seeking Faith, Finding God; published by BRF 2007 –(see review in April Edition) used by permission.

John Rackley gave the Bible Reflections at the Retreat Association Conference at Swanwick 12-14 May He is also leading a retreat at Scargill on The Sceptic's Gospel 29 Sept - 2 Oct 2008.

The Prayer of the Empty Water Jar

Jesus, I come into the warmth of your presence
knowing that you are the very emptiness of God.
I come before you holding the water jar of my life.
Your eyes meet mine and I know what I'd rather not know.

I came to be filled, but I am already full.

I am too full.

This is my sickness.

I am full of things that crowd out your healing presence.

A holy knowing steals inside my heart and I see the plain truth.

I don't need more

I need less - I am too full.

I am full of things that block out your golden grace.

I am smothered by gods of my own creation

I am full of my own opinions and narrow attitudes

full of fear, resentments, control

full of self-pity, and arrogance.

Slowly this terrible truth pierces my heart

I am so full there is no room for you.

Contemplatively, and with compassion

you ask me to reach into my water jar.

One by one, Jesus, you enable me to lift out

the things that are a hindrance to my wholeness.

I take each one to my heart and I hear you asking me,

'Why is this so important to you?'

Like a murmur of a gentle stream I hear you calling

Let go, let go, let go!

Finally

I sit with my empty water jar

I hear you whisper,

You have become a space for God.

Now there is hope

Now you are ready to be a channel of life

You have given up your own agenda

There is nothing left but God

BOOK REVIEWS

From the Bottom of the Pond: The forgotten art of experiencing God in the depths of the present moment.

Simon Small

O Books 2007, 2008 £7.99 ISBN 978-1-84694-066-8

This is a slim volume with great clarity of expression about precisely the focus of Julian Meetings – encountering God in contemplation. The chapters are short, written in an easy, direct style. Each gives so much food for thought that this is a book to read slowly and to savour at length. He covers areas that may be familiar: prayer, contemplation, difficulties, being truly present to God. But his stories and approach give us a new slant on our practice of contemplative prayer and the depths to which it can take us. Learning to experience God in the present moment will take us a lifetime, but this book will be a great help along that path.

Deidre Morris

Ed: see article by Simon pp.14/15

Other Prayers of Jesus: Praying Jesus' way is dangerous.

John Henson

O Books 2007 £11.99 ISBN 978 1 84694 079 8

This is a somewhat iconoclastic book but none the worse for that. That it is controversial is the hint in the introduction written by Dr Michael Ball, that more conservative Christians "may not always agree" but that "what John Henson says is always worth thinking about". I would agree. The commentaries strip accumulated layers from the prayers of Jesus and provide fresh insights into their meaning.

I did not like the giving of "modern" names like Rocky, Bart, Maggie to the disciples and others in that I found them confusing and did not add anything to the message. However, I greatly appreciated the insights into the Lord's Prayer and I felt that the chapters on Meditation and Contemplation were practical and full of good spiritual sense.

This is a book well worth reading as a refreshing change from the more mainstream commentaries on prayer and spirituality. Try it.

Janet Robinson

Journey to the Heart: Centering Prayer for children

Frank X Jelenek; illustrated by Ann Boyajian

Paraclete Press 2007 \$13.45 ISBN 978-1-55725-482-5

This is a nicely produced book using rhyme and illustrations to introduce children to how to practice 'prayer of the heart'. It suggests it is 'ideal for parents, teachers, educators – and children ages 3-10'.

I found the book attractive; it suggests a simple way for a child to choose a 'special secret holy word – a secret just between you and God' and to use that word to 'unlock' the silent time spent with God, either alone or with others. However it seemed to me that the only way of finding out if this was suitable for children was to ask some. We have a group of children being preparing for confirmation in our church at the moment and our Vicar agreed to lend them the book and gather their feedback.

The result of this was not very positive, they reported that they did not find it useful; however the Vicar felt that it presented a set of concepts and ideas which were pretty alien to them as they knew so little about prayer. It is aiming at a very wide age range; the language used and the images given suggested a young age, an older child wouldn't connect with it as it is presented for a younger reader. He felt that children would find it very difficult to understand this book if prayer was not already part of their family life.

I then decided to test this with a younger child, my own five year old granddaughter who is used to attending church and has been going to junior church since she was four. I explained to her that we were reviewing this book and what that meant, then, sitting together on the sofa, I read the whole book to her. She remained still and silent, with the exception of saying the Lords prayer quietly with me when it came in the text. At the end she gave her opinion "it is quite a good book, it tells you about God and I have chosen my secret word, but I am not telling you as it is a secret'.

I think that the publishers are right when they suggest that this book is 'for parents, teachers, educators ' because, from our experience, it would seem to be more suitable to be used by adults with children rather than for children to read on their own.

Anne Stamper

livesimply: a CAFOD resource for living simply... sustainably...and in solidarity

Annabel Shilson-Thomas (editor)

Canterbury Press 2008 £9.99

ISBN 978-1-85311-863-0

livesimply is a CAFOD (Catholic Fund for Overseas Development) project which encourages people to live simply...sustainably...and in solidarity with those who are poor.

This book is a very varied collection of articles, reflections, poems and prayers from people throughout the world – some well known, some unknown – which support and encourage these aims. It is arranged in three sections: living simply, living sustainably, living in solidarity .

Contributors include Christopher Jamison Abbot of Worth Abbey, Desmond Tutu, Rowan Williams, Cormac Murphy- O'Connor, Sharon Looremata , who is a Maasai farmer, and numerous CAFOD supporters. The book also includes some of the pledges and comments added to the message board on the CAFOD *livesimply* website. Subjects include practical hints for the way we live our daily lives so that we consume less, the experience of living with AIDS, why are we too busy. 'Grand Designs: redesigning the household?' is about building silence and contemplation into a busy household with a six year old child. While there is practical guidance on practical matters, the book also addresses some of the underlying causes which hinder living simply, sustainably and in solidarity and underlines the value of silence and contemplation. I have returned to it again and again.

Annabel Shilson-Thomas is an Anglican priest and a member of the CAFOD Spirituality Team.

Gail Ballinger

Mentoring for Spiritual Growth: Sharing the journey of faith

Tony Horsfall

BRF 2008 £7.99

ISBN 978-1-84101-562 0

This is an excellent book about spiritual direction which succeeds in what it sets out to do: to make this ancient Christian practice accessible and relevant to a new generation. The word mentor does not carry the same "baggage" as spiritual director and the terms accompaniment, or spiritual friendship are equally interchangeable. Tony Horsfall states in his introduction that he is writing primarily though not exclusively for those in the evangelical and charismatic sections of the church, where there has been most suspicion of this ministry, in the hope of removing some of the mystery and fear that "direction" might mean authoritarianism.

Starting with an examination of the history of spiritual direction in the Bible and in Church history, the author goes on to outline the qualities, skills and tools of a mentor, while recognising that the ministry is a gifting and a calling enriched by training. Small group mentoring is explored as well as the place of retreats and quiet days as part of the spiritual journey. The chapters on developing spiritual awareness and discernment as well as some spiritual exercises in the appendix would be encouraging for the general reader.

Altogether this is an easy read and a helpful book for anyone seeking to explore their journey deeper into God whether or not they wish to seek out a spiritual mentor for their journey or feel called to be a "soul friend"

Yvonne Walker

The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist monastery

Henri J Nouwen

DLT-This Edition 2008 £10.95

ISBN 978-0-232-52729-2

Amongst many publications currently available of works by / about Henri Nouwen, this is seminal in laying bare the development of his inner thoughts, as the Confessions of St. Augustine did before him. We see revealed the further development of the Inner Life, and realise how in his absolute honesty and integrity his journey with God moves him. Henri Nouwen goes into the depths of his being, and shows us the journey within, the meeting with the God who is his life.

Francis Ballinger

On Holy Ground: Guided Prayer: a Handbook & Practical Companion

Anita Woodwell SGS

Canterbury Press 2008 £12.99 ISBN 978-1-85311-866-1

Weeks of guided prayer and retreats in daily life have become popular in recent years and this practical handbook offers an introduction to many aspects of companioning another person. It covers such topics as the art of listening and discernment, choosing Biblical texts for prayer, and the teaching role of a prayer guide. I found the focus on teaching and guidance and the dogmatic style of writing to be sadly out of tune with a ministry characterised by the freedom of discovering God's spirit already at work.

People involved in the ministry of accompanying others may well find the content of this book helpful, particularly the practical guidelines on the structure and organisation involved in running a week of guided prayer. However, I would recommend that they sit lightly to the dogmatic and authoritative style used in this book. There is also a website providing reproducible handouts for a week of guided prayer at www.onholyground.org.uk

Yvonne Walker

Through Julian's Windows: growing into wholeness with Julian of Norwich

Elizabeth Ruth Obbard

Canterbury Press 2008 £7.99 ISBN 978-1-85311-903-3

This is a book about Julian of Norwich, but equally it is about the solitary or hermit life lived as a vocation within the church. It includes a history of the hermit life.

Early in her life Julian prayed for three wounds: the wounds of contrition, compassion and longing for God. In the core of the book the author relates these wounds to the three windows from Julian's cell. The first window is on to everyday life and is the window to which her maid brought her food and drink and is linked to the wound of contrition. Similarly the second window of welcome, where people came for counsel and support, is linked to the wound of compassion. The third window looks out on the sanctuary of the church and was where she received communion. 'The first window opens upon the world of nature and physical necessity, the second window on to contact with others and their problems. But the third window is the God-window, and God is the whole reason for Julian's life as an anchoress.' We are not to flee from our wounds but embrace them.

Each chapter ends with 'space to reflect' with Bible readings, readings from the saints and prayers; the text contains quotations from Revelations of Divine Love – enough to illuminate without dominating.

It was both fascinating and helpful to read a little of twentieth century mystics and hermits such as Caryll Houselander who I had never come across. The final, brief, chapter says a little of the author's own journey. An appendix gives details of several organisations which support people living the solitary life. The whole book is easy to read.

Julian of Norwich grew in popularity during the twentieth century and this book demonstrates her value to us in the twenty-first. Anyone who has found themselves drawn to her - or to the solitary life themselves - would gain a lot from reading it, finding new insights, gifts and even healing. 'Each one of us is in some way solitary as we seek to become self actualised persons. In each one who is growing towards wholeness there is a need to accept one's aloneness and make it fruitful... to live with and for God, to counsel others, to be a sister or brother to those we meet is the vocation of us all in one degree or another. In this Julian can be our teacher and guide, for she does not threaten or cajole, but inspires and enlightens. She is a friend worth knowing and heeding'

Gail Ballinger

Ed: see article by Sr. Elizabeth pp.6/7/8

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 views expressed in this magazine are those of each writer, and are not necessarily held by the Editor or the Advisory Group.

The Editor is always pleased to receive original articles, short meditations, stories, poems or artwork for use in the magazine. Book reviews for publication should include date, publisher ISBN and price.

Contributions for the next magazine should be sent to the Julian Meetings Coordinator ,

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