



*Magazine*

*August*

*2020*

## *The Julian Meetings*

- *Foster the teaching and practice of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition*
- *Encourage people to practise contemplative prayer in their daily lives, and explore ways of doing this which are appropriate for them*
- *Support the individual ecumenical Julian Meetings — groups whose members meet regularly to practise Christian contemplative prayer together*



## The Julian Meetings Magazine August 2020

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# A Resource for Contemplative Practice

*More than anything else the psalms  
reflect a longing for intimacy with God*

(this concludes the article begun in our April issue)

The ancient words of the psalms can take us into the place which Martin Laird calls 'The Silent Land'. This is a place of wordless adoration which is the very essence of contemplative prayer.

But how to go about it? As we think about this challenge, and the usage of the psalms, three things can usefully be said.

## **First**

Recognise that this is about a different kind of praying. Because contemplative prayer is not about words, or even thoughts. It is a journey into deep stillness and silence that is beyond the chaotic activity of the thinking mind. We need only a very few words to point us there.

How can the psalms, which can be so wordy, help? Well, after you have come to your prayer place, and you have shut the door and prepared yourself to sit attentively, perhaps by silently repeating the Jesus Prayer for some minutes, turn to the psalm for the day. As you slowly read it, listen out carefully for the line or the verse from that psalm that captures your attention and may seem to have further hidden meaning in it.

Such evocative lines are to be found in most of the psalms. Psalm 63 is full of them. Its opening line, 'O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you,' when gently repeated in time with the breath can act as a powerful focus for the distracted mind, and can lead you into deep silence.

Or the opening line of Psalm 62: 'On God alone my soul in stillness waits', used in the same way, can also open up a depth and sense of extraordinary inner spaciousness that you did not know was possible.

Another example is verses 7-9 from Psalm 36 which begin 'How precious is your loving mercy, O God' and end with the evocative verse, 'For with you is the well of life and in your

light shall we see light.’ We need to love these texts, of which there are many, and become deeply familiar with them. Learning them by heart we develop our own inner repertoire which can be turned to at any moment of the day.

## **Second**

Learn how to deal creatively with the often very off-putting difficulties of the psalmist’s language. For example, there are frequent references to ‘the righteous’ and ‘the wicked’. The first psalm, with its two images of a tree planted by water, and chaff being blown away by the wind, is a good example and directly contrasts these two states. Briefly, the ‘righteous’ (not an attractive word to contemporary ears) does not mean ‘self-righteous’ but rather the precise opposite. It means those who constantly look to God rather than trust in themselves, while ‘the wicked’ who ‘strut’ (12.8) and ‘flatter themselves in their own eyes’ (36.2) are inherently self-obsessed.

There is frequent use of other words and phrases that people find difficult. For example, the psalmist who writes a lot about his ‘enemies’ who torment him or ‘lie in wait for him’ and wish to do him evil. When the psalms were written these may have been real enemies at court or on the battlefield. For us, in a time when we have learnt a lot about the inner workings of the mind and how perennial fears, anxieties and neuroses can plague even the most ‘normal’ people, the psalms can be re-interpreted and re-imagined in this contemporary psychological context. And we need to be bold in this re-imagining. Psalm 27 is an example of a person in an intense battle with his inner demons who is almost devoured by his own fears - ‘my enemies came upon me to eat up my flesh’. Verse 10 tells of his mother and father forsaking him. This suggests a fundamental psychological wound at the root of his mental fragility, and the psalm describes how he finds his peace only through a profound contemplative indwelling described in verse 5.

## **Third.**

When facing the challenge of learning contemplative practice

using the psalms we need persistence and discipline if it is to bear fruit. To quote the Epistle to the Hebrews, we have 'to labour to enter into rest' and frequently we shall try to find any excuse to avoid this work. And it is no immediate magic answer to personal difficulties. We need to persist over a long time, even a lifetime.

But if you can establish a contemplative practice as a fundamental and habitual part of your daily routine, then truly it will lead you to live more 'truthfully, honestly and lovingly'. You may even discover, in the most trying circumstances, reserves of deep joy.

***The Reverend Patrick Woodhouse***  
*formerly Canon Precentor of Wells Cathedral*

*This article first appeared in The Reader, and is used with permission.*

*Peter Rowe reviews the book 'Touch the Earth Lightly' on page 25. The book's title is the opening line of a poem by New Zealander Shirley Erena Murray. Its first verse reads:*

*Touch the earth lightly,  
use the earth gently,  
nourish the life of the world in our care;  
gifts of great wonder,  
ours to surrender.  
trust for the children tomorrow will bear.*

## Julian Meetings During Social Isolation

Since the lockdown, and being unable to meet together every Friday afternoon, the Bexhill Meeting has been using the time from 2.30pm on a Friday to sit quietly in their own homes/ gardens and have their own 'Julian quiet time'. We have been keeping in touch regularly by phone, text and e-mail, and are praying for each other and thinking of each other on a Friday afternoon. I have even been contacted by some other people wanting to join the Bexhill JM!

I e-mail to all the people who attend our Julian Meeting a word document with prayers, reading and links to music on the theme for that day. For those not on e-mail I print it out and post it to them, so that we can all follow the prayers, readings etc at the same time. On 8 May the Meeting was themed on Julian of Norwich as this date celebrates the day that Julian received her revelations or 'showings' in 1373.

***Diane Meladio***



The Winchester Hyde Julian Meeting has met remotely but not with Zoom! We agree a reading and then all sit down at home at 2 30 on Tuesdays. We have added to the core five of us a gentleman called Chris, who lives in Winchester and who has been thinking of joining us for some time but so far hasn't been to an actual meeting. And Julia in South Africa. She has been a visitor to our group

in the summer for a few years when she is over here visiting family in Winchester. Sadly she won't be visiting this year. The experience of meditating together, even though not physically present, is very powerful.

***Sue Derbyshire***

*See our website for details of on-line Julian Meetings*

## Placing Our Trust in Your Generosity

When the Julian Meetings began in the 1970s, our founder, Hilary Wakeman, wished it to be as simple as possible, with little in the way of admin, bureaucracy, hierarchies etc.. We do our best to continue in this vein, but in some ways we inevitably have to be more organised.

In the beginning the idea was of belonging, rather than of 'membership'. Subscribing to the magazine was just a matter of money received and a list of addresses for sending them out. Over time we grew into using a computer 'membership software package', which has resulted in the subscription being a de facto 'membership', which is not our wish at all. Rather than 'members' we would like 'supporters' - people who value what JM has to offer and wish to support its work. The free spirit is among us still and we wish to retain our 'keep it simple' roots.

### **A new way to finance the magazine**

From 2021, rather than asking individuals to subscribe to the Magazine, we'd like to invite people to support the work of the Julian Meetings by simply making a donation.

Anyone will be able to join our mailing list and receive the newsletter and magazine three times a year. Our hope is that they (you) will wish to support our work by choosing to make a donation.

Ways to donate will feature more prominently on our website, and in our literature, in the hope that people who engage with JM will also wish to support us.

Registration of Meetings will continue in the same way as at present, and as part of their annual registration each meeting will continue to receive three magazines a year for their people to share, as they have in the past.

So this is just about changing individual 'subscriptions' into 'donations'. We are very grateful that, in the past, many



subscribers have also added a generous donation, and this is vital income for the Julian Meetings network to continue.

We don't want to reduce our income! We still have to meet the cost of producing and sending out the magazine, having a good quality website and reimbursing volunteer expenses. Nothing is getting cheaper, so we hope and trust that future donations will match our previous income from subscriptions plus donations.

### **Freely ye have received, freely give**

Along with keeping it simple we feel that it fits the spirit of the Julian Meetings to freely offer what we do - maintaining the website, producing the magazine and promoting Julian Meetings, Contemplative Prayer and Quiet Days etc. - and to ask those who value these things to keep them available to everyone by donating to us.

We will simply do what we can with the funds that we receive.

Giving is, of course, at the heart of Christianity. Sharing the riches God has given us with our fellow human beings is also integral to the Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and other faiths. It is an act of Faith. It stems from our *love* and *hope*, our positive intention to do good. Donating to an organisation shows our connection with the values it expresses and a belief that what we give will have the desired impact.

We hope that, in not taking subscriptions but trusting to donations, the Julian Meetings Magazine will meet a warm response and encourage more people to take up shared contemplative prayer, which is of such value to us. We are going to relax, quieten our worries, and trust in the God who has brought us thus far. May He guide us into the future.

***Ian Bailey, JM Treasurer***

*On page 16 you will find details of how you will be able to donate and support the running expenses of JM.*

## *Wind Whispers*

*Softly whispering Spirit  
blow gently into our lives*

*Blow softly into our minds  
and bring peace*

*Blow softly into our thoughts  
and bring understanding*

*Blow softly into our concerns  
and bring calm*

*Blow softly into our fears  
and bring courage*

*Blow softly into our hearts  
and bring love*

*Life giving Spirit  
breathe Your Life into our lives*

*This day and every day*

*Amen*

*Elizabeth Mills*

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### **Extracts from the Taizé 'Letter' for 2020**

Setting out on the road! That is a call for our day. Let us be attentive to new initiatives, even if they are provisional: we find solutions by going forward.

In times of trial and joy, let us remember that God is faithful and invites us to persevere in our commitments; God is always preparing a future of peace.

By faith we respond to God's call to set out on the road, remembering that a new beginning is always possible.

Like 'strangers and sojourners on the earth' (Hebrews 11:13) we need to find a place where we are inwardly anchored so that we can be ourselves. Is it not in prayer that this anchoring can take place, in a dialogue of friendship with Christ?

Constantly returning to this communion with God gives us great freedom. By his love, God wants to bring us out of our individual and collective forms of servitude, helping us to let go of what hinders our steps.

## How?

How shall we sing the Lord's songs  
in a strange land? The old rhythms,  
the melodies of praise, strangle  
in our throats and the words  
fall to the ground like leaves in autumn.  
The air feels thick with suspicion and doubt  
and who's to say, any more, what  
is true enough to last, to prevail?

Isolation feels like a punishment  
for offences we never enacted.

Let us trust, now, the ground under  
our feet - that which has proven steady  
for generations. Look up. The heavens  
are still there, unclouded, beatific.  
We breathe, even though masks clothe  
our faces. Prayer surrounds us, close  
as our skin, weaving for us garments of  
trust and solace. Even in our isolation  
we are joined in love, never alone

**Luci Shaw**

## Julian: an icon 'for such a time as this'



Once again, Julian of Norwich is relevant 'for such a time as this'. (Esther 4.14) and I find she is a great comfort.

Mother Julian lived through three waves of the Black Death in 14<sup>th</sup> century Norwich. She knew people who died. She may have lost some people very close to her and mourned them - perhaps at a distance, unable to attend their funeral.

The coronavirus pandemic has caused many people to self-isolate. Julian knew, by vocation, obedience and choice, what it is like to live isolated from others. She may have had access to a small enclosed garden, but we don't really know. Those of us with gardens can get some fresh air and see nature growing, but that is less easy if you live in a care home or a flat. The solitary, limited, enclosed life has become a reality for many this year, with no choice in the matter.

Today we can keep in touch via e-mails, texts, Facebook, What's App, Skype, FaceTime, phone calls, post, etc. Julian had none of these in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Her social contact was limited by her vocation as an anchoress. However, she had limited contact with her priest, spiritual director and servants. Also with the many people who came to her for spiritual counsel, but whom she didn't see due to the heavy curtain at her open window when she listened to them and talked to them.

Julian could hear the Daily Offices and Mass through the window of her anchor-hold which opened into the church. But she was not physically *in* the church with others. We may be limited in our attendance at church but have opportunities to join with others on-line via prayer and worship websites. Some churches offer their own services via Facebook. Julian

may not have physically taken the consecrated elements at Mass very often and it would have been 'in one kind only', the consecrated bread. Often she would have heard Mass by watching through her window, making a 'spiritual communion', just as many of us are learning to do.

For many Christians the contemplative life is a reality – a response to the call of God. Whether that is as a solitary or in the more social context of living with a partner, in a family or with a friend, we know our need of God, we respond to the call to prayer and intercession. This is surely a call to all of us at this time.

Julian would have eaten a simple diet, and lived without most of the luxuries we take for granted: I expect mediaeval toilet paper was non-existent! Like her, we can appreciate what we do have, live more simply and with gratitude.

The Black Death spread differently from *Covid-19*, and we now know much more about hygiene and infection control, medical and scientific research, epidemiological mapping and vaccines. But we seem to be as susceptible to panic, fear, despair, selfishness and believing misinformation and 'fake news' as our mediaeval sisters and brothers were. The media is two-edged - a good way to disseminate helpful advice and information but also capable of whipping things out of proportion and worrying people. We are also seeing the best is being brought out in people in wonderful instances of love, care and self-sacrifice and community awareness. We should all follow the official advice we are given to stay as safe as we can. But perhaps we can follow Julian by filling time with thoughts of the love of God rather than being lead off-track by the media circus.

All that Julian experienced led her to write her wonderful *Revelations of Divine Love*, so full of insight and reflection. The God she shows us in the suffering and compassionate Jesus is the same God for us. "He did not say, 'You shall not

*be tempest-tossed, you shall not be work-weary, you shall not be discomforted.’ But he said ‘You shall not be overcome’. God wants us to heed these words so that we shall always be strong in trust, both in sorrow and in joy.” (RDL Ch 68)*

Mother Julian of Norwich – pray for us.

**Gill Butterworth CJN**

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## Wayfaring

*God be the road on which we travel:*

*He the mountains on which we are tested and  
challenged*

*He the wells at which we find healing and peace.*

*Christ be the light by which we travel:*

*He the vision which informs and enlarges us*

*He the lodestar shining in our darkest nights.*

*The Spirit inspire us as we travel:*

*She the restlessness driving us onwards*

*She the stillness leading us to the heart of God.*

*The Trinity, the Three,  
go with us as we travel;*

*and may our journey*

*begin*

*continue*

*and end*

*in Them*



*Pat Bennet*

## **A Retreat at Home with Julian Of Norwich**

Last October my husband went on a pilgrimage to Rome for the canonisation of Saint John Henry Newman. I was unable to go, so I decided to make good use of the time and do a 'retreat at home' or 'retreat in daily life', with a flexible framework.

I hesitate to say timetable, because in the end there wasn't one. I knew that I didn't want to spend lots of time preparing material in advance. This was partly so that I came to it fresh, and partly because I didn't want to anticipate what God might be saying to me in it. Also, if I'm honest, sheer energy. I chose to read Julian of Norwich and my only preparation was to choose a translation to accompany me. In the end I chose two: an old favourite, *Enfolded in Love*, edited (1984) by Robert Llewelyn, once Chaplain of the Julian Shrine; and a new one, *A Revelation of Love*, by Elizabeth Obbard (2018),

I started with few structural rules, but I limited TV to the news once a day, plus Classic FM for 30 minutes in the evening. A pattern emerged of a short reading of the same passage from each book, followed by silently absorbing both what I had read and God's love revealed in it. I did this three or four times a day but the timing was different each day.

We moved, last year, to a retirement flat in a complex owned and run by Methodist Homes for the Aged. This has a good community ethos, a chaplain, and regular worship which I built into my retreat. Saturday included a visit by a niece. On the Monday I spent some time sitting in the nearby park for a time of prayer and reflection, watching birds on the lake.

The fruits of it? I doubt if I'll really know. However, chats with new friends that weekend have led to us starting a Julian Meeting here. It is a time that I remember with gratitude and as an on-going source of strength.

**Gail Ballinger**

# Where's Wally?

## Julian Meetings for those exploring vocations

*For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. Psalm 62.5-6*

Do you remember Wally, the character in the red and white striped shirt, hiding in the crowd? Illustrator Martin Handford created him in 1986 at the request of his art director, who apparently sought something that would serve as a focal point in the busyness of Handford's illustrations of crowds.

### **So many distractions**

As we are aware, for thousands of people in communities across our country, life feels too noisy, too busy and too distracting. And often church can feel just as noisy, busy and distracting as any other part of our lives. Distractions are so – well, distracting – that we don't get the silence we need to connect with God or to search for the focal point of Christ in our lives. Regardless of tradition, whether that noise is just too many words in a traditional liturgy or the volume of an electric guitar during a worship set, our churches seem uncomfortable with silence. But the good news is that, like Wally, Jesus is still visible when we look (even though he may often be obscured by the glaring light and noise of everything around us).

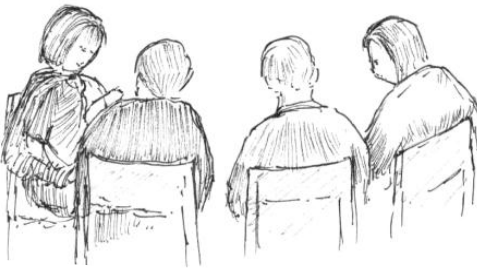
John-Francis Friendship, in his book *Enfolded in Christ: the inner life of a priest*, argues that "it's noticeable that Jesus countered [this] by seeking out places of silence and solitude for prayer, and he taught his disciples the importance of developing an inner 'cell' for the 'prayer of the heart' (Matt. 6.6)."

I've been blessed to work with the vocations team in our Diocese as a discernment advisor and have had a number of potential ordinands on placement at our church. It has been

a joy to share with them the benefits of ‘seeking out places of silence and solitude for prayer’ at our monthly Julian Meeting and our services of Adoration or Sung Compline.

### **Discovering silence together**

Sitting in silence with other people during a Julian Meeting is something experienced by few of the potential ordinands, regardless of their traditions. For some (understandably), it



was quite uncomfortable: it felt like they were unable to be still for more than 1.37 minutes before they shifted in their chair or adjusted their surprisingly loud jacket. For others, it was an unexpected

blessing and they were deeply moved by the experience. One woman commented ‘That was beautiful. Can I just sit here for a few more hours? I don’t want to move.’ And a young man recently stated ‘I loved it. That was ace! When can we do it again?’

### **The gifts of silence**

As most of us know (and not to be overly dramatic here), sitting in silence like we do during a Julian Meeting has the potential to be life changing. In fact, perhaps ‘life changing’ may be an understatement (and that’s saying something). For our potential ordinands, many of whom will be future leaders in our churches, sitting in silence provides the opportunity for a freedom in their prayer life that they haven’t known... like a gift they hadn’t previously imagined. The silence invites a relationship with the Holy Spirit; invites us to look for that focal point of God in our noisy and busy lives; and invites us to look for manifestations of Christ in the people around us, in our churches, in our communities, in our world.

*Dwayne Engh*

## **Donating and Supporting: how it will work from this autumn**

The article on page 6, by our Treasurer Ian, outlines the spirituality behind our move to asking for donations for the magazine. This article explains how the new system will work..

There will be *no change* to the present process for the registration / renewal of individual Julian Meetings. The fee of £12 a year to register a Meeting will remain the same.

### **Current Magazine Subscribers**

Everyone who has renewed for 2020 will continue to receive the magazine three times a year as usual. You do not need to do anything to continue to receive our magazine and newsletter. If you currently receive a large print magazine you will continue to receive this. You will also receive an e-mail (if you've registered an email with us) saying that the magazine is on its way and giving a link to the pdf copy of the magazine. You can donate whenever you like. You will continue to receive the magazine even if you don't donate.

### **How do I donate?**

You can do this online with paypal - you do not need to have a paypal account to do this, it is just the means by which we can accept payment. Or you can donate by post with a cheque. The information for both methods will be in each magazine and on the website magazine page. The magazine will also contain a QR code, for those who find this an easy way to donate.



### **PDF copies**

You can choose to only receive a pdf copy of the magazine. This will be a choice on the unsubscribe page for existing subscribers and on the application form for those joining our mailing list.

## **Extra magazines**

After the December magazine is issued, any extra magazines you may want can be bought from our shop online or with the order form in the newsletter.

## **How much money is needed?**

We are always so grateful for your generosity, without which The Julian Meetings could not continue. We hope that you will continue to donate at least the cost of the old subscription (£8 a year) and add whatever extra you feel is appropriate. We are grateful for whatever people are able to give.

## **Updating your information or coming off the mailing list**

If you wish to come off our mailing list please use the link in the email or write to our mailing administrator, Diane Meladio. (see page 27)

If you wish to change any other details either email / write to Diane or unsubscribe completely and re-subscribe with the new information.

If you have any questions now or in the future please email Ann at [it@thejulianmeetings.net](mailto:it@thejulianmeetings.net) or Diane at [mailings@thejulianmeetings.net](mailto:mailings@thejulianmeetings.net) or write to Diane (details on page 27)

## **Joining our mailing list**

If you do not already receive your own copy of the magazine, all the details you will need to join our mailing list will be given in the magazine. We hope that you will wish to support our work by making a donation if you choose to join the mailing list - or even if you do not!.

## **Data Protection**

We use a mailing system which fully complies with data protection requirements. Your data is never shared with any other organisation or individual by us or by our software provider.

## ***The Life of Christ* by a medieval Carthusian**

Well before the coronavirus lockdown I had started to read, most days, a page or two from a recently translated volume of medieval devotion. *The Life of Christ (Vita Iesu Christi)* was written by Ludolph of Saxony, who was born at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He was for many years a Dominican friar, and only entered the Carthusian monastery near Strasbourg in 1340. He died on 13 April 1378.

### **More than a 'Life'**

The *Vita Iesu Christi* is his most influential work. It covers Christ's life from the generation of the Son of God in eternity, through his earthly life, death and resurrection and on to its conclusion with the Last Judgment. So it is rather more than a Life in the usual sense. It is more a series of meditations on many different aspects of the life of Christ, in all its variety, each of which ends with a prayer. It is firmly rooted in the Middle Ages from which it springs.

### **A resource for deep reflection**

Although one reviewer, Sr Sarah Schwartzberg OSB, wrote that 'modern readers will find Ludolph's work fanciful', she seems to underestimate us, especially when she adds 'this book is not for the gullible'. No, this is a book for those of us who value deep and sustained reflection which inevitably leads us into silent prayer and adoration, having on the way reminded us of all that is involved in our calling to be followers of Christ. I have rarely found such powerful words to ponder and savour. Even only a paragraph or two always leads me to silence and prayer. That is why I would like to share this book with you.

### **A text through the ages**

Ludolph drew heavily on the Scriptures (both Old and New Testament), the Fathers of East and West, later spiritual writings and other sources. For several centuries it was an immensely popular spiritual text. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish

mystic, St Theresa of Avila, decreed that every convent of her reform of the Carmelites was to include 'the Carthusian' in its library. Her contemporary, St Ignatius of Loyola, read Ludolph during the convalescence that led to his conversion. He went on to found the Jesuits. This work also nourished Luther and other reformers, and later Anglican writers like Lancelot Andrewes and William Austin.

When its publication is completed, it will occupy four sizeable volumes. So far, only the first two have been published (see details below). If you would like a taster before embarking on these first two volumes then do whet your appetites with:

### **YOUR HEARTS WILL REJOICE**

**Easter meditations from the *Vita Christ***

***Ludolph of Saxony, translated by Milton T. Walsh***

Liturgical Press 2016

Paperback: ISBN 978-0-87907-340-7

Amazon £2.99 – Kindle £2.76.

Full details of first two volumes of the complete work are:

### **THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST**

**Part One, Volume 1, Prologue and Chapters 1 – 40**

***Ludolph of Saxony, Carthusian, translated and introduced by Milton T. Walsh.***

Cistercian Publications (CS 267) from the Liturgical Press.2018.

Hardback ISBN 978-0-87907-267-4 (Amazon £39.69)

eBook: ISBN 978-0-87907-008-3; (Amazon Kindle £37.71)

### **THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST**

**Part One, Volume 2, Chapters 41 – 92**

***Ludolph of Saxony, Carthusian, translated by Milton T. Walsh.***

Cistercian Publications (CS 282) from the Liturgical Press 2019

Hardback ISBN 978-0-87907-282-7 (Amazon £39.69)

eBook: ISBN 978-0-87907-128-8 (Amazon Kindle £41.40)

I do not know when the last two volumes will be published, but I will write short reviews of them when they are. In the meantime I will continue to draw inspiration from what is now available.

***Peter Rowe***

## Healing

And the people stayed home.  
And read books, and listened,  
and rested, and exercised, and  
made art, and played games, and  
learned new ways of being,  
and were still. And listened  
more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some  
danced. Some met their shadows. And the people  
began to think differently.

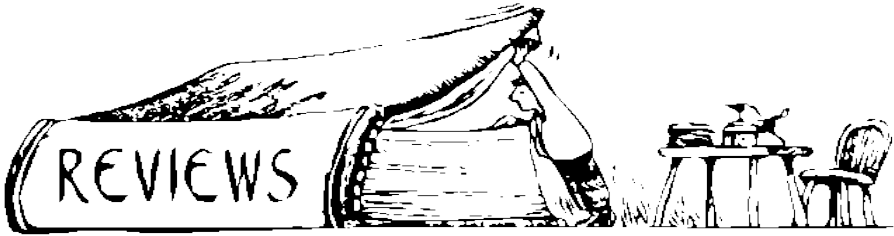


And the people healed.  
And, in the absence of people living in  
ignorant, dangerous, mindless and  
heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed, and the  
people joined together again,  
they grieved their losses, and  
made new choices, and dreamed  
new images, and created new  
ways to live and heal the earth  
fully, as they had been healed.

**Kitty O'Meara**





## **PRACTICAL MYSTICS: QUAKER FAITH IN ACTION.**

*Jennifer Kavanagh* ([www.jenniferkavanagh.co.uk](http://www.jenniferkavanagh.co.uk))

Christian Alternative Books  
(an imprint of John Hunt Publishing Limited). 2018.  
Paperback ISBN 978-1-78904-279-5. Price £6.99.  
eBook ISBN 978-1-78904-280-1. £3.99.

The author adopts Evelyn Underhill's definition of mysticism as 'the art of union with Reality. The mystic is one who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment' (quoted on p.9). This short and very readable book does indeed describe Quaker faith in action, and considers to what extent Quakers might properly be considered to be mystics. The central theme of this book is that Quaker practice does make mystics of those who participate, and 'practical' mystics at that. In developing the argument, this book looks carefully at the prayer practices which are the mark of the Quaker Meeting for Worship, and the ministry that might be offered at such meetings by individuals moved by the Spirit. Those used to Julian Meetings will find a lot that is familiar.

But the account given here of the Quaker way goes further than that. It stresses the balance that is sought between spiritual experience and the action it brings about, the balance between the stillness of the Quaker Meeting and the clamour of the world. In the Quaker experience of the Meeting, the stillness and, for the most part, silence, is not just solitary prayer as it might be for some of us, but very much a communal activity as well. 'I like to think of Meeting for Worship as a triangle of the self, the Divine and the others in the room' (p.26).

'Reality' rather than 'God' in the definition of Mysticism

adopted here highlights a more recent strand in Quakerism: although Quakers are rooted in Christianity, they are also open to new Light. This leads to possibilities of working with other faiths, for almost all of which service to others is as fundamental as it is to Quakers.

If Quietism is a temptation for some who seek to pray simply and in silence, Jennifer Kavanagh quotes the late Dutch Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen, to put us right:

True contemplatives . . . are *not* those who withdraw from the world to save their own souls but the ones who enter into the centre of the world and pray from there. Mysticism is the opposite of withdrawal from the world. Intimate union with God leads to the most creative involvement in the contemporary world (quoted on p.57).

I commend this book to all for whom prayer is important. It challenges the reader, but it also mightily encourages her.

*Peter Rowe*

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## **FRAGILE MYSTICS: reclaiming a prayerful life**

***Magdalen Smith***

SPCK 2015 £10.99

ISBN 978-0-281073-84-9

In an easy and accessible style, Magdalen Smith encourages Christians to reclaim mystical communion with God as the balance to a busy working life. Attuning to the divine presence is much needed in today's frantic world. Each chapter ends with practical suggestions for personal and corporate projects.

The book is well referenced: cultural allusions to modern media sit alongside current theology and classics of Christian mysticism. She gives a range of quotations, plus personal anecdotes inviting us to sense her vulnerability. With the ever-present demands of Church, family and the wider world, her desire to help others find God shines through.

The chapters 'Gaze', 'Dark', 'Deep' and 'Shed' pay tribute to

the apophatic tradition, typified by St. John of the Cross, 'The Cloud' author, Meister Eckhart and their modern acolytes. She gives equal regard to Julian of Norwich, Ignatius of Loyola and Thomas Traherne. Her balanced portrayal of these different aspects of mysticism will help anyone seeking a spiritual balance between darkness and light, enabling us to react effectively to negative and positive elements in our situations. A useful book for any called to join the 'fragile mystics' in uncertain times.

***John Ansell***

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**THE GEESE FLEW OVER MY HEART: Poems for Prayer and Reflection**

***Lyn McCrave***

Sacristy Press. 2019.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-78959-017-3. Price £8.99.

A book of gentle and heartfelt poems: some are pure prayer. Many sing of the revelation of God through the natural world, or of God's presence in times of sadness and times of joy. Some are imbued with the age-old metaphor (common to mystics of different faiths) of erotic love for the soul's longing for and delight in the divine, and God's delight in us. Some of the poems would make effective lead-ins for Julian Meeting sessions or periods of personal meditation.

If you seek poetic pyrotechnics or intricate language, you will be disappointed. Lyn's language is simple, but beautifully evocative, with short lines and occasional use of rhyme. It is designed to focus mind and spirit, not display poetic virtuosity. One short poem, "Evening", gives a flavour of the style:

Be still and wait  
in softly falling light.  
The Beloved is at the gate  
And sees me in love's night,  
Sitting in shadow.  
Dear heart, do you not see  
though all is dark and still.

You rest upon His knee.  
So close is He, until  
The dawn reveals Him.

A book to savour, to read slowly, maybe only one poem a day, so that the words have a chance to resonate in the mind.

**Michael Cayley**

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**MY SOUR-SWEET DAYS: George Herbert and the  
Journey of the Soul**  
**Mark Oakley**

SPCK. 2018.

Paperback ISBN 9780281080328. Price £9.99.

Ebook 9780281080335. £7.99.

Not everyone finds reading poetry is a road to prayer. But do try *My Sour-Sweet Days*. Mark Oakley, who many will know through his books *The Collage of God* and *The Splash of Words*, has taken 40 poems by the 17<sup>th</sup> century poet George Herbert, clarified and explained each gently and then added a reflection of his own. Each poem, with an explanation and added thoughts, is a suitable length for one day's reflection. I have found those forty days a great comfort and joy.

I thought I knew Herbert's poems but many here are new to me. Some are well-known: *King of Glory*, *King of Peace* and *Teach me, my God and King*, are in the hymnals, but others are less familiar and do not yield their valuable insights upon first reading, for the language can be unfamiliar. It is here that Mark Oakley excels. He wears his erudition lightly and teases out unfamiliar words and phrases so clearly that one quickly gathers Herbert's train of thought. He has also helped me to appreciate the skill with which Herbert has constructed the poems, which has enhanced my understanding.

But how do the poems become a road to prayer? Oakley points out that Herbert's God is no distant or angry god but our loving friend. 'God is the one who takes Herbert's hand smiling.' And, as with human friends, we may argue, be

advised, share thoughts and delights, so Herbert talks with God in memorable and felicitous verse. Oakley demonstrates Herbert's intimacy with God, and while acknowledging faults and weaknesses, emphasises God's unfailing kindness:

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart,  
Such a Joy, as none can move,  
Such a Love, as none can part,  
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.

(Last verse of *The Call*.)

And now I have finished *My Sour-Sweet Days* I intend to read it all over again.

**Janet Robinson**

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## **TOUCH THE EARTH LIGHTLY: Words to encourage all who are working for the healing of our planet**

**Peter Millar**

Published by the author; 2<sup>nd</sup> printing December 2019.  
A5 paperback. No ISBN. Distributed free of charge.

This booklet concentrates on our wounded planet and our response to climate change. The coronavirus pandemic was not on the horizon when this booklet was published, but many of its reflections can be applied to the pandemic. The book's title is the opening line of a poem by New Zealander Shirley Erena Murray. (see page 4 for the first verse of the poem.)

The booklet has 15 pages on different subjects, with text on the left-hand page facing a lovely and appropriate colour picture on the right. The words draw on many traditions, and include words by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, a Navaho blessing, a Native American prayer, and describes an Aboriginal Australian quality called *dadirri*. This involves 'inner deep listening and quiet still awareness, [and] recognises the deep spring that is inside us. . . . It is something akin to what we know as contemplation.' My favourite quote during the pandemic is from Eric Hoffer, the American writer on political and social philosophy: 'In times of

profound change, the learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.' Not a few of the passages in this booklet may be helpful to open and close a Julian Meeting.

I have a supply of these booklets and will be happy to post one to you if you let me have your name and address. I live at 4 Tourney Road, Lydd, Romney Marsh, Kent TN29 9JD. My 'phone number is 01797 690832. My email address is [bookreviews@thejulianmeetings.net](mailto:bookreviews@thejulianmeetings.net).

**Peter Rowe**

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## **REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE**

***Julian of Norwich. Foreword by Kaya Oakes***

Dover Publications Inc. 2019

Paperback ISBN 978-0-486-83608-9. Amazon price £11.49

Also available as Kindle £10.92

This is an unabridged re-publication of the second edition of Dom Roger Hudlestone's translation of *Revelations of Divine Love*, published originally by Burns, Oates & Co, London, in 1927 and again in 1952. Katya Oakes has written a six-page contextualising Foreword especially for this publication.

What urged Dom Roger Hudlestone's second edition of the text was the finding of Margery Kempe's *Book* in 1934. He seized the opportunity to include the account of the meeting between Margery and Julian recorded therein, adding it to his Introduction and titling it 'Postscript'.

Kaya has kept Hudlestone's Introduction, Postscript, Notes and Glossary and gathered up all Hudlestone's footnotes as Endnotes, freeing Julian's text from possible distraction by the earlier, more academic approach.

In 2018 Kaya wrote an essay on the wisdom of medieval female mystics. She found Julian's voice can be 'a beacon lighting our way forward' (xv) especially, perhaps, those coming to the *Revelations* for the first time.

***Fr Luke Penkett, CJN, ObjN,***

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**[www.thejulianmeetings.net](http://www.thejulianmeetings.net)**

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- \* online events booking
- \* publicity for Meetings and JM events

You can follow us on Facebook and Twitter now, so if you, or friends, are into social media do pay us a visit!

