

Magazine

December

2017

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 2017

CONTENTS	PAGE
The Silence of Taizé by Lukas	2
A Christmas Prayer / A Medieval Hymn of Praise	4
The Risk of Birth by Madeliene L'Engle	5
Meditation and Personality Type by Jennifer Tann	6
Poem by Elizabeth Mills	8
How Julian's Influence has Grown by Sheila Upjohn	9
Creative Meditation and Healing by JMN, NP, JT	12
Held	13
Manna by Steve Garnaas-Holmes	14
Contemplating Money by Ian Bailey	15
New On The JM Website by Ann Moran	16
Softnesse by Brian Morris	17
Two anthologies: Rain Falling by the River *Christopher Southgate*; Colliding with God *Richard Skinner*	18
Another Thin Place by Kathy Druce	20
Book Reviews: Waiting in Mindful Hope *Martina Lehane Sheehan;* Soulfulness - Deepening the Mindful Life *Brian Draper*; A Taste of Silence, *Bieke Vandekerckhove*; A Silent Melody - an experience of contemporary spiritual life, *Shirley de Boulay;* Listening & Spiritual Conversation *Sue Pickering;* Exploring Doubt - landscapes of loss and longing *Alex Wright;* Come Let us Age *Wanda Nash*	21-26
JM Magazine and contact details	27-28

The Silence of Taizé

At Taizé, silence has a central place. Some young adults spend the whole week in silence. At every prayer, all are invited to pray in silence for a long time, in the middle of the service. Some young people feel the need to take a step back from the crowd and from the daily programme. A few places are intended for spending a longer time in silence, like the St Stephen Spring or the village church.

During a big summer week one young man from Germany, Lukas, shared his reflection about the silence. Here he gives us some ideas he associates with silence, with a short explanation for each one.

Freeing our souls from all that burdens them
In daily life we are permanently confronted with problems, tasks and struggles. Sometimes I feel the need to get free from all this.

Listening to ourselves
We always receive a lot of expectations from those who live around us. Silence is an opportunity to focus on the things I really need from myself.

Being empty so that God can speak
The state of emptiness that goes with silence allows God to speak to my heart. How often are we not distracted from the call God directs to us?

Taking off our masks; encountering ourselves
Within silence I enter a room in which I can encounter my true self, without the masks I usually wear in front of others. In a personal relationship with God, I can trust him with all my heart.

Being filled by the presence of God
As a consequence of this renewed trust, the presence of God can fill my entire life. Silence is the first fruit of this.

Being a child
Like a child who trusts his parents, silence makes it possible for

me to feel comfortable and full of trust, in God's hands

Abandoning myself
In silence, I wish to abandon myself into God's hands, in order in my turn to respond with love to the love he has for me.

See www.taizé

If we make deficient responses to the Word, we fail to become ourselves at all.

Our response is to be one appropriate, not to the accomplishing of a *work*, but to the bearing of a *fruit*.

The goal it sets for us is not the amassing of deeds, good or bad, but simply the unimpeded experiencing of our own life as the Word abundantly bestows it.

Robert Farrar Capon



If you would be the light
you must endure the burning

To listen closely to every fibre of our being, at every moment of the day, is one of the most difficult things in the world, and yet it is essential if we mean to find the God whom we are seeking

Esther de Waal

God of the stable, whose cry is love,
Guide our steps to Bethlehem,
And bless us with your courage
To take time to slow down,
To be still.
Empty us of all our noise
That in silence and seeking
We may find your gift,
Which is wrapped not in tinsel
But in hope re-born,
And which is truly Christmas.
Amen



A Medieval Hymn of Praise

Mary the dawn — Christ the Perfect Day;
Mary the gate — Christ the Heavenly Way!
Mary the root — Christ the Mystic Vine;
Mary the grape — Christ the Sacred Wine!
Mary the wheat — Christ the Living Bread;
Mary the stem — Christ the Rose blood-red!
Mary the font — Christ the Cleansing Flood;
Mary the cup — Christ the Saving Blood!
Mary the temple — Christ the temple's Lord;
Mary the Shrine — Christ the God adored!
Mary the beacon — Christ the Haven's Rest;
Mary the mirror — Christ the Vision Blest!
Mary the mother — Christ the mother's son

By all things blest while endless ages run

Amen

The Risk of Birth

(Christmas, 1973)

This is no time for a child to be born,
With the earth betrayed by war & hate
And a comet slashing the sky to warn
That time runs out & the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born,
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
Honour & truth were trampled by scorn-
Yet here did the Saviour make his home.

When is the time for love to be born?
The inn is full on the planet earth,
And by a comet the sky is torn-
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

Madeleine L'Engle



Meditation and Personality Type

There are many aids to meditation but each of us has probably got - or regularly uses - one or two well-tried and tested ‘companions’. For some it may be a smooth round pebble, for others a hazelnut, for yet others looking at a picture or focussing on an icon. Others say they find all of these a distraction and will happily sit still with eyes closed and hands open from the start.

There is great variety in human personalities. A well-known measure is the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), another the Enneagram, yet another the KAI which measures style of creativity and problem solving.

Perhaps the best known is MBTI which is now available in two formats – Step 1, the basic tool, and Step 2 which analyses personality style in greater detail.
Step 1 measures four elements of the personality:
how we are energised
(internal energy – introverts, or externally- extroverts),
how we take in information
(through our five senses or through intuition),
how we arrive at decisions
(through structured processes or with reference to personal and societal values)
overall organising
(planfully and ordered, or going with the flow).

Each person taking the questionnaire receives a score for each element. Introverts are energised interiorally and, on the whole, prefer less ‘talk’. Either introverts or extroverts may or may not like meditation aids such as something to hold or something to look at, depending, in part, on how they prefer to take in information. If they use their senses, then icons, pictures, or something to hold may be a useful aid to stilling down. On the other hand, if they are informed by their intuition, they may find these a distraction. If their decision-

making is structured they may quite firmly adhere to a particular practice, whereas if their preference is informed by human-centred values, they may focus on the facilitator. And those whose preference is for overall order may find it more difficult to accept a variety of approaches to leading into silence and out again. For each of us, whether we are extroverted or introverted, together with the preferred way of taking in information and deciding things, affects how we engage with tasks and how we may prefer to enter into and sustain silence.

But it has been suggested that the least preferred, the hidden aspects of our personalities, sometimes called 'The Shadow', are also routes into prayer and meditation. In the less well developed areas of our personalities we may feel most vulnerable and turn to God. Thus the person who enjoys various 'visual aids' in other walks of life may, perhaps to their surprise, prefer to still down with none of these; where-as the person who dislikes the 'control' of too much order in the way information is presented may, in stillness, find meditation on an icon a profound experience. Deliberately making contact with The Shadow in silent meditation and prayer can enable us to grow in all sorts of ways.

Jennifer Tann

God made us in order that we could join in with his joy and delight.
How do we do this when we are old, and energy-less and have lost our dynamism and beauty?
What is there left for us to offer him?
Would he like our emptiness?

(From Wanda Nash's book reviewed on page 26)

If I were to sit and wait
Would You come?

Would I see Your Face again?
The Face I love the most
The Face that shines like no other

There is a kindness in Your Eyes
There is a warmth that radiates out

Of course, I do not know
But this is how it feels
This is how it always seems

You are not visible
But that does not mean You are not present

The warmth shines through in feeling
And the light radiates out in love

All the qualities that You bring
Are always available

It is not a case of will You come
What matters is that I come
And that I sit and wait.

This day and every day

Amen

Elizabeth Mills

How Julian's Influence Has Grown

and how she gave her name to the Julian Meetings

When I was at university in the 1950s I'd never heard of Julian of Norwich – despite studying mediaeval English and living in Norwich all my life. Today her assurance of God's unending love, and the words: "All Manner of thing shall be well" are cherished by thousands. This article tries to trace how the Holy Spirit has moved, in people and events, to bring Julian's message of over 600 years ago, into the consciousness of the 21st century.

It began with something that looked like a disaster. In an air raid on Norwich on 27th June 1942 St Julian's church, where Julian lived and wrote her book, received a direct hit. There were more pressing needs than rebuilding mediaeval churches in a city with thirty three of them still standing, and St Julian's might have been left as a ruin, along with two others badly damaged in the raid. But the Sisters of the Community of All Hallows, Ditchingham, and their chaplain Rev Paul Raybould resolved otherwise. They set themselves the task of raising the money to rebuild the church.

In 1944 T.S. Eliot's *The Four Quartets* was published, and in it he quoted Julian: "Joined by this joining and made holy by this holiness…. And all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well." It was the first time that many people had heard Julian's most famous words. Eliot was introduced to Julian by his friend Evelyn Underhill. She'd come across Julian's book in Grace Warrack's 1901 edition, and had then quoted Julian in her own ground-breaking book 'Mysticism', published in 1911.



On 8th May 1953 the newly-restored St Julian's church was rededicated, together with a new chapel, built on foundations of the original anchorhold. The Community of All Hallows also built a small hall and an adjoining guesthouse, with the pitch of the roof matching the roof of the church.

Then another religious community, the Community of the Love of God, an enclosed Anglican order at Fairacres, Oxford, plays a part. On 8th May 1972 three CLG Sisters, each of whom had been professed on Julian's day, reminded their chaplain Donald Allchin that the following year would be the 600th anniversary of Julian's Revelations. He replied: "We must do something about that. Alan Webster, the Dean of Norwich is my friend. I'll get in touch."

In the 1970s nearly all the 33 mediaeval churches in Norwich were open for worship. Most of them had tiny congregations, since many people had moved out of the city centre, or had stopped going to church altogether. A committee was set up to decide their future, and in November 1972 it decided to deconsecrate nearly all of them and turn them over to 'suitable secular uses.' I wrote an article in the Eastern Daily Press which ended:
"Churches are built to the glory of God and because of it, they turn into prayers themselves. They are the books of men and women who could neither read nor write: the testimony of craftsmen that God transfigures work. Empty or crowded our churches are full of prayers in wood, prayers in stone, prayers in glass. Those who want to be spared the expense of the buildings' upkeep so they can get on with preaching the word of God, fail to see that the message of these churches speaks aloud to people who may never open a prayer book or go to a service. They speak through materials to a materialistic age, and they are a challenge to it. We should not be embarrassed by their riches, but grateful we have so many. For was there ever a generation more beset by noise, and haste and false values, and was there ever a generation, therefore, more in

need of places where people can pray?"

Next day the phone rang: "Since you're so keen on prayer," said the Dean of Norwich, "perhaps you'd like to serve on a committee." My heart sank. But the committee was to plan the celebration of the 600th anniversary of Julian of Norwich.

Alan Webster sent out invitations to people all over the world who knew and loved Julian. On 8th May 1973 Julian's 600th anniversary was celebrated with a Festal Eucharist in Norwich Cathedral. It was the first time that Christians of all denominations had been able to pray there together since Henry VIII had dissolved the cathedral priory more than 400 years ago. It was made possible by the decisions of Vatican 2 eight years earlier in 1965.

Later in 1973 Hilary Wakeman, disappointed that hippies were enthusiastically embracing meditation while the Church seemed to ignore it, wrote to the newspapers of the various Christian denominations asking if people would like to meet together for meditation. There were hundreds of letters in reply. When I learnt that she and Pamela Fawcett were holding a day of contemplative prayer in the Prior's Hall, Norwich, I went along. Afterwards a group of us who lived in the Close began to meet for silent prayer. The Meetings were so new that they did not even have a name. But a name was necessary and, as groups formed, each was asked to suggest one. The name they chose, time and again, was Julian. And so the link was made with this woman who had spent her life in prayer and solitude 600 years before.

Sheila Upjohn

This is the first half of Sheila's article. The second half will be in the April 2018 Magazine.

JM does suffer from people's confusion over our name. Some people expect or assume that we promote Julian's writings, but we primarily value her encouragement to contemplative prayer.

Creative Meditation and Healing

There are times when nothing else will hold a moment of indescribable wonder, joy - or pain. When language seems inadequate; when time stands still. It is at these times that the spare language of Haiku silently offers a hand. Its very bareness and rawness help to say the inexpressible.

Haiku became popular in Japan, the country of origin, in the mid -17th century at the hands of two masters of the idiom. While a Japanese Haiku is written vertically, an English version consists of three lines, no more than 17 syllables and, as in the Japanese, with a 'cutting word', typically at the end of a line; the last line often containing an element of surprise:

Risk invites, puzzles, enthrals,
Wings grow, spiralling flight,
Joy unbounded

The wonder of a child in the womb, the anticipation of birth, poignantly expressed by a mother-to-be is sheer joy:

My velvet angel
In your sacred universe
Dancing like champagne

While subsequent reflection on a problematic childhood recalls times of anger that have been overcome by time:

Childhood…unknowing
Steps in rage, self-doubt
Understanding, sureness, now.

In illness the small silent hours of the very early morning can be a time of wakefulness and deep anxiety; a time when humans feel frightened. At such times, engaging the mind in writing a haiku can lift the heart and soul; crying out to God in personal meditation.

In damp…stillness creeps
Dusk hues awaken song
with ebbing pain…love

Inspiration for haiku is unpredictable in these waking early hours and they are times when thoughts of life unravelling can overwhelm.

Before the consciousness
He skeins our life…we unfold..
are then drawn home

Lying in the darkness, watching the first glimmers of soft light, it becomes clear that God never lets go of the skein however bleak things appear to be. He gently reels back. Tears may be of rage, sadness, happiness and sometimes of comprehension, and these can prompt the pen.

Is time mine or His?
Are dreams time re-spent to repent?
Or notes of hope?

Haiku, of all the ways in which words are used, perhaps comes the nearest to expressing the inexpressible.

MN, NP,JT

My grandchild was very poorly, and too weak even to lift herself up in bed. When she asked that I sit with her for a while, I went and lay down alongside her, as she was in a double bed. I then curved my arm round her head, so that she could feel my presence without it weighing on her in any way. My hand rested lightly on her shoulder or her back.

As I settled by her I spoke quietly, to reassure her. I said a few words gently at intervals, but otherwise just lay still, being a presence with her, which I hope was comforting.

Lying there I became aware of being, myself, held in a calm, strong presence: *underneath are the everlasting arms*. In a Julian Meeting I have at times felt a sense of God's presence enfolding me. No words. No actions. Just being together and needing nothing more. I hope my grandchild sensed not only my presence physically with her, but God surrounding us both with his healing grace.

Manna

In the morning on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance ... the Israelites ... said "What is it?" … Moses said to them, "It is the bread that God has given you to eat." Ex. 16.13-15

What gets you through the desert?
What gets you through?
What gets you through the chemo,
the healing from abuse, the bad marriage,
what gets you through
the job that tries to kill you,
the dark alley of the shadow of death,
the rotten places, the placeless places,
the evil you fear, the evil you've done,
your daily inadequacy,
what gets you through?

Some will call it courage or stamina,
luck or faith or reaching down deep.
But you know it's not you, not yours.
It's given. To you. For you.
From the Holy One.

The thread you follow,
the source you drink from,
the encouraging voice,
the Divine desire that you thrive,
the gift amid the desolation,
you find it anywhere—
the usual, the impossible,
the unwelcome.
You learn to recognize it.
You learn to receive it.

For that grace that gets you through

you learn to say thank you.

You learn to count on it,
and be surprised,
every morning.
Every morning.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes
www.unfolding light.net

Contemplating Money

The subject for contemplation in these pages is often a worthy and noble spiritual notion of the Godhead in some form. Money, however, is better known as the root of all evil. Or is it? And what should we better contemplate to deepen our spirituality than the challenges we face?

As the new JM Treasurer I presented the Annual Accounts to the JM National Council. Happily I can report that we had a small surplus of £2,000, after revising our subscription and postage rates. This has turned around a potential on-going loss, so thank you for being willing to pay these increases!

Jesus tells us not to store our treasure where moth and rust corrupt, so I'm pleased to say that National Council agreed to move our reserve savings to an account with Triodos Bank. This is an ethical bank, where our money will support people and organisations working to make a positive impact – culturally, socially and environmentally.

Whilst money can cause anxiety or stress or tempt us to wrong doing, it is neutral in some ways and can also be used for good. We hope we can say, with Luke 12 vs 34: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also". To read more about how banking can make a real difference visit www.triodos.co.uk

Ian Bailey
Treasurer to the Julian Meetings

New On The JM Website

www.thejulianmeetings.net

Our magazines and newsletters are now available to read as pdf documents in the Member's area of the website, starting with 2017 issues. A sample magazine from the previous year is available to all visitors to the website from the Magazine page.

We have had a great response for requests for suggestions for a new list of music resources and these are now available in the Resources and Forum sections of the Members area and will be available in printed form soon. More suggestions are very welcome.

On the home page we now have a 'News' section. Our website and shop have recently been redesigned and updated following a move to different software.

We like to use members photos and artwork on our website and social media, this is always credited to the member and remains copyright to them. Many thanks to all those who have already sent items in, and we would welcome more contributions. Please email your suggestions to Michael Cayley at: facebooktwitter@thejulianmeetings.net

Don't forget our Members Directory, which is our members equivalent of our Meetings Directory. You can display to other members or also to any visitor to the website. You can also enable a message facility, which does not reveal your email address, so that people can contact you. Log in to the Member's Area for more information.

We welcome comments and suggestions about our website and online facilities.
We are also grateful for any offers of help from anyone with web design or other IT skills.

Ann Moran
it@thejulianmeetings.net

Softnesse

We meet in quiet twice a month, and when
The silence ends with words spoken again
We surface slowly; as from sleep, and then,
'Was that the full time?' someone will complain.
Around, the river flows, the traffic runs;
The world pursues its endless, restless gait.
Within these walls, like silent monks and nuns
We sit, wait on the Word and meditate.
Silence; the softness of the robe which wraps
Around us, free from fear and free from stress.
Silence, between the words, important gaps
Where meaning hides which language can't express.
Like new-born babes, we nuzzle at the breast
And drink the love of God that's here expressed.

Brian Morris



(one of 27 sonnets written in response to Malcolm Guite's workshop on George Herbert's poem 'Prayer'.)

This is what you are to do: lift up your heart to the Lord with a gentle stirring of love, desiring him for his own sake and not for his gifts.

St John of the Cross

For those who attended the JM day in Derby, poetry may have figured more often than before in their quiet reading and meditation. So we offer reviews of two anthologies that may be of interest to our members.

RAIN FALLING BY THE RIVER
Christopher Southgate

Canterbury Press 2017 £11.99
ISBN 978 1 84825 968 3 (Also available as an e-book)

I had not read this author's poetry before and I am profoundly glad that I have now done so. This is his 8th collection, so how did I miss him before?

This book's poems have immediacy, taking one into subjects which are illuminated by original metaphors. They totally engage one's attention, make one think, then cease thinking and begin to absorb the meaning.

I like the wry humour in some, and daring takes on serious subjects. The poems are not long and all reveal aspects of the sacred in encounters with people, place, biblical stories and the human predicament.

Like all poetry collections, the individual poems need to be savoured, not read in a sitting. The themes are in five sections: points of departure; biblical subjects; poems of place; poems meditating on death, bereavement and suffering; and the author's responses to various catalysts. Consequently I would like to make my own arrangement, looking for one or another poem which speaks to my own condition. I shall enjoy making that acquaintance with this collection to give me inspiration.

Janet Robinson

COLLIDING WITH GOD: poems of faith and doubt
Richard Skinner

Wild Goose Publications 2017 £8.99
ISBN 978-1-84952-539-8

This is a very varied selection of religious poems. Many give takes on Bible stories; some are based closely on passages

from Julian of Norwich; others explore faith, doubt and the mystery and wonder of our world. There is a set of short invocations and finally a sequence of poems, most in ballad form, recounting the passion and resurrection of Jesus. Many of his poems gave me pause for thought.

The poems are written in approachable language, and vary both in subject matter and form, from tight formal structures to free verse. I sense that some are designed to be read aloud or sung during services.

I preferred the free verse poems to those in rhyming metres. Those that spoke most to me were the, at times, witty poems on contemporary subjects; also the beautiful invocations. The latter call on the natural world and our senses to fill us with a sense of the divine: several of them would make good lead-ins for periods of silent prayer .

One poem – *Prayer Meeting* – might describe a local JM session. It concludes:

> … we entered a silence
> beyond all words,
> a silence that deepened
> and thickened like honey in winter.

Michael Cayley

Inner noise can be quite exhausting... If you want to grow spiritually you have to stay inside the room of your spiritual raging and persevere. You have to continue to sit silently and honestly in God's presence, until the raging quiets down and your heart gradually becomes cleansed and quieted.

Sr. Johanna Domek

Quoted in 'The Taste of Silence', reviewed on page 22

Another Thin Place

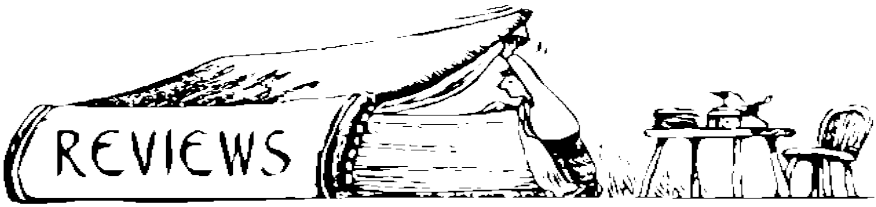
It doesn't **look** "thin"; - this bridge made of three stone slabs crossing a small river.
Five solid, stone steps descend to the shallow crystal water murmuring below.
I find my place – the third step down – and settle.
The sky; the stone; the water; the trees: all so ordinary and normal.
There is nothing airy-fairy or numinous here.

But the babbling of the water over the stones transforms itself into a song of joy and praise.
The stress in my neck and the stress in my spirit relax into peace.
The loneliness in my soul is dispelled by the recognition that I am part of the communion of saints, always surrounded by friends, seen or unseen.

The present moment is in eternity and eternity is in the presence of God. I rest in this place where the veil between heaven and earth seems no separation at all. When I get up, I seem to have given away the care that I brought with me and instead I have been given a hymn of blessed assurance. Heaven is not "above the bright blue sky". Heaven is in our hearts and our hearts are in heaven.

Praise the Lord for the thin places where He lifts the veil and shows us reality.

Kathy Druce
Lechlade JM



WAITING IN MINDFUL HOPE: wisdom for times of transition
Martina Lehane Sheehan

Veritas (Dublin) 2016 €9.99
ISBN 978 1 84730 759 0

Initially designed for use in Advent, as this book progressed the author felt it suitable at any time 'because the cultivation of *mindful living, attentive waiting and hope* are at the corner-stone of authentic living throughout the year.' Still, it remains a good Advent read, with some references to the season and opening with part of Patrick Kavanagh's poem *Advent*.

The book is arranged in three parts - waiting, mindfulness, hope - and looks at themes like listening and joy. It is easy to read and dip into with enough good stories and quotations to bring reading to life. I found it made a good companion to a retreat at home during the summer.

Gail Ballinger

Martina Lehan Sheehan is a psychotherapist and Director of Retreats & programes at Ennismore Retreat Centre, Co. Cork

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SOULFULNESS — Deepening the Mindful Life
Brian Draper

Hodder & Stoughton..2016 £13.99,
ISBN 978-1-473-63074-1

I feel this book reassures Christians that 'Mindfulness' sits comfortably with contemplative Christian practice. Written for people of all faiths and none, Brian describes his life with reference to the Bible and Christianity, not with the intention of persuading, but rather asking the question, "How can I live with soul".

I found a Mindfulness course led by an Anglican chaplain to be a life-changing experience, helping me deal with negative thoughts and distractions in prayer in a way I have never

learnt in Christian circles. Brian initially validates mindfulness skills, and explains the different levels of consciousness and the way the brain takes us deeper. Three further sections have chapters on awakening to our unique, inner aliveness; reconnecting lovingly with all parts of life; and giving flesh and blood expression to the soulful life. The epilogue then gives a summary, and lists the practical exercises, to help us be present, through living intentionally and compassionately.

Brian is a great communicator, retreat guide and facilitator. Although this feels like a big book, it is an easy read with largish print and well-spaced headings. The content is logical and practical, feeling like 'common sense'.

Jesus asks us to "Love the Lord your God with all your mind, all your heart, all your soul and all your strength." Soulfulness gently steers us to a deeper spirituality, helping us to manage stress, to flourish, live dynamically and creatively.

Fiona Elliott

THE TASTE OF SILENCE

Bieke Vandekerckhove Translated from the Dutch.

Liturgical press. Collegeville, Minnesota 2015
ISBN 978-0-8146-4773-8

Insightful essays by an author who, aged 19, was diagnosed with a form of Motor Neurone disease. The disease went into remission three years later, leaving her partially paralysed and very disabled, but with much help she has led an active life of teaching and counselling for more than twenty years.

The first essay is an anguished cry written, I suspect when she was first ill and feeling desperately weak and sad. She quotes Dutch theologian: Huub Oosterhuis: "…handle your sorrow in such a way that it does not isolate or embitter you. Stay connected. With others. With God. Yours is the future come what may." Later in life she accomplished this.

Sometimes a painful read, as one realises how her life and her beliefs are forged out of weakness and pain. Nonetheless it is inspiring because she has matured in belief, grown in wisdom. It could help anyone struggling with illness but also offers

much spiritual wisdom to the healthy.

Of Dutch origin, the book has quotations and images that are fresh and unusual. Bieke found hope and help in Christianity – particularly Benedictine spirituality - and in Zen Buddhism. Both practices have become 'the two lungs through which I breathe'. She examines the teaching of both and shows how they complement each other. For her, to love God is to love life in all its diversity. Being open to difference opens gates and enriches life.

An intensely personal book, thoughtful and wise, to which I shall return many times.

Janet Robinson

A SILENT MELODY An Experience of Contemporary Spiritual Life
Shirley du Boulay

Darton Longman & Todd, 2014, £12.99
ISBN 978-0-232-53074-2

In this book we accompany Shirley du Boulay on her own spiritual journey. She grew up in an Anglican family and went to an Anglican boarding school, sitting 'diligently through hymns and sermons, but they meant little to us.' Nonetheless she was very aware of a mystical presence in her life.

Two spiritual experiences have dominated her life. One when, walking in woods, she encountered a huge beech tree and became aware that 'the beech tree and I were one and that we were both one with the whole of the universe.' Some years later the second was a series of extraordinary Shaman experiences which she courageously describes. These culminated in a violin and bow getting up and beginning to play 'All by themselves. Quite high in the air with no one holding the instrument or the bow.' Her Guardian Musician, not in the least surprised, turned to the author and said 'When you are in the still centre it just happens.'

There were also encounters with the Hindu Maharishi Mahesh Yogi; a loving marriage to a former Jesuit priest; early widow-hood; Zen; and the acknowledgment that 'However great my

wish to be anchored in one religious tradition, it did not seem to be the way for me.' She ends with the thought that, 'even as we embrace spirituality, so we reject religion and yet we continue to try to define God.' The definition of God which draws du Boulay is that of God who is pure Being. The understanding of this Being is the spirituality she seeks, a spirituality concerned with wholeness, the numinous, the sacred, the search for meaning and the mystical.

A uniquely wide-ranging and brave book.

Jennifer Tann

LISTENING AND SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION
Sue Pickering

Canterbury Press 2017 £18.99
ISBN 978-1-84825-910-2

This book has two aims: first to help us learn to notice God's active presence in our everyday lives - 'God spotting' - and second to weave these into stories so that we can witness to God's love by sharing our experience with others. It's short chapters open up ways to hone our listening skills when we attend to ourselves, to God, to our church, to our communities and to the world. She offers us techniques and reflective questions to help us over-come our embarrassment at, or resistance to, speaking of our faith.

Although the book can be used for personal spiritual growth, to go deeper we need to use it with spiritual friends, or a church group, in order to grow in discipleship together. In a small group we can try putting our experiences into words; hear others witness to God's active presence among us in many ways; then we can reach out to the world, listening for the needs of others and shaping our response to these needs.

We can listen through creation, (Pickering calls this the first book) which teaches us about God's nature. The second book, scripture, tells of ordinary people whose struggles and lives are still relevant today, as they work out how God has been active in shaping history. Cultures may differ, but human nature remains the same! We are encouraged to pray

through the imagination, or lectio divina, to hear what God might be asking of us. Silence is the third book, asking us to avoid distractions so as to hear and learn the language of God within us through centring prayer or meditation - to hear the whispers of grace.

Being with God always precipitates action. In our groups we will discover what networks we are part of - work, hobbies, friends etc. Spiritual conversation is not just about God. It can include ethical dilemmas, illness, child-rearing, social justice, wonder, beauty, scientific inventions, and our sense of powerlessness. Listening respectfully to others helps us to build on what we have in common. We all need to make sense of life, including suffering, hope, connection with others, forgiveness and reconciliation. As trust grows, we can share stories from darker experiences: shame, failure and guilt. The Holy Spirit prompts us to share where Jesus has met us and lifted us.

Pickering assures us that when we are able to witness to God's grace in our experience, it is set free to continue its work among those who hear it proclaimed.

Ann Morris

EXPLORING DOUBT: Landscapes of Loss and Longing
Alex Wright

Darton Longman & Todd 2016 £12.99
ISBN 978-0-232-53060-5

This book stayed with me long after reading it. Alex writes poignantly of doubt, his account set in a much loved Norfolk landscape, 'a geography shaped by change', as he struggles to accept the end of a marriage and the collapse of life as he had known it. It was a separation that he had not expected nor wanted: 'I felt lost on an uncharted map of darkness,' and the sense of God seemed very distant.

His neighbour provided companionship and some sense of stability. In time, despair was supplanted by a determination to make a new life. Drawing on many writers from the Psalms to philosophy, theology to modern novels, Alex showed how

writers ‘made sense of their beliefs fundamentally through the exploration of doubt and ambiguity’. For him this was complemented and, in part sustained, by the beauty of the Norfolk coastline. He suggests that it is doubt, not conviction, which expresses the profound insights on religion and spirituality. ‘The capacity to doubt implies the capacity to believe, just as the capacity to believe suggests the capacity to question.’

In time Alex re-married and he found new happiness, while reflecting that ‘the transcendent value of writing of the dark as well as of the light…is surely worth celebrating’. Written with tenderness, acknowledgment of fragility, with almost-liquid prose, this is a book to savour and was a privilege to read.

Jennifer Tann

COME LET US AGE: an invitation to grow old boldly
Wanda Nash *edited by Poppy Nash and Debbie Thrower*

BRF 2017 £6.99
ISBN 978 0 85746 558 0

Wanda Nash began this book on getting older before she was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Edited by her daughter Poppy and friend Debby Thrower, it includes entries from her journal and extracts from her earlier book *Come Let Us Play*.

It starts by asking ‘What is old age for?’, convinced old age has a purpose. The book is full of hope; of excitement at the thought of approaching life beyond death; of a sense of being called to on-going prayer for the world. She is always ready for the new; questioning with a light touch, and humour, and playfulness. Wanda shares experiences of prayer when very ill, including ways to settle into silence while lying in bed, and sharing prayer with others gathered in silence round her bed.

Perhaps we could learn not to make problems centre stage. Perhaps we need to be aware of the positive features of old age and develop, not just a positive attitude, but approach it with joy and playfulness and thankfulness. It is not simply to be borne, but has real purpose in our, and others, lives.

Gail Ballinger

 (There is a brief quote from this book on page 3 of this magazine)

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