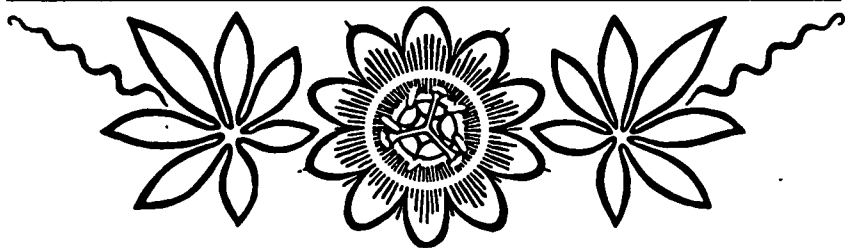


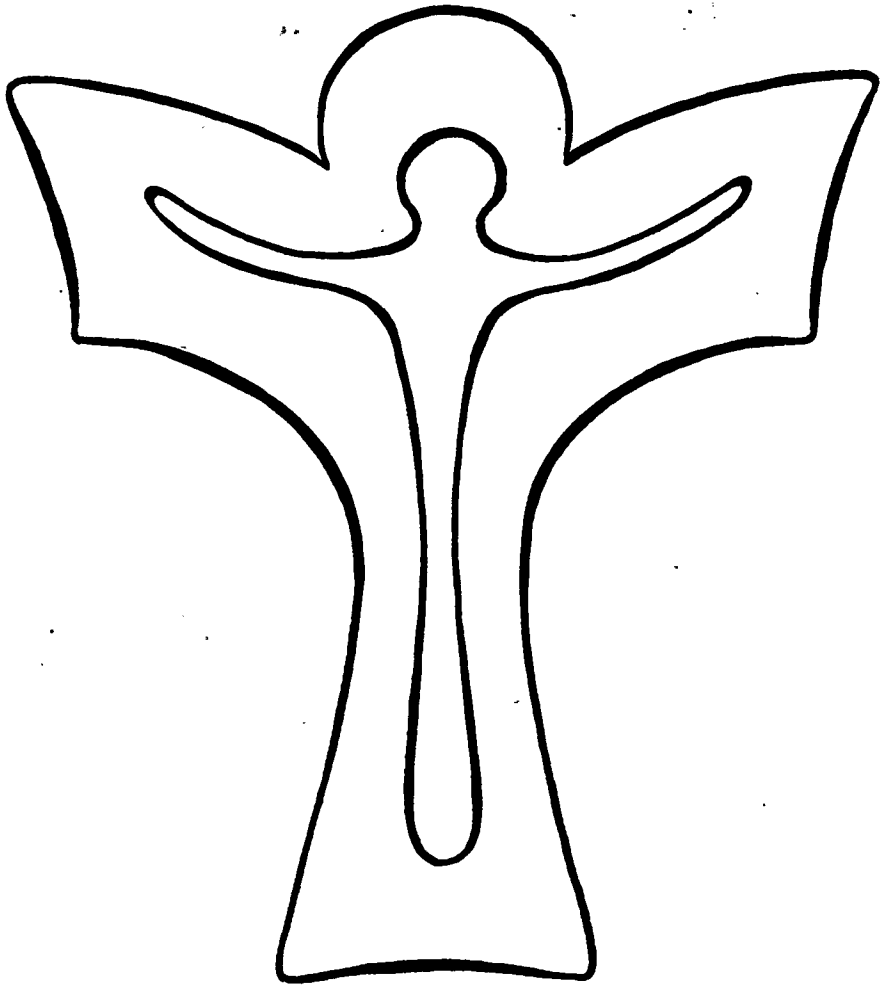


THE
JULIAN
MEETINGS
Magazine



December 2002

£1.50



Yvonne Walker brought this beautiful wooden cross to the retreat at Woodbrooke. The inside is hollow. Thanks to Fiona Wallace for the drawing.

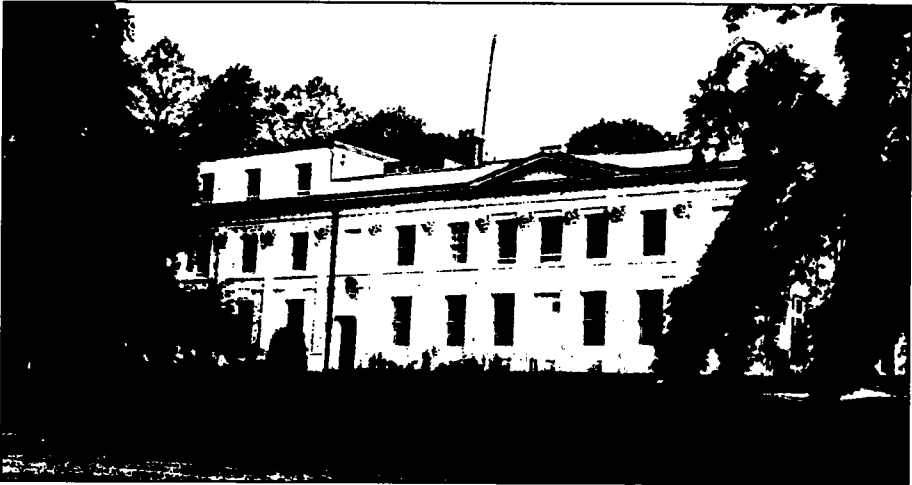
The JM Annual Retreat 2002

Gail Ballinger

57 of us gathered at Woodbrooke, the Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham for this year's Julian Meetings Retreat. Most of us were tired; for some the journey had been quite stressful, so it was good to be on the receiving end of a warm welcome and the easy companionship of our first meal together. Conversation over the meal enabled us to start to get to know each other before entering into silence at the end of the evening. For me it was a particular joy to be there with friends from the Julian Meeting I belonged to before moving to our present home. It was a few years since I had seen them last.

John's theme was Thin Places: places of breaking down – into clarity or into mist. "And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child..." – a Thin Place. These are places – a moor, a quiet street – where we have experienced special insight, special awareness of God's presence. Throughout the weekend John inspired us to "remember the quarry from which you were hewn" (Isaiah 51:1-2) and to begin to see the Thin Places of our own lives, past and present and how "your home region explains you to yourself." We looked at a series of Bible passages, at Jesus' home region of Galilee and how he moved out from Galilee – prosperous trade centre – to the Borderlands (the land of the Gerasenes), moving to the edge of the Roman Empire, from the settled to the unsettled. We travelled the borderlands "where most human and spiritual growth takes place" and laid our own experience alongside that of Jesus, considering not only our home region but also the journeys that have taken us away from home. In our Thin Places we experienced in common with Jesus honest questioning, loneliness among companions, struggle and hope, lament, trust, grief; asking God to do things differently *and receiving no reply*. Or was there a reply? Gethsemane and crucifixion were followed by resurrection. So too in our own lives we enjoy the leaping off points: resurrection moments when faith seems more energising.

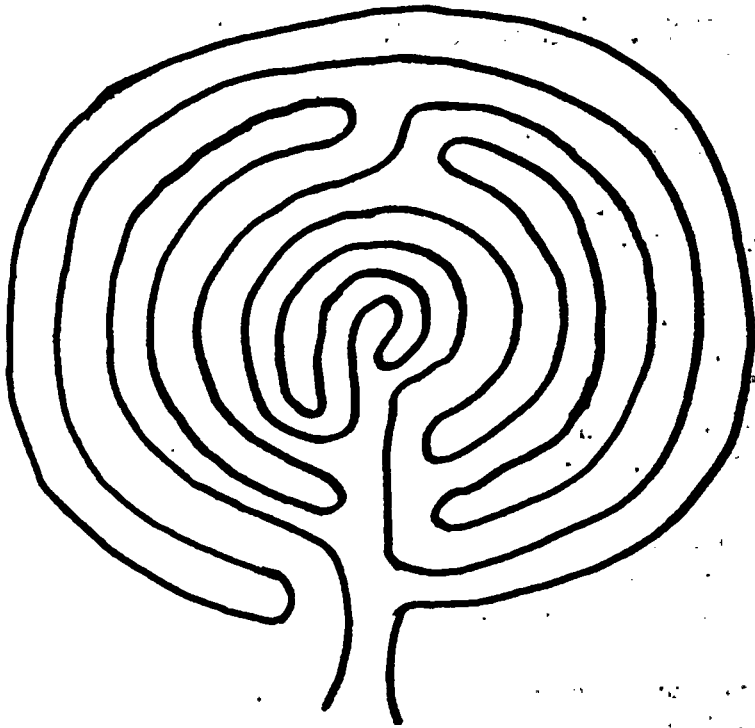
Mid-day Saturday saw us sharing in a time of profoundly simple intercession, in solidarity with Julian Meetings throughout the UK, followed by a free afternoon to follow our own inclinations, wandering outside, resting, making use of a range of art materials to add another dimension to our experience of the weekend. Our final worship was one of great closeness to each other and to God. And finally we spoke – and began to share what we had gained – though we would continue to ponder that for some time to come.



*The house at
Woodbrooke
seen across
the grounds*



*Retreat and
relaxation*



Apart from John Rackley's wonderful input, the highlight of the retreat for me was the beautiful and varied grounds at Woodbrooke, and particularly what I found in the lawn by the lake. In the grass the gardener, Barney, had mown out a labyrinth (pictured above). It was not very easy to see – I missed it the first time I walked on the lawn – and it required attention to follow it. Having walked the Chartres labyrinth at Gloucester Cathedral both last summer and this, it was a joy to walk a very different design of labyrinth and to do so out in the sun and the wind. Barney had designed it as a tree of life with a single path, which leads through the centre but is only walked once. (The Chartres labyrinth takes one into the centre and back out via the same route.) This meant that I could walk it both ways, starting first from one end or beginning point and then from the other. This was certainly a "thin place" for me on the weekend, and I was delighted to experience the walk a number of times.

—Deidre Morris

Prayers at the Retreat

The Prayer of Six Directions

We turn to the East and face the rising sun
Praise God for the gift of new life
 of new days
 of youth
 of beginnings

We turn to the South
Thank God for those people
 events
 and things
which warm our lives and
help us grow and develop

We turn to the West where the sun sets and sinks
Praise God for our sunsets
 nights
 and endings in our lives

And we face North and remember
 the challenges and difficulties
 in our lives and of our life

We bend down to touch the earth
Praise the Creator for all that
 nourishes and develops
 our life.

Finally,

We look up into the sky
...limitless space is there before us.
Thank God for our hopes and dreams.

And now,
Let God come to you, in all his
 compassion
 mercy
 strength.

GOD AS HE IS, IN JESUS.

John Rackley used this to close the first session on the Friday evening. We said the prayer in the main room at Woodbrooke, although it is really an outdoors prayer with actions. After the retreat John added this disclaimer:

"There are different versions of this way of prayer and I am not sure where I first obtained mine. I believe it originated among the North American indigenous people under the influence of Roman Catholicism. I have adapted mine a little to incorporate the final stirring words which are those of the former bishop of Durham, David Jenkins."

Symbol prayer

Heavenly Father, Creator and Lord, you have told us to "Be still and know that I am God", help us as we seek to know you.

Beautiful Saviour, Lord Jesus Christ, who laid down your life for love of us, help us to love you and all our fellow men.

Spirit of Wisdom, eternal flame of love, guide us as we strive to show forth God's amazing love in this sinful world. Amen.

Sent in by the Middlesbrough Guild of Contemplation, Ormesby

I thought you might like to read a comment from a letter I received after the retreat from one of my family: "Hope your retreat was restful and rejuvenating (or should I say rejuvianating?)" – spiritual 3Rs you might say – I could add "rejuvilitating", to coin yet another word!

—Patricia Churchill

Beyond

Paul Leigh

Beyond the hustle of the day,
beyond the marching of the hours
through bone and blood.

Beyond the frantic wishfulness
of all our dreams,
we may pause,

and step into a well of solitude,
a solitude of self
that stands unclothed and raw.

No goal in sight,
no mask to wear,
empty of desire.

Yet in this place we may hear
that deepest heart
beating in our own life's blood
its clear insistent rhythm
of eternity.



FEDERICO BAROCCI
The Birth (1597)

How do we "belong"?

Gail Ballinger and Deidre Morris

There have always been subscribers to the Julian Meetings magazine who do not belong to a Julian Meeting, but their numbers are higher than we expected (see James Toon's article on JM registration in the August issue). Some of these subscribe just because of their own personal interest in the subject matter, others because they are a spiritual guide or lead retreats or courses, and the magazine may become a resource for participants in these activities.

"Lone members"

There seems to be a substantial minority of subscribers who would like to belong to a Julian Meeting but for various reasons cannot. These people might be called "lone members."

Some lone members cannot join a Julian Meeting because of their life commitments: a job with a lot of travelling or unsocial hours; the needs of sick or disabled relatives; their own poor health, disability or frailty. This last group will include people who were once regular attenders, but whose changed circumstances now make it impossible.

Some people have so many other commitments that they cannot be regular in their attendance at a meeting. So they stop going rather than be – or seem to be – unreliable or half-hearted.

There are also some people out there who would welcome links with, and support from, a Julian Meeting in their vicinity, even if they cannot be present physically.

Clusters

The new UK database also revealed areas where there is a cluster of magazine subscribers but no registered Julian Meeting. These subscribers may be unaware of each other's existence. One or two may originally have wanted to start or join a Julian Meeting, but it didn't happen. Since then more people have taken out subscriptions, or other subscribers have moved into the area, some bringing their feeling of loss at leaving a Julian

Meeting and its regular support behind. We regularly get letters saying "Can you give me details of a Julian Meeting in or near [place] – I am moving there in three weeks' time." Sometimes they are lucky, sometimes not.

There are questions here for all of us.

For individuals – "Is there a way I could meet up with others?"

And for each Julian Meeting – "Is there a way we can support those who would like to join us and can't at the moment, for whatever reason?"

Individuals

Where the timing of meetings is the problem for individuals, they might contact the local Julian Meeting, explain that they can't make that time, and offer to host an additional meeting on a different day or at a different time. This increases the options for everyone in the area, with extra meetings on offer. There might be more or less the same people at every meeting, but with one or two significant additions.

Sometimes people need a lift. Perhaps their Julian Meeting has people who would happily offer a lift if they knew it was needed. Try asking. If there is no-one who can offer transport, are there any others in your position? Could you share a taxi, and its cost, to get to meetings?

If health, disability or family commitments is the problem, might those who can't get out to a Julian Meeting offer to host the local meeting from time to time? Obviously this will depend on the exact nature of the problem, but there are a few people who already do this. If there was a specific problem at your meeting's usual venue, did you raise this so that other options could be considered?

If you really cannot get to a meeting, could you pair off with another loner and agree to share fixed times for contemplative prayer? Perhaps you could use the same lead-in, and maintain some telephone contact in between times. You might even manage to meet two or three times a year. There is a meeting in the Scottish Borders which is actually a couple who commit themselves to a regular time of prayer and publicise it in the area. Their weekly times of contemplation are a covenant. While it is rare for anyone else to join them, the opportunity is there for local people, visitors or someone moving into the area. At the same time they belong to a Julian Meeting in Cumbria that meets once a month. This might be particularly

useful for any area where there are few subscribers, or where distances are great, as in some of the non-UK countries with Julian Meetings.

If you are a lone contemplative, would you welcome being put in touch with any others in your area? Either for mutual support or to start a new Julian Meeting in your area if that seems appropriate. This could be possible in the UK, but only if you tell us you would like to do it, and you give us your written permission to pass on your address or phone number to other subscribers in the area – now, or if they subscribe in the future. In other countries you would need to contact your national co-ordinator to see if this would be possible.

Meetings

How accessible is your meeting for all kinds of people? Are there any steps or stairs that can be difficult for some people to manage? How easy is it for anyone who is hard of hearing to be or to feel included? Are the seats suitable – not too hard, too soft, too deep or too low? Is the room warm enough for, possibly, older people sitting very still? When people leave, perhaps in the dark, is it easy for them to see where they are going? Does anyone need a lift to or from the meeting? If you have lost members in the last year or so, has anyone asked if this arose from any of these practical matters, which they may have been reluctant to raise?

Are there things that might help? Depending on its size, could your meeting sometimes be in the home of someone who is housebound? An occasional meeting, or an extra meeting, at a different time of day, or on a different day, might enable other people to join you – perhaps a carer, or a shift worker. If they got involved they might then maintain the extra meeting themselves, and everyone has a wider choice. People can only come to a differently-timed meeting if you tell them about it, so it is a good idea to keep a record of everyone who asks about your meeting, even if they do not become members.

Could your meeting stay in touch with those who can no longer attend, or support those on the fringes? We know of some meetings in the UK who provide a copy of the lead-in and lead-out to those who are unable to attend the meeting. This both provides non-attenders with a connection to the meeting and is also a resource for their own times of contemplation, which they may be able to make at the same time as the meeting takes place.

Postal Group

In the UK, one meeting extended its mailing to become a small "postal group", with monthly meditation material being sent to people across the country who could not attend a meeting. Since the co-ordinator gave up the role last year, the Advisory Group has continued to provide it to about 40 people. No decision has been made about its future. There are administrative and practical implications if a large number of lone members wish to join it, yet is also valued by many who receive the monthly material. Much will depend on whether suitable people come forward to do the various tasks, including this one, that fall to the Advisory Group.

Tell us what you think, or what your meeting does.

The Advisory Group would welcome input from individuals or Julian Meetings on any of these points. Please send any contribution to the Magazine Editor. We will be interested in what you have to say and will report back on any responses.



GERHARD RICHTER
Lesende (Reader) (1994)

Renewal

Nicky Lord

Sometimes when the road is bare,
Endless, featureless, without direction,
When it winds uphill over
Jagged rocks and sharp crevices,
And the weight on my back
Makes my legs sag and my feet burn.
Then I know I must stop awhile.
Put down the baggage,
Lie down just where I am,
Close my eyes and for a while sense
Nothing.

Then out of the nothing
Comes a gentle light,
A breeze of peace
And crystal rain,
Which fills the empty places.
And out of the rocks and crevices
Tiny seedlings emerge,
Quivering in the breeze.
Letting the rain roll down their leaves.

Growing around me and over me,
Providing shelter.
Scented flowers blossom and
Produce sweet fruit,
I eat my fill.
And strengthened,
Leave my baggage swathed in flowers.
Continue on my way.
Still uphill. But I walk renewed.

Eternity

Kerry Hiscock

What is eternity? No-one really knows. It has no beginning and no end. It is God's gift to us.

I think the nearest we can get to understanding eternity is our experience of "now." Yesterday had limits – it ended at midnight. Tomorrow also has limits – it won't start until midnight and then it will instantly become today. Even "today" has its limits. It is different in Japan from New York. But "now" has no limits. "Now" is the same all over the world. Wherever you are, it will always be "now."

Offer your "now" back to God. He wants to share it with you. It was He who made it, and it was He who made you so that you can enjoy spending "now" with him.

You don't have to talk. You don't even have to listen. He just wants you to invite Him into your "now" – to spend time together – like old friends sitting and watching the sunset without saying a word.

This was used as a lead-in at a recent meeting of the Julian Meeting in Harrow, Middlesex.

Let nothing disturb you,
nothing frighten you.
All things are passing,
God never changes.
Patient endurance
attains all things.
Whoever possesses God
lacks nothing.
God alone suffices.

—*Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)*

The Julian Meetings on the Internet

James Toon

People associated with the Julian Meetings will know that we exist to promote the teaching and practice of Christian contemplative prayer, through a network of local groups supported by an Advisory Group, with a magazine and newsletter.

Rather fewer may know that the Julian Meetings has a presence on the internet. We are still coming to terms with this technological fact of life, but it already offers us new ways of supporting and encouraging each other.

The Julian Meetings website

We have had a website for some time – the address, which has recently changed, is www.julianmeetings.org. The website has been overhauled and expanded over the past few months and we are very grateful to Don Quilty for his work on this. Here are some of the things on it:

Introduction – what the Julian Meetings are, how we started, how to join, where to find more information. This is basically the text of the blue leaflet “Waiting on God in the Silence.”

Basics of Prayer – some extracts from the booklet “Some Basics of Contemplative Prayer”, explaining what it is and how to get started.

JM Magazine – an order form for subscriptions to the magazine. It is not yet possible to complete the form and subscribe online, but this may come in the future.

JM Publications – an order form for all our publications including the recent anthology “Circles of Stillness.” Again, this cannot yet be completed online.

List of Meetings – all the places in Great Britain where there is a Julian Meeting, listed alphabetically by region.

Useful Links – a small, select list of other websites for those interested in Christian prayer, including The Julian Centre, the Living Spirituality Network, the Quiet Garden Trust, Daily Prayer Online, The Mercy Site, and the Retreat Association.

Index of Magazine Articles – showing the author, title and publication date for most of the articles, poems and meditations to appear in the magazine over the past couple of years. A few of these are available online and more may be placed on the website in future, but the real purpose is just to give an indication of the kind of material contained in the magazine.

The website is updated from time to time (so this article may even be out of date by the time the magazine reaches you). We hope to add more to it and make it even easier to use as time goes on. In the meantime, if you have any views on what the website contains or suggestions for what else we could do with it, please let us know.

An online Julian Meeting

Liz Gentleman, who now lives in Italy, has started the world's first online Julian Meeting. The basic structure is familiar: a focus point, then a period of silent reflection followed by group discussion. The difference is that the meeting is electronic, so that anyone who wants to join needs to have internet access, and communication is online rather than face-to-face. Members communicate by posting messages on a forum – a kind of communal message-board which all members can view and which publishes messages as soon as they are sent. The electronic meetings are intended to be once monthly at an agreed time between members. To avoid unnecessary expense, members can log off for the silence then back on again afterwards.

Liz is the moderator of this Julian Meeting and can be contacted by e-mail at gentlee@inwind.it. Alternatively, anyone who wants to join can register direct by going to the Yahoo group “amidthenoise” – the full address is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/amidthenoise>.

At the time of writing (October 2002) it was not clear whether the group had yet started or how many members it had. It may, however, be just right for some of those who have internet access and cannot be physically present at a local Julian Meeting for whatever reason.

One obvious practical issue is how the group would work across different time zones. It will probably not be possible to find a time that suits everyone (this can be a problem even for groups in the same geographical area), but other groups could be started in other parts of the world. It will be interesting to see how this develops.

Contemplation – the simple prayer

Hilary Burn

Why do we make it seem so complicated? The desire to worship God and pray in silence should be the simplest way to pray. So many people find the worship in services full of sounds and full of words and in no part can they find silence in which to be with God – just to be. The need for God is in us all. It may not be acknowledged, but it is there. God is always reaching out to us and it must seem almost impossible for Him to reach us through the well-intentioned but noisy worship we offer. We all need silence. A time just to sit and be with God.

Yes – I know that in the silence our minds can fill with thoughts we would rather banish. We can learn to cope with these distractions in our own way. Sometimes it is necessary to weave them into a prayer and offer them to God. Seeking God in this way can be enriching and often solves the small problems which fill the surface of our minds. But then we return to God. Some people find a mantra helpful – the Jesus Prayer – a verse of a favourite hymn. There is no right or wrong way, it is a personal approach to God who is always ready to hear us. It doesn't have to be complicated. We don't have to be learned theologians to attempt this prayer. All we need is time, a quiet place and the desire to pray.

There are many ways we can devise to help us in our silent prayer. One great blessing is a group of other Christians sitting in silence with us supporting each other in prayer. A Julian Meeting. We who know the great joy of praying together in silence can invite others to join us, we can spread the word and be a great encouragement to those who are seeking God. Tell them how much we gain from this time of silence together. But don't make it sound complicated – it is the simple prayer of a loving heart.

Contemplation is to open our whole personality to God so that he can take possession of our emotions, our thinking and our will.

—*Stephen Verney*

JM – South Africa

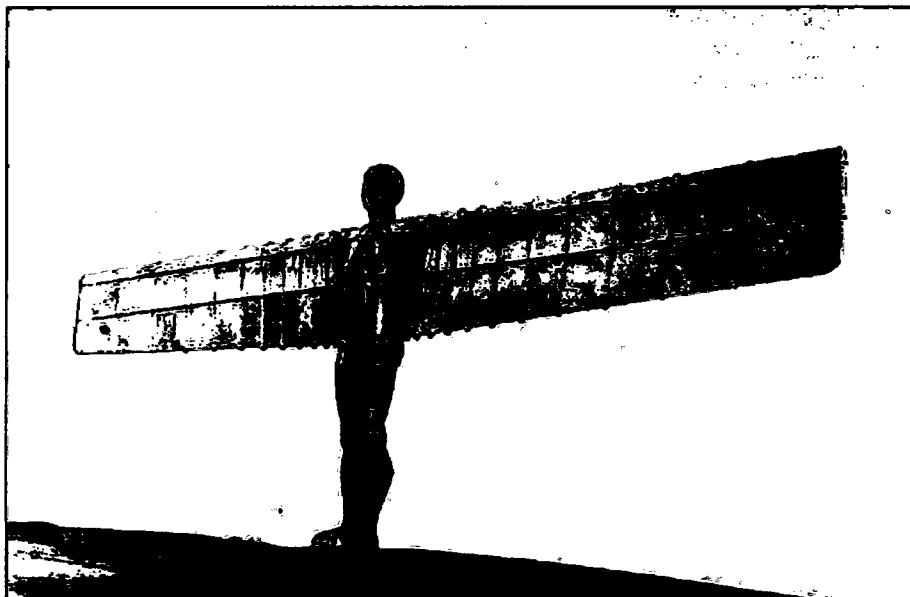
Kay Hudson

We have nothing planned for a Julian General Meeting this year, but there will be one in May 2003.

We have four Julian Meetings in Cape Town, with a total of 30 members, and one Julian Meeting in Somerset West with 7 members and 10 lone members. There are also 13 Julian Meetings in the provinces and 9 lone members.

We had a very good Annual Fellowship in May, but unfortunately the weather was bad so we only had 14 members attend. The venue was the Presbyterian Church in Cape Town, where James Patrick, our convenor, is the minister.

The Angel of the North, by Anthony Gormley, near Gateshead in north-east England. At 20m high and 54m wide, it is the largest sculpture in Britain.



Leading on from JM Registration

Wanda Nash

I very much enjoyed James Toon's report on the Julian Meetings registration project in the last issue of the magazine: it was evidently worthwhile and made extremely interesting reading. Arising from this valuable material, may I offer some further comments and questions?

Something in the article startled me: it was the fact that my home town of Winchester was not listed as being a place where a Julian Meeting is registered. This is perfectly correct information. Nonetheless in our city there are about seven groups meeting regularly for Still Prayer. They go by different names, such as "Shared Silence", "Cathedral Stillness", "Meeting for Still Prayer", "Breathing Space", and "Alternative Ways of Worship." This realisation led me to think of similar groups I know that are held in prisons, in schools – sometimes as an extension of "Circle Time" – in town centre drop-in spaces for quiet prayer, and in residential homes for older people. If the practice of stillness in Christian Yoga is included, we could add leisure centres and adult education units. There are also GP surgeries where stress-relief, offered by Christian practitioners, includes Still Prayer.

This list is made not at all to suggest there is a shortfall in registration or commitment to Julian Meetings, but to make another point entirely.

People ask: "What's this all for, wasting time being still?" What is the basic appeal, or need, or desire? For myself, and of course I can only answer with authenticity for myself, it is about waiting on God so God can imprint on us His/Her purposes, rather than be perpetually bombarded with our demands, expectations and projections. It is about making time that is freed, as far as possible, from planting our own human constructs on the holy Other, when the GOD-NESS of God can somehow come through, however much of Unknown-ness (what Julian calls "God's privities") there may be about the divine being. Where my small "i am" can rest in the shelter of the "I AM what I AM" of our great Creator. Where, although I am aware of Jesus' injunction to "ask, and it will be given you", I am even more conscious of his "abide in me, as I abide in you": or, as one modern version puts it "make your home in me as I make my home in you" ... When

I have a guest in my home, I don't spend the time plying him with requests which I expect to be fulfilled; instead I just relax in his company and listen to whatever it is that he wants to say.

This activity "of wasting time with God" (a description used by Michael Hollings) is of its nature low-key, receptive rather than self-promoting, and is very softly voiced. Maybe there is no way of measuring how much it is alive in our current society. When it is counted together with the activity of Christian Meditation groups, of Quaker meetings, of the Fellowship of Meditation, the Servants of Christ the King, the contemplative prayer that continues in religious houses, the number of people choosing to go on retreat of all denominations – it constitutes a remarkable number. Add to this all those attending Julian Meetings, and we are led to something more. If this witness, even though it is largely un-voiced, combines with the known numbers of regular church attenders, it makes credible the comment of a recent observer: that the allegiance to God in our society is far larger than the number of those committed to football. Could it be that while Sunday church-going is weakening, simple God-listening and church-being is strengthening (even on a week-day)? A wonderful antidote to those who declare that God has no influence in our world today.

Finally, may I add a description of Stillness that I heard recently?:

"It's as if the Spirit is dowsing for that trickle of living water that He has put deep within each of us;

The same trickle that, with His help, can grow into a bubbling stream, continuously bubbling up from the belly.

That stream that makes our parched souls green again, so they become in us the place where God longs to be;

The place that God longs for is the same place as we yearn to reach, the only place where our deepest desire can rest;

The deep green place where the God-made-me can meet and fuse with the God-who-made-me.

Glory be to God."

He alone is God who cannot be sought in vain – even when he cannot be found.

—Bernard of Clairvaux (1091–1153)

Here

Bruce James

here are my arms
holding the world

here are my lips
conversing with stars

here are my eyes
illuminating the moon

here are my ears
hearing the earth
turn around my soul

here is the eternity
I have always known



JULIA MARGARET CAMERON
Prayer and Praise (1865)

Contentment

I do not know when I have had happier times in my soul, than when I have been sitting at work, with nothing before me but a lit candle and a white cloth, and hearing no sound but that of my own breath, with God in my soul and heaven in my eye ... I rejoice in being exactly what I am – a creature capable of loving God, and who as long as God lives, must be happy. I get up and look for a while out of the window, and gaze at the moon and stars, the work of an Almighty hand. I think of the grandeur of the universe, and then sit down and think myself one of the happiest beings in it.

A poor Methodist woman, 18th century. From "Daily Strength for Daily Needs", an anthology whose 10th edition was published in 1904.

On visiting walled gardens near Hay-on-Wye

Ann Shillaker

Warm walls, rich-red
suffused in soft sunshine.

Quiet corners secreted
behind high hedges, open on to
diamond glints off tranquil waters.
Delicate pink cups float by lily pads.

Apple trees of ancient stock;
canopies of horizontal limbs
reaching back into time
guarding fruit for tomorrow.

Walls footed by foliage, flowing
colours splashed and spreading.

A sheltered seat. Time
to soak up the riches.
Time to come alive
to honeyed scents,
cascading notes of robin's song,
rainbows glistening from gossamer.

Time to be.

A Julian Meeting in Ireland

Padraic Golden

About three years ago a few cross-denominational acquaintances in Monkstown, Co.Dublin, principally Ronnie, Ken, Father Jim and myself, discussed the possibility of forming an ecumenical prayer group that would be open to allcomers. After further thought and prayer, a group was eventually formed. The initial meetings were held in the local Church of Ireland Hall but were later transferred to a quieter and more readily-available venue in St Patrick's Parish Centre close by. They have continued there at 8.00pm on the last Wednesday of each month. The numbers attending have ranged from 10 to 16 – about half being Roman Catholics, the remainder being Church of Ireland members (Anglican) or Quakers. There have been no Methodist or Presbyterian representatives so far.

At the same time as this initiative was taking shape, Father Jim, who had recently visited the Julian Centre in Norwich, brought along literature on the Julian Meetings. We were interested to see that the core period of such meetings was a half hour spent by participants in prayerful silence. We had already come to an agreement ourselves that silence should indeed be at the centre of our prayer time together, "silence being the preferred language of God" as someone perceptively put it. Also, there are no denominational differences in silence!

The Julian Meetings literature gave us a valuable insight into how to structure and run prayer sessions. Soon after this, and coincidentally, the worldwide convenor of the Julian Meetings, Hilary Wakeman, who had recently moved to Co.Cork, set about organising Julian Meetings in Ireland. Having heard about our efforts through Father Jim, she invited us to affiliate to the circle of Julian Meetings in Ireland in the course of formation. We readily agreed to this suggestion and so became one of the five Julian Meetings in Ireland.

There is now a JM-Ireland annual newsletter distributed from Cork. This gives information on the Irish meetings. It also explains Julian Meetings generally and lists JM publications. The 2002 Newsletter helpfully explains that "The Julian Meetings are groups of people who meet

regularly in order to grow into the practice of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition” and also “No specific method of meditation is taught. Instead, people are encouraged to find what is right for them; to discover how they can integrate contemplation into their daily prayer life and how personal and group prayer can enrich each other.”

These quotations may help people coming into contact with a Julian-type ecumenical prayer group for the first time.

A few of the initial members of the Julian Meeting in Monkstown were already meditators in the John Main tradition of Christian meditation, which uses a mantric prayer method. Because of the flexibility of the JM approach, their participation in the Julian Meeting did not cause any problems. They were free to continue the mantric method during the silent period. Others were also free to adopt a similar method, or indeed to read meditatively a passage from scripture or other writing – a soft-tone table light was provided at one side of the meeting to facilitate this.

As time progressed, more members took courage and came forward to give short lead-in talks and generally to help run the meetings.

Our meetings last about 80 minutes, including a core period of 30 minutes in prayerful silence and 20 minutes in social exchange over a cup of tea. Each part of the meeting has its own attraction and value but the silent period is the jewel. It is the time when participants learn to quieten their minds and open their hearts before the Lord, so that He, through the Spirit, can gradually change in them whatever needs changing to enable them to respond more readily to the daily indications of His will and to reach out in a more caring and cheerful way to the perceived needs of others.

The effects of our barriers and divisions are also lessened and mutual respect is engendered under the same benign influence. This is surely one of the objectives of true ecumenical encounter. We hope that our monthly events in Monkstown are contributing in some small way to this most desirable end.

The principal thing is to stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing before him unceasingly, day and night, until the end of life.

—*Theophan the Recluse (1815–1900)*



HENRY OSSAWA TANNER
The Annunciation (1898)



LORENZO LOTTO
The Angel of the Annunciation (c.1530)

Book reviews

Long Wandering Prayer: an Invitation to Walk with God

David Hansen

Bible Reading Fellowship, 2002, £6.99

Anne Hibbert says in her foreword, "...this is Brother Lawrence's *Practising the Presence of God* for the 21st century." Such language seems over the top, especially for Anne Hibbert, and I read the book curiously, wondering what could have caused her to praise it quite so extravagantly.

The first thing to strike me was that David Hansen and I have things in common. He grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and his mother let him wander for hours as a child in the marshlands near their home. I grew up in West Sussex, and my mother let me wander for hours as a child on the dunes and shingle banks along the shoreline. We both took the love of solitary wandering with us through all our schooldays, and made excuses to walk unnecessarily long ways round from school to home. We wandered through our student days, and we are wandering still.

Gradually I reached the view that Anne Hibbert was, as usual, measured and prayerful in her praise. This is a great book. I say it as a plain truth – David Hansen's simple, understated style conceals profound thinking and obedience to God; his theology, evangelical through and through (Hansen is a Baptist minister), has the lucid awesome depth of a Maria Boulding.

Long Wandering Prayer is a book about walking alone with God, about prayers that go on for days, rather than minutes, but are without conscious strain because they are, by and large, without conscious attention. We walk, knowingly, with God; but what we are aware of is walking, and sometimes God – not usually what we are supposed to be praying about.

Without conscious strain, I said – but not without tears. Hansen quotes Bonhoeffer: "Intercession means no more than to bring our brother into the presence of God, to see him under the cross of Jesus as a poor human being and sinner in need of grace...we see him in all his destitution and need." And we weep as we walk, wandering in the paths of God.

Do read *Long Wandering Prayer*. It will not fail to give you joy; it might just change the way you pray, always.

Mike Farley

Ponder These Things: Praying with Icons of the Virgin

Rowan Williams

Canterbury Press, 2002, £7.99

This small book by the Archbishop of Canterbury Designate is not one to be read quickly, and is obviously the result of time meditating on three icons and a piece of cloth. The result of these meditations shows a depth of prayer and thought that does what the icons themselves do: takes us from what is in front of us to the world beyond. Yet, as with all meditation, if we take it seriously, there is both challenge and provocation here, so this is not always an easy or comfortable read, but stimulating us to find a love that reaches, and, as Rowan Williams puts it "Then we are aware of a God who will not let go of us."

Different from any other reflections on icons I have read, these talks from a Walsingham pilgrimage look beyond the form of the icons to the nature of God, and of Mary, and through their eyes and hands to ourselves. Can we be unchanged by looking at God ourselves, or letting God look at us?

Francis Ballinger

Sounds of the Eternal – a Celtic Psalter: Morning and Night Prayer

J Philip Newell

Canterbury Press, 2002, £9.99

Celtic Benediction: Morning and Night Prayer

J Philip Newell

Canterbury Press, 2000, £9.99

The thought "Be still and aware of God's presence within and around" is at the heart of both of these books. An opening prayer is followed by two scripture passages for meditation: just one brief sentence from the Old Testament. In these brief scripture sentences the author has set out "to provide an example of how a simple phrase can be used as the basis for meditation. The oldest forms of meditative prayer in Christian practice consist simply of a repetition of words from Scripture in the silence of the heart." A single prayer of thanksgiving and intercession and a closing prayer completes it.

The format of *Celtic Benediction* is identical, but the scripture sentences are from John's Gospel. Both books are rooted in the book of Genesis.

Both are beautifully illustrated, the artwork for *Sounds of the Eternal* being from illuminated Hebrew manuscripts housed in the British Museum Library while for *Celtic Benediction* it comes from the Lindisfarne Gospels.

I was interested to see *Sounds of the Eternal* as *Celtic Benediction* was among our bedside collection while on retreat last year. We bought a copy as soon as we returned home and it has been well-used. Either book would make an attractive gift.

Gail Ballinger

Faith Works: Lessons on Spirituality and Social Action

Jim Wallis

SPCK, 2002, £12.99

Jim Wallis, leader of the Sojourners Community in Washington in the United States, has written a number of books which challenge us as Christians to live out the Gospel. The current book is a mixture of a personal history, and a further attempt to confront us with a gospel that forces us to engage with social issues. Questions about race and inequality arise: "These questions of the heart, as I like to call them, are an entry way into our own spirituality."

He goes on to suggest that we need to struggle with hard questions, and bring conflicting groups around tables in a search for peace. He says "You also won't really know yourself if you stay inside the carefully-constructed boxes of your life. Getting out of the house is actually the first step on a spiritual journey; take it and your life will begin to change." He suggests that involvement with others is what is important: "We have to dispel the myth that you really have to know what you're doing before you start doing it." Being creative in our actions is what is important.

The chapter "Be a contemplative" starts by reflecting on the 27 years Nelson Mandela spent in prison, then on Henri Nouwen, and ends with a letter from Thomas Merton: "The real hope, then, is not in something we think we can do, but in God...If we can do His will..."

Even with its American bias and standing in a tradition that stretches easily to Martin Luther King, Jim Wallis still provokes a response from us to think about the Kingdom of God in this country – can we say we have faith and do nothing about poverty?

Francis Ballinger

Lighted Windows: an Advent Calendar for a World in Waiting

Margaret Silf

Bible Reading Fellowship, 2002, £6.99

An Advent journey with short reflections dated from 1 December to 6 January, this book could be used at any time of the year. It is much more about the reader's personal encounter with God than Bible studies on a Christmas theme. Moving through themes of guidance and trust to God's presence in our lives, the bite-sized reflections invite readers to engage in their own story in a personal way. The suggestions for moments of stillness and "being" make this book a practical guide for finding time for God in our lives and encouraging us to share our personal experience of God-with-us.

Yvonne Walker

Nearer than Breathing: Biblical Reflections on God's Involvement in Us

Melvyn Matthews

SPCK, 2002, £7.99

This series of reflections started out as sermons "which enable those who hear them to see that there is something going on within them which is of God." This gives them a direct and lively style, spoken from the heart. Each passage is short enough for daily reflection or occasional nourishment.

I find Melvyn Matthews' style of writing provides nuggets to mull over for days, for example "We must live life as gift, not as our construction" or "What we are suffering from is not so much the silence of God, but our own deafness."

This book is both engaging and informative, to be pondered over and taken deep into the soul, where God is "nearer than breathing."

Yvonne Walker

Something Understood: an Anthology of Poetry and Prose

compiled by Beverly McAinsh

Hodder and Stoughton, 2002, £6.99

First published in hardback, *Something Understood* is now available in paperback. It is based on the BBC Radio 4 programme beloved of early risers on a Sunday morning. The anthology has been compiled by Beverly McAinsh, the programme producer, with an introduction by Mark Tully. The anthology covers a wide variety of subjects from friendship, youth

and age to the quest for God, consolation and understanding a deeper reality. Edwina Gateley's poem used on the JM bookmark is included as a "Julian Prayer." This collection is for dipping into again and again.

Yvonne Walker

Listening to the Soul

Sandra Holt

SPCK, 2002, £8.99

"The secret of my full identity is hidden in God, and often I am at a loss to know how to co-operate with the work he is doing in me. Working out that salvation is what this book is about."

In these words the author makes clear to us that, not only are we about to embark on the challenging journey of discovering our true selves, but that these hidden, buried selves are known to God. In the discovery and living out of these selves lies our co-operation with God. This concise and lively guide-book gives us some helpful suggestions and insights but leaves us to make our own journey in company with others.

Sandra Holt shares with us much of her own journey, giving down-to-earth everyday examples. Her knowledge of and insights into Ignatian spirituality are as helpful for those who have travelled far with Ignatius as for those for whom he is a new companion. The whole of the book is grounded in the life of Jesus – alive and growing in his understanding of himself. This Jesus is real, flesh-and-blood, the Jesus of here and now whose absolute humanity attracts and invites us to follow.

There are moments of gentle humour which bubble to the surface; moments of intake of breath, sometimes followed by a wry smile, as we are stopped in our tracks by a surprising image or an expression; moments of imagination when we realise we are meeting with the Jesus set free from the confines of the past setting us free to be who we have always been.

This book challenges us as it suggests that we apply its content to our own imagination, experience and daily life. In the challenge there is the seed of growth.

This is also a dangerous book because, if we take it seriously, we shall grow beyond where we are into new territory, new depths of ourselves and new heights of God.

Ken Lawson

Undersong: Listening to the Soul

Peter Price

DLT, 2002, £8.95

The Bishop of Bath and Wells, former General Secretary of USPG, disturbs me with a book which I find difficult to categorise: it is somewhere between a diary, a confessional, Ignation reflections and a series of short essays. I found that it provoked interest throughout. It serves to remind me that reflection on the meaning of life and meeting challenging people goes alongside the radical demands of Christianity.

I admire the openness with which this is written, the range of anecdotes, the appropriate quotations, the depth of thought and the subject matter. It helps to bring me back to the knowledge that serving Christ is no easy option and that to be with God we have to be authentic to ourselves and also to the communities in which we are set. Following Christ means a call to believe in peace, justice and love and to be prepared to act on our beliefs. This book could easily provide daily reading and reflection for a long period.

Francis Ballinger

A Holy Island Prayer Book

Ray Simpson

Canterbury Press, 2002, £6.99

Although many years have passed since I lived on Lindisfarne, when I picked up this book I could feel a fresh wind rushing past my face and the salt on my tongue.

This little prayer book could be used to structure prayer in a round of morning, midday and evening prayer in a four-week cycle. With themes for each day of the week, it envelops you in a Celtic tradition of the first saints who trod the causeway across to Holy Island. It is a useful resource brimming with material, which can be dipped into to provide sustenance on a journey or a starting-point for meditation. With occasional illustrations by Denise Adam, and iconic descriptions of parts of Lindisfarne, you are constantly brought back to the Holy Island.

This would make an excellent gift for an established Christian, or even a first prayer book.

Don Quilty

Sacred Heart: Gateway to God

Wendy M Wright

DLT, 2002, £12.95

Until the eve of Vatican II, devotion to the Sacred Heart was practically the defining symbol of the Roman Catholic Church, dominating its spiritual life, its culture and its art. The focus shifted from popular devotions to the liturgy and to Scripture, so that on the contemporary landscape the Sacred Heart seems little more than an archaeological relic. In recent years it has resurfaced, irrepressibly and to the dismay of the theologically correct, in the form of devotion to the "Divine Mercy." Wendy Wright's book began as a theological dissertation and is a fascinating, "rummaging meandering" look at the history, iconography, prayer, theology, poetry and liturgical expression of devotion to the Sacred Heart.

What gives the book special warmth is its autobiographical slant. Becoming a Catholic in her late twenties, Wright "somewhere along the way lost Jesus...For twenty-five years I've been operating on peripheral eyesight. The Sacred Heart, it seems, is my way of reclaiming central vision – of seeing Jesus." She sweeps the reader along with her enthusiasm for this devotion to the Heart of Jesus, "pouring out its inexhaustible content, exhibiting myriad faces, titles and names" down the ages and still powerfully today.

Paul Rea

Waiting and Watching

Joyce Huggett

Kevin Mayhew, 2002, £5.99

This is an eight-week group study course for the seasons of Advent and Epiphany. Each session includes time for the group to become quiet, a scripture passage with a commentary, an opportunity for a personal response, and a group discussion, ending with prayer and worship. Joyce Huggett explores the themes of waiting and watching from various standpoints (John the Baptist, Mary, the shepherds and so on), providing a fresh and thoughtful insight into some very familiar stories. She captures very well the wonder and mystery of this part of the Christian year. Any group that engages with this course will be enriched by the experience.

James Toon

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 and price.

Contributions for the next magazine should be sent to the Editor by **15 February 2003**. Please type, or write clearly, on one side of the paper. Contributions by e-mail are welcome.



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Correction

In the article on JM-France in the August 2002 issue, we said that a Julian Meeting would be starting next January in the Anglican Cathedral in Paris. It will be fact be starting in the American Cathedral instead. Details are available from George Dobinson.