

THE
JULIAN
MEETINGS

A decorative floral ornament consisting of three stylized flowers. The central flower is larger and features a circular emblem in its center, which appears to be a globe or a similar symbol. The two side flowers are smaller and simpler in design. The entire ornament is flanked by wavy lines.

Magazine
April
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 April 2011

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Part 3 of David Self's short course introducing people to silence and contemplative prayer.

Approaching Silence - Distractions

We lead lives filled with stimuli, rush, and information, with a deeply-learned emphasis on doing, on experiencing NOW, of fixing things NOW. We all have cross-currents of worry and unaddressed aspects of our lives. So it is not surprising if we take longer than we expect to slow down, and then discover the ongoing distractions and tensions we carry. Our lives are of a piece. If we make a regular practice of being still before God for a time, then that feeds into the whole of our living, though we may not feel it to be so. Conversely, the way we live the rest of the time affects deeply our times of prayer.

In the silence we all suffer from distractions. Our attention is caught by a particular thought and off we follow, finding we are far away in our preoccupations once more. Don't beat ourselves up over that – it just gives energy to the distraction. Gently we come back to the focus, for God never gives up on us. Imagine that we are looking from a small bridge at a stream flowing towards, and then under, you. Look at the water and not at the leaves on its surface. The leaves are distractions. Let them flow on, and look at the water instead.

All our preparations — music, body posture, awareness of our bodies and breathing, bodily stillness, a focus to help still our minds – all these are an expression of intent, a desire to pray. Therefore they are a proper part of the praying, not to be hurried through quickly. Sometimes, because of things within us or without, all we can do in our period of prayer is persist with the intention; use the exercises as best we can; keep recalling a distracted mind to a focus; pray within a tension that will not go away; or within a storm in the mind and heart that will not be quiet. At such times it is very important to persist, even if the only prayer we can offer is 'HELP. Here I am, all knotted up, constantly distracted. I

want to pray, Help!’

Similarly it is important that we pray regularly, finding a time and place which is ours to give directly to God, and to defend against invading demands. This is easier for some than for others, but give God the intention, the longing, the regularity, and we welcome the Spirit into our heart and life. God will lift our groanings, that are deeper than the storms of mind and heart, and his healing will carry on beneath it all. We must abandon the idea or expectation that the only ‘good’ prayer is the one that is calm and still.

Everyone suffers from distractions; they come in different ways and there are things we can do to help.

1) Physical. Tenseness of muscles, an itch, ache, cough, rumble Instead of moving or scratching, we imagine directing the flow of our breathing through the area. We take it to the area within the cycle of our breathing and ask the Holy Spirit to attend to it, to heal whatever is causing it. The body is carrying something for us. Let the Spirit flow through us there. (practise)

2) Distractions from the environment – for example noises outside, cars, birds, sirens, other people. Like other distractions, when you attempt to push away sounds, put them out of your consciousness, get irritated with them, all you are doing is giving the distraction energy. Instead, they can become a trigger to lead you to a deeper awareness of the God who holds you. (practise)

3) Distracting thoughts. Repeat a word or phrase (mantra), relating it to our breathing. For example *Jesus* (breathe in) *have mercy* (breathe out). We do not control the pace of the breathing but deepen it so that our stomach goes in and out, and we relax into it, using the mantra on alternate breaths. When our mind becomes more still, we stop using the mantra for awhile. When we wander, and become aware of the

wandering, we return gently with the mantra.

Sometimes we are given a sense of God's presence. We may realise that God lives at the centre of our being, far deeper than thoughts or feelings. We may feel surrounded by God. We may have a sense of the presence without being able to say more. Those moments are gifts, glimpses of the love that is always there. We do not try to hold onto them, just receive them with thanks and let them go, turning again to the Giver that lives beyond the gift.

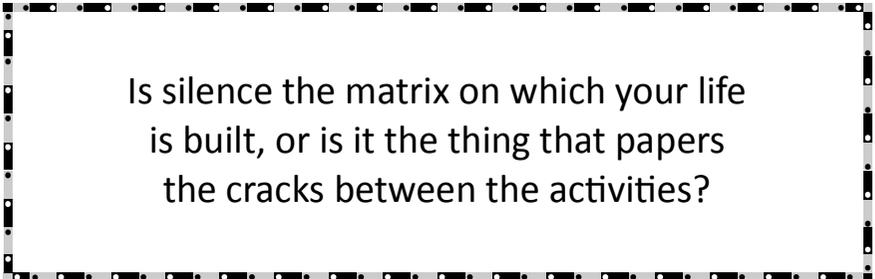
Such gifts may not happen very often and they are not a measure of the praying. Mostly we are asked just to carry on, longing to make ourselves available to the God who is so close and yet beyond our understanding. Often there may be all sorts of thoughts or feelings in the top layer of our being, all of them saying 'Pay attention to me!' And if we do, off we wander. We do not fight the distractions but, like the noises, let them come and go. Let the mantra be the prayer of a deeper level, for it is at the deeper level that our Lord makes his home.

Jesus, have mercy. (silence)

Lord, take my heart from me, for I cannot give it to you. Keep it for yourself, for I cannot keep it for you.

And save me, in spite of myself.

To be concluded in the August issue



Is silence the matrix on which your life
is built, or is it the thing that papers
the cracks between the activities?

Contemplation

Slowly the chatter ebbs away
The breathing settles into a new rhythm
Eyelids close and shut out the world
And all is still — sinking deeper and deeper,
Moving inward, always inward
Towards the still centre.
Shut down the need to control,
To act, to create anything.
Shut down the wish to be, and grow, to become —
Let go of everything and wait,
And then let go of waiting too—
With perfect timing God will bring life from that
nothingness,
And see, the road stretches ahead towards the light.

Jenna

Using Silence

An edited version of the address by Ann Lewin
to the JM Council 2 November 2010

Talking about using silence, being still, may make us think it is yet another technique. But prayer is not about technique, though techniques can help us. Prayer is about our relationship with God. Jesus put it into that context when he answered the disciples request for help with prayer. He said, "Say 'Father'". Julian would have said 'Mother'.

Relationships grow when we pay attention - listen - to each other. In our deepest relationships we can enjoy being with the other person without saying anything. A lot of prayer, certainly public prayer, gives God chance to listen to us. We need to balance that by taking space and time to listen to God, to enjoy being in God's company as Julian said that God enjoys ours.

Our Lord is most joyful and glad because of our prayer, and he expects it and wants to have it, for with his grace it makes us like to himself in condition as we are in nature, and such is his blessed will (LT41)

For he says, pray wholeheartedly, though it seems it has no savour for you; still it is profitable enough, though you may not feel that. Pray wholeheartedly, though you may feel nothing, though you may see nothing, yes, though you may think that you could not, for in dryness and in barrenness, in sickness and in weakness, then is your prayer most pleasing to me, though you think it almost tasteless to you. (LT41)

We learn to be still and quiet so that we can enlarge our inner space, where God is; so that we learn to be aware of God. We can then carry that stillness with us, into life's busyness.

Archbishop William Temple said, 'Most people believe that behaviour matters, and prayer helps it. The truth is that prayer matters and behaviour tests it'. The story of Mary and Martha illustrates this. Martha wanted to be a good hostess when Jesus and the disciples arrived. Luke says she was distracted, a word that might resonate for us. Mary, on the

other hand, sat with the men, and listened. At last Martha's frustration burst out - 'Lord, don't you care that I've been left to do all the work? Tell Mary to come and help'. But Jesus said that Mary had chosen the good part, which wouldn't be taken away from her. Jesus was not putting Martha down — that wasn't his way. He spoke the truth, that time with him is not wasted, and its effect goes with us into all our life.

Martha had actually had a choice – she could have joined Mary and the others, and the work would have waited. Then together the work could have been done without bad feelings and resentment – both would have taken the benefit of Jesus' presence into the humdrum. Perhaps Mary already knew how the practice of the presence of God can transform life.

In the 18th century Brother Lawrence wrote 'The Practice of the Presence of God'. He was a monk, but don't assume he lived in cloistered calm. Lawrence worked in the monastery kitchen. Monasteries in his day gave hospitality to their own residents and to all travellers, so it was like MacDonaldis crossed with a Travelodge. Br. Lawrence's lameness made life difficult, but he said that 'in the noise and bustle of his kitchen, with people making demands on him from all sides, he possessed God in as great tranquility as when he was on his knees at the Blessed Sacrament'. Not like our kitchens and work-places perhaps. He said he kept recollected, and reached stillness by keeping the balance between the times of prayer when he learned stillness, and the times of work when his attention was elsewhere. When he wasn't fully engaged by his work, he turned his thoughts back to God.

How do we learn that stillness? It requires practice – a noun that actually sounds like a verb. When I was quite young my Mother used to ask 'Have you done your piano practice?', or 'Have you said your prayers?' I only realized much later that it was actually parental nudging. The questions were a way of saying 'Go and do it.' I was even older when I realized that they missed the point anyway. Piano practice, like prayer,

was not an activity to tick-box and be forgotten about until next time. The music practice was for me to become more musical. The prayer time was to encourage me to be more prayerful, to develop a life that was oriented towards God.

Our prayer time is really our practice time, where we learn to attend to God, so that we can more easily relate to God in the rest of our time. We must always practise prayer – we easily get out of practice - but never divorce it from the life we live. All the ways in which we pray express our relationship with God. The prayer of stillness, which JM encourages, is the prayer of resting in God. Learning, in stillness, to give our minds a new focus, rather than emptying them – which is not possible, and dangerous as other things soon fill the space.

We need to make space and time for being still with God – and we do make time for things that we think are important. We may practise in a quiet place with a candle and music, or when walking the dog, or gardening. Wherever we practise, we must learn to bring our minds to rest. One tried and tested method is using a rhythm prayer (a mantra) to recall our mind when it drifts off. If our mind wanders we shouldn't feel guilty, which is a big distraction. Julian encouraged people to avoid feelings of guilt, for they turn us back on ourselves

We come to God as we are, with many concerns, trivial and profound, jostling for our attention. We don't change just because we are 'at prayer'. But the more we practise, the more natural prayer will become. Don't worry if nothing much seems to happen – God's presence is God's gift to us. The gift will be given in God's time, not when we think is the right time. Our task is to be prepared.

Prayer is like watching for the
Kingfisher. All you can do is
Be where he is likely to appear, and
Wait.
Often, nothing much happens;
There is space, silence and

Expectancy.
No visible sign, only the
Knowledge that he's been there,
And may come again.
Seeing or not seeing cease to matter,
You have been prepared.
But sometimes, when you've almost
Stopped expecting it,
A flash of brightness
Gives encouragement.

This poem came to me when I looked in vain for a kingfisher that everyone else had seen and I had not. Instead I was given an insight into the giftedness of prayer, and that has been very important to me.

As well as learning to be still, we must learn to take our stillness into the rest of our life, and to use any odd moment. Two monks disagreed over whether you could pray and drink coffee at the same time, so asked their spiritual directors for advice. One director said the monk must just pray, and do nothing else. The other director saw no problem. 'What did you ask him?' said one monk. 'If it was OK to drink coffee while I was praying' said the other. 'Oh', replied the first, 'I asked if I could pray while I was drinking my coffee'.

So often we can simply connect with God in daily life:

- Keep alert and use what we see and hear – bird song, or an emergency siren, can trigger prayer. *Thank God, or Lord have mercy*, are the only prayers we need.
- Use the time in the supermarket queue, or the traffic jam, when our minds would otherwise be in neutral or worse.....
- Learn to recognize the kingfisher – they are there, but we only see them in the right light. Bird-watchers see them more often because they know their habitat and habits. We have to learn to know God more intimately, so that we recognize God in unlikely, as well as the expected, places. God's habitat is the world, not the church, and we can stay

in contact with God in every aspect of our lives.

Lord God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you. Keep us faithful in our praying, and fill us with your presence, for you are all we need. Amen

Julian now gives us the words to enter into the silence:
God of your goodness, give us yourself, for if we ask anything less we shall always be in want. Only in you we have all.

To end the silence:

*My God, I desire to love thee
With all my heart, which thou madest for thyself.
With all my mind, which only thou canst satisfy.
With all my soul, which longs to soar to thee.
With all my strength, my feeble strength,
Which shrinks before so great a task, and yet can do nought else
But spend itself in loving thee.*

*Claim thou my heart, fill thou my mind,
Uplift my soul and reinforce my strength
That where I fail, thou mayest succeed n me
And make me love thee perfectly.*

W. H. Frere

*
* *Contemplation is the* *
* *attention of the soul* *
* *to the presence of God* *
* *Melvyn Matthews* *

**Lord my God, when Your love spilled over
into creation**

You thought of me.

I am

from love of love for love.

Let my heart, O God, always

recognize

cherish

and enjoy your goodness in all of creation.

Direct all that is in me towards your praise.

Teach me reverence for every person, all things.

Energize me in your service

Lord God

may nothing ever distract me from your

love

neither health nor sickness

wealth nor poverty

honour nor dishonour

long life nor short life.

May I never seek nor choose to be other

than you intend or wish

Amen

Sandra Johnston, the JM national secretary for South Africa, sent us this report in autumn 2010, explaining that they held the AGM yearly in Cape Town with, usually, about 20-30 attenders. In the morning they do the business very quickly. They then have a presentation before going into silence for half an hour. After that they have a bring and share lunch.

Sandra has attended Julian Meetings for 16 or 17 years and the group she is with now meets twice a month.

Annual Report of the Julian Meetings of South Africa 2009-2010

Well here we are in 2010. After all the hype I find I'm quite surprised we made it! This has been a quiet year as I've settled into the routine of receiving and then printing the three magazines per year. This continues to save us a lot of money and I'm becoming quite proficient at it!

I haven't received many reports yet. Mostly groups seem to be continuing quietly along. I find that after I send a magazine I then get a thank you letter with a little news. I'm not sure whether it is really essential to insist on one. Maybe we could discuss this at the end.

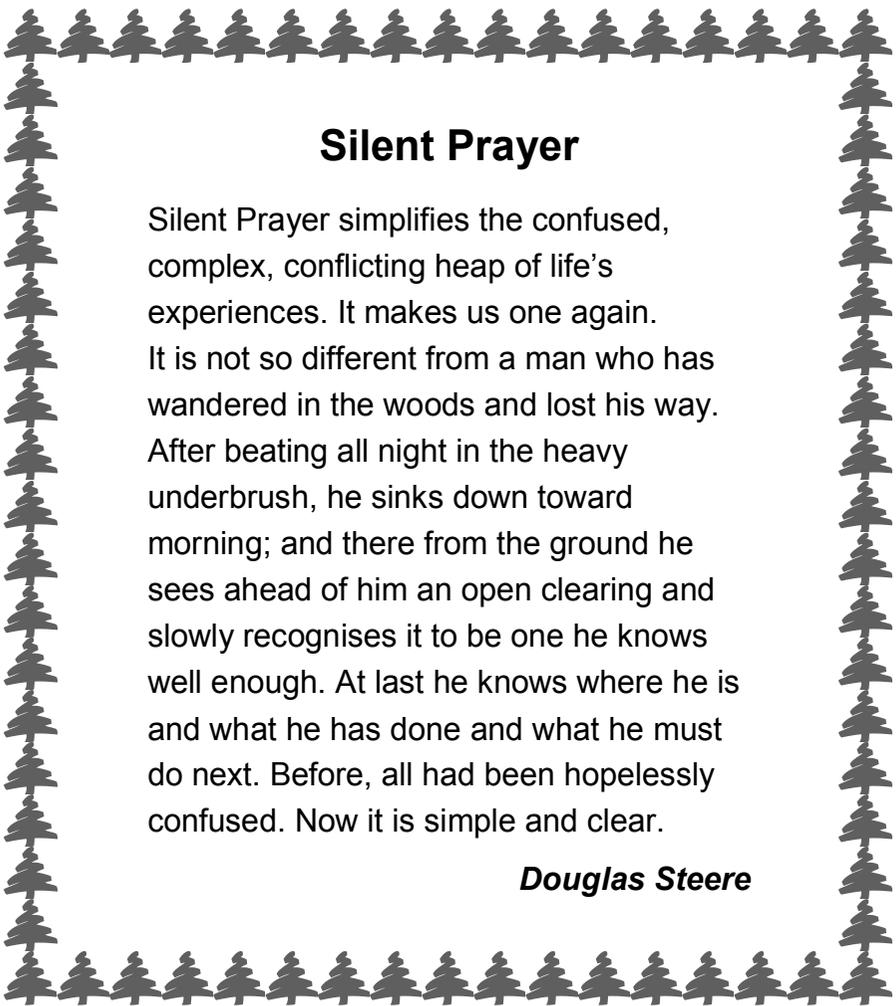
At the end of this year I am once again off to Australia and this time I will arrange in good time to meet with the Julian Meeting in Melbourne. I was unable to visit parishes in the Northern Suburbs last year but intend to try to get to at least some in this coming year to see whether there is a need for Julian groups there.

In the country at the moment we have: 6 groups, Pretoria, Johannesburg, East London and 3 in Cape Town and 32 lone members. At present I send the magazine to 10 people by e-mail and 30 people by post.

Our thanks as always to James Patrick, Pat Jenner and Joan / Irene and Kurt Werner for the lovely venue, tea, coffee and soup. Thanks also to Edward van Graan and his helpers for

organising the venue. Thank you to Kay for her help with registration, Sylvia for her help with the books and cards, My thanks to Lex for the welcome and to all of you for your support, the shared lunch and the fellowship we share.

In addition this year I have a huge vote of thanks to Pat Jenner who made all the arrangements for me as I was so ill with bronchitis and unable to do anything. Pat from the bottom of my heart thank you.



Silent Prayer

Silent Prayer simplifies the confused, complex, conflicting heap of life's experiences. It makes us one again. It is not so different from a man who has wandered in the woods and lost his way. After beating all night in the heavy underbrush, he sinks down toward morning; and there from the ground he sees ahead of him an open clearing and slowly recognises it to be one he knows well enough. At last he knows where he is and what he has done and what he must do next. Before, all had been hopelessly confused. Now it is simple and clear.

Douglas Steere

How Common an Experience?

In the TV programmes *The Silence*, shown in autumn 2010, several participants had a very real experience of God. They were brave enough to record this for the programmes despite feeling they'd be labelled 'nutters', or deluded, by their family, friends and colleagues (and viewers?).

Years of contemplation

I have taken time to be silent with God for over 20 years now, both on my own, as part of my local Julian Meeting, and on occasional retreats.

Sometimes I cannot stop my mind from wandering, however hard I try. This happens to everyone, particularly when they are tired or feeling under the weather. Often just one word, or a single phrase, really clicks with me and I focus on this for the whole of the silence. At times a picture comes to mind. It may be static, like a photo. More often it is like a film into which I am drawn to become part of it. At these times I can feel that I've really been in touch with God and his world.

Difficult to share

Very, very occasionally I've had an amazing experience of God but I find these events very difficult to share, even with fellow Christians, as I feel they will think I am a 'nutter' or deluded. Yet these occasions made a huge impression on me, which has lasted. They were God's incredible gift to me in the silence: why is it so difficult to share them? It makes me wonder if other people have similar experiences. Are they more common than we think, but we don't know about them because we are scared to share them?

An experience of God

It is not easy to write them down. On one occasion I was having great difficulty with a fellow Christian: preferring to avoid him if possible as I found it hard to talk 'normally' with him, due to my dislike of him and his behaviour. During the silence one day I realised that I seemed to be a young child – 5 / 6 years old? – sitting on the left knee of God, with God's

arm around my shoulder to support me. This felt wonderful, until I realised that on his other knee – and seemingly a similar age to me – was this Christian I was having so many difficulties with. Overwhelmed by anger and resentment, I was about to have a huge tantrum about it, when I was aware of God saying ‘I love you, and I love him, and that is how I am. Having a paddy will make no difference to how much I love you, or him, because I love you both.’ That was not something I wanted to hear, and I came out of the silence in a state of confusion and agitation. Some days later I met the man at a local event and found, much to my own surprise, that I could talk to him easily. During the conversation, I discovered aspects of his childhood that made me feel great sorrow and pity for him. God’s grace had really changed things for me.

An encounter with Jesus

On another occasion Jesus came to me. Life had been very difficult for many months, and I had coped by keeping my emotions locked away inside. Things settled down but I was unable to release all these locked in emotions, I just didn’t know how to do it. In the silence one day I sensed that I was in a room, facing a closed door, with an open window behind me. The whole room seemed to be beating with pent up energy. Then a voice spoke from the window behind me and asked ‘Why are you so afraid to open the door? I could come round to it and knock. Perhaps you might let me in.’ I was panic-stricken. I knew it had to be Jesus speaking. When I heard the knock I went to the door, it opened, and Jesus was standing there, a dark shadow against the brilliant sunshine behind him. He laughed gently and invited me out into his garden.

What are these events?

These are just two instances from a number of times when I have experienced God being with me in the silence.

I’ve no idea what to call these events. Are they visions?

JM Council Meeting, November 2010

The JM Council met in Abbey Baptist Church, Reading, on Tuesday 2 November. It was an opportunity for people working for JM in many different ways, and from all over the country, to meet face to face and share things as a group.

New council members are Helen Lems, warden of Ivy House Retreat House in Warmintser; David Griffiths, new treasurer, from Malvern; and Andy Thurlow, from near Bradford, who now deals with individual subscriptions. Sadly Andy couldn't be with us on the day, but we were joined in the afternoon by John Parkin, who helps his wife Denise with the Magazine mailings; Terry Robinson, whose wife Pat is Publications Manager; and John Stamper who runs the JM Website and helps his wife Anne with the Database.

Non-UK Meetings

During the morning Janet Robinson, who has taken over this role from Francis Ballinger, updated us on non-UK Meetings. There are now none in Europe, but one is starting in Canada.

Money matters

Pat Hughes presented her last financial statement as our treasurer. Finances are healthy. Prices always increase: VAT and postage will both rise in 2011. Postage on the magazine is now two thirds of the printing costs! As we no

Continued from page 15

I'm sure some people would say I have an overheated imagination. Some have said that what I experience is only my sub-conscious desires, but it certainly didn't feel like that with the 'sitting on God's knee' encounter.

In both these instances (and some others I've experienced) I have moved on greatly in my emotions, and I see this as God's healing grace being given to me in this particular way. But I do wonder how common it is for people to have this type of experience.

longer receive many DLT royalties, the cost of providing free Waiting on God leaflets has to come out of regular income.

JM Database

Anne Stamper reported that, with annual registration, we have a much more accurate record of Meetings. There are 335 Meetings registered, and during 2010 11 had closed but 12 had opened. There are 596 individual magazine subscribers, and we send out 37 complimentary copies.

These go to the members of the Council, to our supporters, and to a number of organizations with whom we have links. Most enquiries about JM now come electronically, and Anne had dealt with 226 so far last year.

Publicity

Anne has devised a poster which we hope to produce in both A4 and A5 sizes during 2011. Meetings advertise in various ways, and we will look into ways of helping with publicity. On the wider front, Deidre had been in touch with 27 Anglican Dioceses to alert them to our existence.

Future Events

In 2013 JM reaches its 40th anniversary. We are considering having a big daytime meeting as we did in 2003 in Oxford, but holding it in London this time. If anyone has any ideas about this - venue, format, speakers etc. - we'd be pleased to hear from you. Naturally many people couldn't attend, but some Meetings might like to organise something special locally, or use this as a focus for a regular event they hold.

The afternoon

After lunch Pat, Tina and Francis were thanked for all their work with JM and then Ann Lewin gave an address (see page 6) leading into a time of silence. This was followed by an open meeting, with a wide ranging discussion of the BBC programme The Big Silence, links on our website, interfaith activities, e-mailed magazines rather than hard copies, and ways to publicise JM. Interfaith matters were suggested as a focus for the 2011 Council Meeting, which may be held in the Midlands.

Lord
Jesus Christ
Son of GOD
Have Mercy
on me
a sinner

*The Jesus Prayer:
Lord Jesus Christ,
son of God, have
mercy on me a
sinner*

*The Julian Meetings
booklet 'Some Basics
of Contemplative
Prayer' suggests using
this short prayer as
a verbal focus to
anchor us, and to
which we can return
when we find our-*

selves distracted by thoughts or feelings.

The Jesus prayer is used by Eastern Orthodox Christians and has a long tradition dating back to the sixth century where it has links with the ascetic lives of monks and hermits. The Jesus prayer is not a mantra, it is a prayer addressed to our Lord Jesus Christ. It can be used in regular prayer time and also during any natural pauses in the day – waiting for the bus, doing the washing up, walking the dog.....

There have been numerous books written about this prayer. In his book 'The Power of the Jesus Prayer – a reflection and guide', published in 2005, Jonathan Smith writes

In our prayer, the name of Jesus dwells with us, and dedicates our lives to him. As we remember the prayer throughout the day, our ordinary actions take on a new significance, as we find Christ within them.

Recently three books on the Jesus prayer came to us for review., and we also review three older books on this subject which cast different lights on the prayer.

**THE JESUS PRAYER – the ancient desert prayer that
tunes to the heart of God**
Frederica Mathewes-Green

DLT 2010 175pp
ISBN 798-0-232-52784-1

The author is an American woman member of the Orthodox Church. This is quite an academic book, with full reference notes and suggestions for further reading. She introduces the prayer, its history and theology, and then addresses a series of questions that might be posed by someone exploring the prayer. That imagined person seems to make heavy weather of it and I feel this is not perhaps the book for the beginner.

THE JESUS PRAYER Gospel Soundings
Sister Pauline Margaret CHN

Fairacres publications SLG Press 28pp
ISBN 978-0-7283-0173-3

Sister Pauline makes the prayer and its practice much more accessible and attractive 'No-one needs feel inadequate or excluded; all may be regarded as 'amateurs' when it comes to prayer, since the amateur - the literal meaning is 'lover' - is one who practises for love.'

STILL LISTENING – considering the Jesus Prayer
Fr Bruce Batstone

Urban Quiet Publications,
23 Albert St, London NW1 7LU.
28pp £2.50

The first two chapters of this small book cover the history and use of this prayer. The second half considers how it can be practised today, and how it may help our prayer life to grow, the author often using his own experience as example.

THE WAY OF THE PILGRIM – annotated and explained
translated and annotated by Gleb Pokrovsky

DLT 2003 ISBN 0-232-52475-0

This classic in Russian spirituality is an account of a wandering pilgrim seeking to use the Jesus prayer to follow St Paul's exhortation to 'pray without ceasing.'

This annotated version explains the names, references and terms, so helping modern readers set it in the context of the orthodox church and the Russian countryside in the 1850s.

THE POWER OF THE JESUS PRAYER a reflection and guide

Jonathan Smith

Kevin Mayhew 2005

ISBN 184417 440 9

This deals first with the history of the prayer and then reflects the meaning of the words themselves. It is particularly useful for group study.

PRAYING THE JESUS PRAYER TOGETHER

Brother Ramon and Simon Barrington Ward

BRF 2001

ISBN 1 84101 147 9

I found this book most moving. It shares the experience of Brother Ramon (the hermit) and Simon Barrington Ward (the Bishop) when they spent a week using the Jesus prayer together. Both had been practising and teaching the Jesus prayer separately for many years but this shared experience added a deeper level. The more so because it was when Br. Ramon entered the final stages of cancer and died before the book was completed but having written his own contribution

In the stilled silence
mind heart and soul
wait upon God
reach out to God
not thinking
not asking
not doing
just waiting
stilled upon
God

It is worth reading some of these books, particularly if you are new to the Jesus prayer - sometimes known as 'the prayer of the heart'. In the end don't worry about how to use it in the 'right' way - just use it.

Anne Stamper

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BOOK REVIEWS - BOOK REVIEWS BOOK

'MARKED FOR LIFE'

Maria Boulding

SPCK Classics 102 pages

Reissued 2010

Paper-back ISBN 978-0-281-06396-3

'How can the track still be so rough, when crowds have worn it smooth with their feet?'

Augustine asked this question and Maria Boulding tries to answer it. Her focus is to help us see the paschal mystery, death and resurrection, as a way for us to make sense of the track we walk. She recognises the very different nature of our track in the 21st century while reminding us of others, biblical, historical and contemporary, who may help us in life and prayer.

There is a place for intercession in prayer but there is more to prayer. With themes of exodus and salvation Boulding helps us reflect on how, in life and prayer, we say 'yes' to God, as Christ said 'yes' in his life and prayer.

The 10 chapters portray us as an unfinished creation yet made in the image of God. The call is to attunement with our heavenly father. Included in this is the practice of contemplative prayer. In aloneness, stillness moving into wordless, imageless prayer. This is not a case of ignoring the realities of our life; it's mystery of weakness, darkness, and chaos. These do bring unknowing and bafflement.

Several non-biblical parables and poems illustrate how we might find meaning in our predicament. Aids in the process are biblical characters, and people of faith over the last 20 centuries, as well as people around us now who understand the move from words to wordless prayer.

Boulding's appeal is to give more time to prayer, including

contemplative prayer. In contemporary terms letting go of unreality, the pseudo self, illusions, and cravings. The track at times might still be rough but a life including prayer can immerse us in God's love and joy.

Raymond Fox

JULIAN OF NORWICH: a contemplative biography

Amy Frykholm

Paraclete Press, 2010 hardback \$19.99, £14.50

ISBN 978-1-55725-626-3

In recent years a number of books on Julian of Norwich have attempted to reconstruct her life and understand her teaching in a historical context. This book is outstanding in the genre: easy to read, but also sufficiently deep and spiritually challenging.

Amy Frykholm has tried to enter empathetically into the reality of Julian as a person, giving the reader a real insight into the fourteenth century and the anchoritic vocation, as well as daily life in Norwich in a time of plague, suffering and social upheaval.

The book is indeed a 'contemplative' biography which repays prayerful reading and study, for we see Julian's thoughts unfold as she penetrates her 'Revelation of Love' ever more deeply. This effect is achieved through chapters giving different 'windows' into Julian's thought and life, beginning with the first window of her three desires and ending with the eleventh window of her death. Through it all Julian's voice resounds as unique, personal and intimate.

This book may be a work of fiction but it is not peopled by a complex crowd. The text runs smoothly, carrying the reader along into Julian's life and teaching as in a seamless whole. Amy Frykholm's understanding of Julian continuing to live a lay life in the world before entering her anchorhold, being supported in the meantime by a community of women following a 'mixed life' of prayer and household tasks,

resonates with my own latest thinking on the subject. I see Julian as a possible forerunner of the beguine movement in England. This reached Norwich from the Low Countries in a more formal way shortly after Julian's death, and offered women a dedicated life of service and devotion outside the confines of the convent.

That Julian herself was a laywoman shines out in the text and is a source of encouragement for people seeking holiness today in all states of life. If you pray with this book, as well as read it, you will be immeasurably enriched and encouraged in your own spiritual journey.

Elizabeth Ruth Obbard

WOVEN INTO PRAYER

Angela Ashwin

Canterbury Press new ed 2010 £9.99

ISBN 978-1-84825-052-9

This book was created to offer a set form of daily prayer through the Christian year that is as flexible as possible for use in ways that suit individual circumstances and needs: to avoid the discouragement that can occur if we fail to 'keep up' because of life's pressures and difficulties. I used it for my morning quiet time during Advent, Christmas and Epiphany and found it a gentle, though at times challenging, start to the day.

The daily material has:

- A thread for the day: a verse or short scripture passage
- A short order of daily prayer: a simple piece of liturgy.
- A quiet space: suggestions for imaginative, reflective and contemplative prayer (15-30 minutes).
- A night time blessing to close the day.

If you would welcome some structure and pattern within a contemplative commitment then try this.

Angela Ashwin is well known to JM for leading of retreats and quiet days and for her books on contemplative prayer.

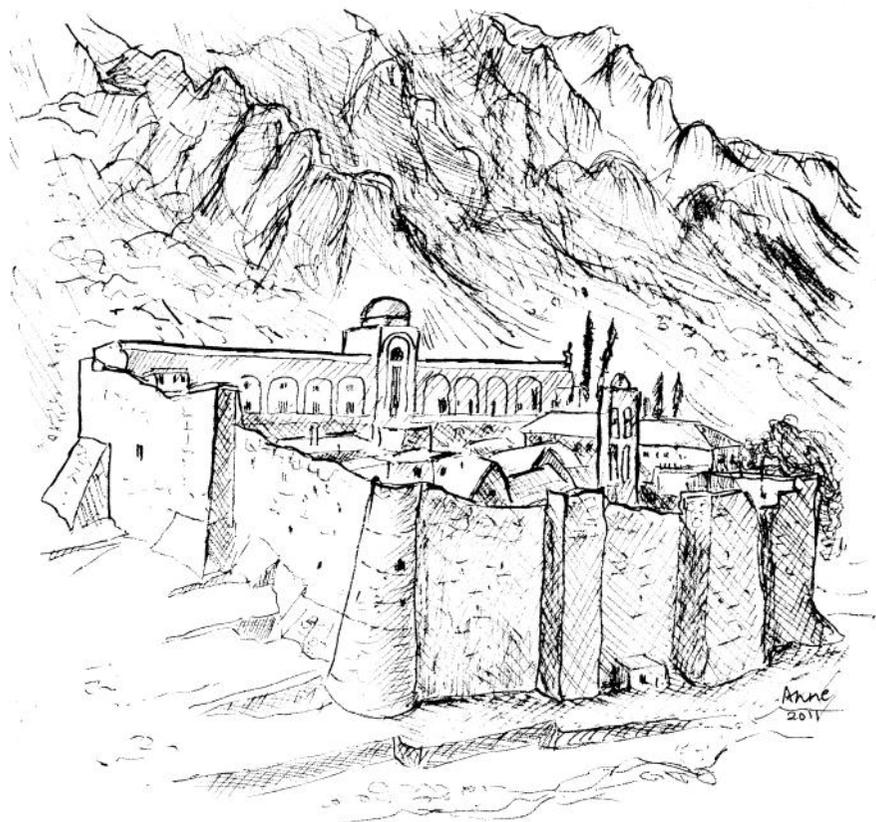
Gail Ballinger

REAL PRESENCE – in search of the earliest icons
Sister Wendy Beckett

Continuum 2010, 144 pages, £12-99
ISBN 978-1-4411-5887-1

Sister Wendy became familiar to many of us through her TV programmes shown a few years ago. More recently her books have brought her remarkable insight to us in a more lasting way. When travelling to remote monasteries and churches to view the earliest icons of Mary for her previous book she decided that she had to continue and broaden her search and look for the early icons of Jesus and the saints.

The result is this beautifully produced little hardback book. Her travels took her back to St Catherine's Monastery at



Mount Sinai (see sketch, left) the oldest continuously inhabited monastery in the Christian world. It is so remote that its 6th century icons (they have over 3,000) survived because the violence of iconoclasm did not reach them. The book contains excellent reproductions of many of these icons. Sister Wendy sees them as much more than art, she is more interested in what they reveal to us spiritually than their aesthetic importance for historians.

Icons appeal to the spirit, they are there for prayer. Sister Wendy writes that an icon is “a unique, personal, offer of an encounter with God. Only you can respond to this. It is my profound hope that, looking at these icons from the early ages of Christianity, all who take up this book will feel encouraged to spend time in silence, looking and receiving the blessing of a mysterious but Real Presence”
This is a book to take slowly and revisit

Anne Stamper

LECTIO DIVINA MATTERS: Before the Burning Bush
Mary Margaret Funk OSB

Published Continuum
ISBN 978-1441-15169-8

The Lectio Divina way of reading scripture derives from the Benedictine tradition. The author, an American Benedictine nun, describes *lectio* from her personal experience with the Book of Jonah. She shows how the ideas, “*praxis*” (her word) and practice of *lectio divina* can be expanded to completely inform a spiritual life. The book continually reminded me that the life of the cloister underlies her descriptions. I’d hoped for an attempt to relate the ideas and “teachings” to lay people’s life and experience, but found no hints in this dense read. A pity, as Sister Margaret seems a deeply religious, spiritual person. It is sad that her description feels like an ascent of Mount Everest to someone challenged by a spiritual Ben Nevis or Snowdon. Others may find their experience different.

John Stamper

LEADERS LEARNING TO LISTEN

Chris Edmondson

DLT 2010 £12.99

ISBN 978 0 232 52736 0

There are good books for Christians on listening skills and Chris Edmondson draws on them here, but really this book is a plea for a different kind of leadership, with the church doing less 'proclaiming' and more listening and discerning. He maintains that leading from the edge, which is where the church is in the 21st century, requires a different approach.

This is about leading from a different place: one of listening with attention, absorbing and acting on what is heard.

Leading by being led. He explores the place of silence and stillness, listening to those who differ from us, including those of other faiths. He explores obstacles on the way, especially busyness and tiredness. Concerns to develop new strategies for changing times can result in what feels like anxiety-driven activity. 'Leaders need to be aware that doing God's work can destroy the work of God in us' (Bill Hybels).

Creating a listening church starts with the leader's threefold listening - to God, the world and the church. The chapter *Creating a Listening Church* makes practical suggestions. 'A serious commitment to listening could enable one of the most important tasks for the leader at times of transition, namely to discern what should be taken into the future and what ought to be left behind.'

Chris Edmondson suggests that high quality listening is in short supply in the world in general and also in the Church, including among its leaders. Listening in silence and stillness is good leadership.

Chris Edmondson is the suffragan Bishop of Bolton in the Anglican Diocese of Manchester; he has lived and worked in Bradford.

Gail Ballinger