

THE
JULIAN
MEETINGS

Magazine
December
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 December 2011

CONTENTS	PAGE
Reflections for a December JM by John Ryall	2
Plea for help with cerebral fleas	4
Shell a lead-in and lead-out for a Meeting	5
Two versions of the Lord's Prayer	6
Extract from Sense and Nonsense by Malcolm Rothwell	7
Quiet Day with Bishop Martin Report from Sylvia Reid	8
Quiet Day a poem by Diana Stow	10
Chagall's Windows Aid Contemplation by Janet Robinson	12
Our Julian Meeting by Andy Thurlow	14
Living Under the Star a poem by Pauline Hawksworth JM in South Africa	16
Book Reviews: Feast and Fast <i>Christina Rees</i> ; Barefoot Disciple <i>Stephen Cherry</i> ; Creative Retreat Ideas <i>Sue Pickering</i> ; Praying the Dark Hours <i>Jim Cotter</i> ; Seasons of Grace <i>Ann Lewin</i> ; Sense and Nonsense <i>Malcom Rothwell</i> ; The Naked Now <i>Richard Rohr</i> ; Meister Eckhart <i>Richard Woods</i>	19-20 21-26
JM Magazine and contact details	31-33

Reflections for an Australian Julian Meeting

20th December, 2010

How many of you read the preface or author's introduction at the beginning of a book? Don't you think this often sets the tone of the book and explains the intended purpose of the author?

When we come to the Christmas story in Matthew, how often do we skip over the first two-thirds of chapter one and start reading at verse 18?

However, Matthew actually starts at verse 1 of chapter 1. These are the very opening words of the NT, so they must be important. They read like this: "*a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*" I would like us to focus for a few moments on the words "*a book of the genealogy,*" which, in the Greek just reads *biblos geneseōs*.

When I first noticed that, I thought, "That sounds like the book of Genesis. Isn't it interesting that both the Old Testament and the New Testament should begin with the book of Genesis?" Is Matthew trying to tell us something here?

More investigation reveals that the words *biblos geneseōs* are found in the Greek Bible on just two other occasions – and both are in the book of Genesis! In Gen 2:4 it refers to the "*account of the origin*" of the heavens and the earth. Then in Gen 5:1 these words refer to the lists of Adam's descendants. So the first time *biblos geneseōs* is used, it is about the beginning of creation; the second time, it is about the beginning of humanity. Now when Matthew uses it the third time, could he be suggesting a new beginning?

Matthew is about to give us "*the book of genesis of Jesus Christ*". When Matthew speaks of Jesus Christ he is not saying that "Jesus" is his Christian name and "Christ" is his surname. Later in Matthew Ch.1 we learn that "Jesus" means "Saviour". It was the Greek name for Joshua in the OT. And

“Christ” means messiah or anointed one. Most often in the OT the anointed one is a king, so this was a royal title. Thus Jesus Christ is both a Saviour and a king. He has royal blood coursing through his veins. He is a saviour king, and Matthew is about to give us his family tree. He comes from the purest bloodline. He has the perfect ancestry and legitimacy to be the king.

David and Abraham are mentioned in this first verse because these are the only two people in the OT with whom God made a covenant, although sometimes God *repeated* the covenant with their descendants. In 2 Samuel 7, God promises David both a dynasty and a temple: “*Your son will build my house and I will build your house.*” And in Genesis 12, God promises to make Abraham into a great nation and *all* the peoples of the earth will be blessed through him.

Jesus came to bring us a new covenant through His precious blood and broken body on the Cross. So, as we draw near to Christmas Day, we are reminded in Matthew’s opening verse that Jesus *is* a Saviour king who came to earth to offer us new hope - new hope of forgiveness of sin, and the gift of eternal life. Praise be to God.

Time of Silence

New hope came with Jesus. The Hebrew Bible, the one that Matthew would have known, ends with the second book of Chronicles. It concluded with the Persian king, Cyrus, saying “*the LORD, the God of heaven, has given **me** all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed **me** to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah...*” One might well ask what had happened to the covenants with David and Abraham, but that is for another time. Suffice to say that God did not renege on the covenants.

Now look at how Matthew concluded *his* gospel. Matthew ends with the Great Commission where Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to **me**.”

Matthew has brought the story from one of despair at the end of the Old Testament to one where Jesus has his rightful place in God's order.

And in this most Jewish of the gospels, there is the strong theme of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant whereby his descendants would be a blessing to all nations. In the genealogy of Jesus, only four women other than Mary are mentioned, and they are all foreigners, or Gentiles. At the end of Matthew's gospel, in the Great Commission, Jesus commands us to "*make disciples of **all** nations.*" And we ourselves are part of that fulfillment, included into God's family of *all* nations.

Benediction and Passing the Peace

John Ryall

Dear Editor

I was struck by the 'cerebral fleas' remark on page 7 of the August Magazine and wondered if any readers could offer suggestions on 'pest control'! I struggle with the fleas of wandering thoughts and would love to hear of how other Julian Members cope with this and similar distractions. I hope you, and they, can help

Sue M.

Our booklets offer some suggestions as to what might help, but please send in your own suggestions and we can include them in a future issue. This is a common problem for most of us who practise contemplative prayer, and there are many ways to deal with these distracting 'fleas'!

Editor

When the lead-in and lead-out below were used all the members of the group held a scallop shell during the silence, and took it away with them afterwards.

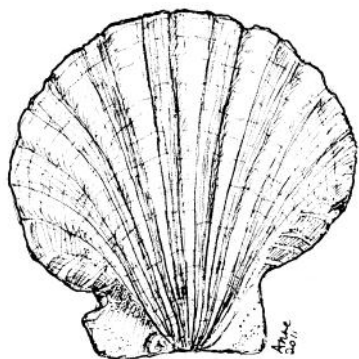
The shell in your hand once gave a home, and safety, to a vulnerable sea creature. When we feel hurt, or vulnerable, we can be tempted to retreat into a shell, and cut off contact with people, or a situation. Do we also do this with God?



A shell like this, though usually made in precious metal, is often used to pour the water over someone being baptised. So it has a new role as it serves in this symbolic act of cleansing and renewal.

Baptism is the start of our Christian pilgrimage. This shell is a symbol of our pilgrimage as it was, and still is, the token most usually carried by pilgrims.

Shells like this have often been used to serve out food, or food is served in them. This is a reminder that we are called to serve, and to bring to others the bread of heaven.



A time of silence

Be with us, Lord, every day of our pilgrim journey. Uphold us, encourage us, feed us, guide us, goad us, until we come at last into your eternal presence, and need our shells no more.

Two versions of the Lord's Prayer
used antiphonally at a Quiet Day

Our Father in heaven

O Silent Sound,
whose shimmering music pulsates
at the heart of each and all,

Hallowed be your name

Clear a space in us where thy melody
may be perceived in its purity.

Your kingdom come

Your will be done

Let the rhythm of thy counsel reverberate through our lives,
so that we move to the beat of justice, love and peace.

On earth as in heaven

Then, our whole being at one with thy song,
grant that the earth may be filled
with the beauty of thy voice.

Give us today our daily bread

Endow us with the wisdom to produce and share
what each being needs to grow and flourish,

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us

And give us courage to embrace our shadow with emptiness,
as we embrace others in their darkness.

Lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil

But let us not be captive to uncertainty,
nor cling to fruitless pursuits.
For from thee springs forth
the rhythm, the melody, and the harmony,
which restores all to balance, again and again.

Amen

An extract from Sense and Nonsense - Conversation with a clown about spiritual things by Malcolm Rothwell which is reviewed on page 20

Every time I try to concentrate and focus on God, thoughts come flooding into my mind and the elusive moment disappears. The problem of distractions can be overcome by learning to concentrate on the present. Our minds like to keep busy and so we think about what has happened, we reminisce, we remember. All too easily we think about the future and sometimes we are anxious and fearful about what may or may not happen. In a sense we are too busy living to think about Life. Life in its fullness is in the here and now. The present is all we have and the present is where God can be found. This has been called the sacrament of the present moment. However, with our plans for the future and our memories of the past, the present moment is squeezed out. Of course we cannot control the presence of God or decide how or when God is encountered.

It is not we who encounter God, but God who encounters us. Our part is to lay ourselves open to this encounter. More often than not, this is not a matter of saying or doing anything, but of BEING - simply being who and what we are in the presence of God. By being in silence in this way we put ourselves in a position to encounter God. God is not known through our rational minds, although they can help our understanding, but through an encounter, an I-thou relationship in which we stand before God in the depth of our hearts and encounter God as a personal presence.

*Prayer is not a request — not intercession.
It's to be just in the presence of the Lord, to
open my heart, to let God transform me.*

Thierry Guillemin

SW Quiet Day led by Bishop Martin, 2 July 2011

Bishop Martin is a large man with a big heart and a loud voice who gave much of himself in sharing his beliefs, prejudices, loves and hates concerning the church and religion. Now, in retirement, he can speak as Martin rather than 'the Bishop'.

Martin emphasised that spirituality should not be confused with religion. Religion is concerned with theology, creeds, beliefs and liturgies. He criticised churches (Quakers excepted) for neglecting spirituality and discouraging folk from being real, from expressing their individuality, vulnerabilities, failures and brokenness. Christian spirituality is concerned with relating to God and experiencing his love for us.

All of us gathered together for this day are searching for God. We begin by recognising God, and then by realising God in our lives. To progress and blossom our spiritual lives we need to find a community of fellow searchers, and there is a wide variety of organisations and groups that offer help and support (see note at end). We each need to discover what is helpful to us, and at this point in our spiritual journey.

Reflection is essential to the spiritual life. No-one finds it easy, but we need not attempt it on our own.

We also need to find our own aids to spirituality. Bishop Martin's include the Salvation Army's Daily Prayers (on the internet), the books of Simone Weill, Rose Macaulay's book *The Black Prince*, Beethoven's string quartets, the Daily Office, and Cadbury's drinking chocolate. Other books we've found inspiring on the Pilgrim way, apart from the Bible, are the works of Shakespeare, particularly the *Tempest's* in depth exposition of forgiveness and *King Lear's* final understanding of ageing and preparation for death. Visual images of those we seek to emulate are very powerful - think of adolescent pin-ups of their idols. To grow more like Christ, Martin holds on to a mental image of Christ and suggested this as an aid as we pray and meditate on his words.

Ignatian spirituality helps us come nearer to God through reading the gospels imaginatively rather than theologically. You imagine yourself actually present in the gospel story, as part of the action, so bringing it to life at a much deeper level. On a silent Ignatian retreat (of 4,5,6,8 days) you follow Ignatian exercises and meet daily with a spiritual guide. The *full* Ignatian Exercises take 30 days, usually on a single retreat but sometimes on 3 x 10 day retreats. Four phases are pursued in depth: the recognition of God in the natural world; the life of Christ; the passion of Christ; the resurrection of Christ. The exercises are not to be undertaken lightly as they are emotionally demanding.

Whatever method of meditation we follow the result must be action. The spiritual life essentially means working towards bringing about God's kingdom on earth.

I cannot do justice to Martin's leadership of this stimulating and challenging day, which evoked both enthusiasm and some uncertainty. Above all, Martin was passionate about his belief in the power and efficacy of prayer. This day, with its mixture of prayer, silence and discussion, gave us plenty of material for ongoing reflection. As we parted we resolved to persevere in seeking the aids and support systems right for us individually, to guide us in our continuing adventures into the mystery of God.

Sylvia Reid

Communities that may help us on our pilgrimage:

The Julian Meetings; The Fellowship of Meditation; The Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer; Thomas Merton Groups; lay orders of the Franciscans, Benedictines etc.; local Religious' houses.

The internet has many useful websites.

The Retreat Association has details of most Retreat Houses and the retreats they offer; details of contemplative prayer networks; can help with finding a spiritual director. The Retreat Association, Kerridge House, 42 Woodside Close, Amersham, Bucks HP6 5EF
Tel: 01494 433004 website: www.retreats.org.uk

Quiet Day

(14 May 2011)

Silence smothers the noise:
'Hush!' says a still, small voice,
as Jesus' presence comes near
to calm his followers' fear.

Let us listen, to hear
words of our saviour so dear.

A wise nun shows us the way
with deeper meaning to pray.

Vivid the tales she tells
like our Lord's own parables,
clear as a peal of church bells
that lifts faint hearts, and quells

troubles that torment the brain;
Satan is plotting again.

Hard for tongues not to talk,
when thoughts hover like hawks
keen their victims to stalk:
human instinct soon baulks

when we try not to utter
moth-worries that flutter.
Only God grants the power

to hold in for an hour
feelings fragile as flowers
lashed by late-summer showers,

with strength to submerge
every pathway and verge.

The Spirit's fierce fire
can rouse and inspire
man's mind to aspire
to soar ever higher.

Without gift of prayer
no person could dare
Christ's true Cross to share:
this Quiet Day showed where
to find courage to bear
silence's soul-searching stare.

Diana Stow

This poem was written by one of the 18 participants on the Faringdon & Buckland Julian Meeting's Quiet Day. She was one of the six present who had never experienced a Quiet Day before, and they expressed much appreciation at the end of the day. This was the second Quiet Day the Meeting has held, both led by Sister Deirdre Michael CSMV, and it included members from Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist and United Churches. Everyone found inspiration and encouragement from their shared time together.

Chagall's Windows Aid Contemplation

Last year I visited St Stephan's Church in Mainz, Germany. This remarkable church seems to embody the marriage of spirituality and concern for the world.

Almost demolished by bombs in three WW2 air raids, only the exterior walls and piers survived, although some furnishings and statues had been saved. After the war the building was reconstructed as accurately as possible.

In 1973 the parish priest, Fr. Klaus Mayer, who knew Marc Chagall, was inspired to ask the artist to design three stained glass windows for the eastern apse of the church. In 1978

Chagall, then 91, made detailed paintings of the windows, and drafts of the two windows flanking the middle one which were finished in Holy Week 1979. In 1980 Chagall completed the chancel's side window and just before his death in 1985, aged 97, he completed the transept windows.

The windows were donated by individuals, a group of banks and the municipality of Mainz. Chagall



himself would take no payment for his work.

The windows were intended by the artist as a token of friendship between France and Germany, a pledge of peace and a Jewish artist's wish to create in a church a visible token of the bond between Jews and Christians.

The background of the windows is a singing blue and the Biblical incidents are sketched in vibrant colours. In the six chancel windows Chagall presents the message of the Bible with the vision of the prophet and the profundity of the mystic. The chancel and transept windows are a more delicate blue with fewer bright sketches. As the intensity of the blue background increases one is led towards the mystery of God in the East window which is jewelled with brilliant splashes of colour.

The windows in the north and south aisles were executed by Chagall's friend Charles Marq and they complement the windows by Chagall. Blue, the colour of sky and of mystery, remains the basic hue but the abstract designs are simpler, with less shadows and tones. Marq even varied the deeper and lighter tones on the bright southern side so that the flow of light in the north aisle is balanced.

The guidebook to the church says:

"This is where the background tone of the windows becomes important: a blue of the most subtle and varied shading... which is conducive to meditation... The visitor who surrenders himself to the blue of the background is filled with a sense of wondrous tranquility, and perhaps even with an inkling of the entity of hidden things, of the unfathomable God".

So, by the visual artistry and vision of these two artists, the whole church is bathed in a contemplative blue light. Nearly every week meditations on the windows are held in the church. Rarely in a building have I experienced such an intense and overall sense of transcendence. So much so that it brought me to tears.

Janet Robinson

Our Julian Meeting

Two of us started the Trinity (Bradford, Yorkshire) Julian Meeting nearly three years ago. We'd been to other local JMs and thought Bradford could sustain one of its own.

Numbers

At the first meeting nine of us met in the Methodist Church Hall. From the beginning we had members from four different churches and three denominations. Numbers vary from 4-15, with an average of 9-10. Some people tried and didn't come back. Some come occasionally, others nearly every time.

Format

We meet from 7.30pm to 8.30pm, then have a cuppa and leave about 9.00pm. People seem to settle very easily into the silence, with little restlessness or fidgeting. "In silence no one can tell what you are thinking" but everyone certainly looks spiritual! The way we use the silence differs from many Julian Meetings.

First

We start with 10 minutes of silence using the Examen. We reflect on the past 24 hours, asking ourselves 3 questions: Where was God in the day? What is there to thank God for? What is there to ask forgiveness for?

Second

We then spend 10-15 minutes reflecting on printed prayers, spiritual writings or the words of hymns. Occasionally we gaze at icons. It is usually something visual, for people forget spoken words very easily.

Third

Our third silence, again 10-15 minutes, is usually Bible based using our imaginations to explore a passage and try to 'be there' ourselves.

Finally

We finish with an opportunity to share what God has shown

us in the silence. This is entirely voluntary, but we find people often want to share their experiences, if they can find the words to express them.

It works for us

Initially I was the only person willing to lead, and developed this format for quite selfish reasons: I need something to focus on in the silence and thought others might also. It seems to work for us, and the six who now lead usually keep to the same format. The themes seem to make us feel more gathered, and it is amazing how many different reactions we have to the same prayer or scripture passage.

Planning

With six people happy to lead we try to plan three months ahead, for everyone's convenience – and to ensure there is a keyholder coming! We try to meet every month but, as it is on the fourth Tuesday we sometimes have to cancel December. For most of us this is our only experience of contemplative prayer.

Second try

We did try to create an afternoon meeting in another part of Bradford, with little success. None of the five local churches had any experience of using silence in worship, nor of prayer groups other than for intercession. Several people said they couldn't be silent and still for even 10 minutes, and didn't want to try. A few did try, but only came once.

Re-try

Now there is just a core of three of us meeting in a member's house. We are trying for a re-launch this autumn, but in the end it is whoever responds to God's call to attend. It might have been easier to begin with just one church, but as the two of us who began the Meetings are a Methodist and an Anglican we had to be ecumenical from the start.

Andy Thurlow

Living Under The Star

No-one asked us what it was like
living for months under the slowly
birthing light.

Didn't know its shape then,
thought it a new moon, or congealing comets -
eyes fearful to examine detail.

Men came, asking 'the way'
and we pointed upwards, felt a deliverance -
the cool warmth, burning brightness explained.

The Star they said.
We, too close, too encapsulated
to see outside our cocoon.

They left, star-dust covering their faces.
We gathered ourselves into angels,
and followed.

Pauline Hawksworth.

It is good to have contributions for the Magazine from members, like John Ryall, who live outside the British Isles.

JM in Southern Africa

Sandra Johnson is our contact in Southern Africa. She sends out 25 'hard copy' versions of the Magazine, plus another 14 go by e-mail. Of the 25, five go to Meetings, for circulation among their members, and 20 go to lone members. Sandra says the meeting size varies, as it does anywhere, but 10 members is about average. So now nearly 100 people in southern Africa are part of the world-wide JM network.

BOOK REVIEWS - BOOK REVIEWS BOOK

FEAST AND FAST: food for Lent and Easter.

Christina Rees

Darton, Longman and Todd 2010 £8.99

ISBN: 978-0-232-52844-2

Give up Chocolate...Marmalade?

Pray more?

No, this is not a conventional Lent book. It is both unusual and thoughtful. The author starts by discussing mindful preparations for Lent. Indeed, it is a book to begin to read well before Ash Wednesday. She emphasises that we need to reflect on all aspects of our personal lives and realise that nourishing our spirits and souls may require thought and restraint about our material pleasures.

Short sections on preparation: Eating, Sleeping, Shopping well etc., are followed by meditations on entering into the spirit of Lent.

The best part of the book is the collection of recipes for quick, simple and satisfying meals to eat in Lent and also the ideas for an Easter feast.

Used carefully this book could give the reader a positive and refreshing approach to these Seasons – and add to one's collection of favourite recipes. I liked the Rainbow Stew and will try many more recipes next Lent..

Janet Robinson

BAREFOOT DISCIPLE: walking the way of passionate humility

Stephen Cherry

Continuum 2010 £9.99

ISBN 978 144 118 2869

'In our celebrity-obsessed culture, humility is unfashionable and too often dismissed or confused with the cringeing false humility of Uriah Heep. When genuine humility is energised

by real passion, a fresh and exciting light is shone on the challenge of following Jesus Christ today: humility is rediscovered as a healthy and life-giving virtue capable of transforming our Blame-Someone-Else society.

This fascinating and thought provoking read gave me much to think and pray about. The book easy to read, hard to put down and I was encouraged by the often amusing and self-deprecating personal stories Stephen Cherry used to illustrate particular ideas. His writing challenges us to consider what they might do to grow in humility and Christlikeness. We are encouraged to consider the effect that apparently deceptively small changes can make to our spiritual growth. One example is to try giving up grumbling for 40 days – try it, and see how often you catch yourself grumbling about something under your breath!

This book was advertised as the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book for 2011 but there is much to be gained from it at any time of the year. I strongly suspect that it will be a book that you keep re-reading and each time new depths will be reached and something else will resonate.

Helen Lems

CREATIVE RETREAT IDEAS: resources for short, day and weekend retreats with CD Rom

Sue Pickering

Canterbury Press 2010 £19.99

ISBN 978-1-84825-021-5

Sue Pickering's first book "Creative Ideas for Quiet Days", published in 2006, was very well received and provided a dozen themed resources for quiet days. This book goes much further, offering a veritable feast of resource material, both ready-made and build-your-own, for retreats of different lengths - day, overnight and weekend.

In addition to suggestions on planning the programme and organising the event there are twenty spiritual formation

resource sheets covering ways of praying; caring for creation; images of God; journaling; and a number of creative activities.

This is a toolbox of resources, not a book to read. It is a substantial tome with a CD Rom from which material can be downloaded and is well worth the cost. The material is contemplative in nature and can be used in whatever context might be appropriate, from prayer groups to quiet gardens. It's not just for busy experienced retreat leaders. I really hope that this book and CD will encourage JM members to share these resources within their groups and also consider inviting other like-minded people to explore contemplative spirituality in a retreat setting. You don't actually need a retreat house, just a local hall or large front room to get started. This book is the ideal resource to start helping busy and world-weary people to find rest and grow in God.

Yvonne Walker

PRAYING THE DARK HOURS: a night prayer companion ***Jim Cotter***

Canterbury Press 2011
£12.99 ISBN 978-1-84825-109-0

"Think *simplicity* and think *silence*" are this book's opening words. The first half of the book is liturgical: night prayer for each night of the week, with extra supplementary prayers and space for the reader's own prayers. The second half gives a year's calendar of thoughts for the night, originally published separately as *Waymarks*.

Over the last 30 years Jim Cotter has done much to make the traditional daily offices of the church come alive for many people. This book is a compilation of material that was previously published in *Prayer at Night* (1983) *Prayer at Night's Approaching* (2001) *Dazzling Darkness* (1999) and *Waymarks* (2001)

Gail Ballinger

**SEASONS OF GRACE: inspirational resources for the
Christian year**
Ann Lewin

Canterbury Press 2011 £14.99
ISBN 978 - 1 84825-090-1

Many JM members know Ann for her leading of retreats or quiet days for Julian Meetings at both national and local level. This book is a collection of material she has devised and used over several years. Starting with Advent, the first two sections reflect the events of Jesus' life as the Church's year unfolds; the third section, Ordinary Time, includes materials for a workshop on prayer; for use in a quiet garden; for a day for carers; leading a balanced life and much more.

This is a rich and valuable resource for both individuals and Julian Meetings. Ann's hope is that she will 'spark off creativity in people looking for fresh ways to present truths about God.' In this I think she succeeds.

This book was previously published in 2005, by Inspire, Methodist Publishing House with the title *Words by the Way*
Gail Ballinger

**SENSE AND NONSENSE: conversations with a clown
about spiritual things**
Malcolm Rothwell

Authorhouse 2011 £11.95
ISBN 978-1-4567-7010-5

This is a light-hearted attempt to examine what it is to live a spiritual life today. Written with energy and passion, it takes the form of a conversation between the author and the clown Zeno who is his alter ego. The conversational style allows the author to probe deeply into questions about prayer, silence, freedom, discernment and community.

Much of the material comes from the author's personal experience as a Methodist Minister, retreat giver and clown. Each chapter closes with some questions to ponder, and aids

to meditation, making it an ideal book to be discussed by a house group.

For all its light heartedness, this book is deeply spiritual. It asks some fundamental questions which those struggling with their faith and spiritual life, and those who find the church irrelevant, will find both challenging and hopeful. It offers spiritual nourishment and laughter originating from a profound and lived experience of God's love.

Passages on prayer and silence, as well as the meditations at the end of each chapter, provide a helpful lead in to silent prayer.

Excerpts from the book are on page 7

Yvonne Walker

THE NAKED NOW: learning to see as the mystics see

Richard Rohr

Crossroad Publishing Company 2009 £12

ISBN 978 0 8245 2543 9

American Franciscan contemplative Richard Rohr is a popular speaker and author. He explains in this book that "the Naked Now is the sacrament of the present moment, that will teach us how to actually experience our experiences and how to let them transform us. Words by themselves will invariably divide the moment; pure presence lets it be what it is, as it is."

The Naked Now is about "removing the straight jacket we have imposed on God and letting God's unconditional love set the only standard - a renaissance of the contemplative mind, the only truly unique alternative that religion has to offer the world." Refreshing insights into contemplative prayer include his suggestion of the word resonance. "All you can really do in the spiritual life is get tuned to receive the always present message...it has nothing to do with worthiness or the groups you belong to, but only inner resonance."

The book may be read straight through or in random chapters or sections, it ends with an appendix of exercises and suggestions for practicing the Naked Now. I recommend it for any contemplatives interested in a modern look at mysticism: it brings a breath of fresh air to ways of seeing and ways of being.

The Centre for Action and Contemplation was founded by Richard Rohr and information about it is available from the website www.cacradicalgrace.org

Yvonne Walker

MEISTER ECKHART: master of mystics

Richard Woods

Continuum 2011 £17.99

ISBN 978 144 1134425

Meister Eckhart: master of mystics is a collection of essays which explore a set of related themes linking Eckhart's medieval world and our own. Richard Woods covers topics such as women's role in spirituality and church life; climate change and the sacredness of Creation; the meaning of detachment; the blind alleys of 'spiritual technology'; art and Spirituality; pain and suffering; the meaning of contemplation and the place of prayer.

Woods also explores Eckhart's relevance for wider and deeper encounters among world religions, along with an investigation of his resources.

I found this book very hard going and it required a lot of concentration, (since I was recuperating after an operation when I read it, this may well have contributed).

It is definitely not aimed at anyone wanting an introduction to the writings of Eckhart: it is more for those who already have some familiarity with his work and wish to go deeper. It hasn't quelled my desire to learn more about Eckhart, but I'm not in any rush to go back to the book to finish reading it either.

Helen Lems

