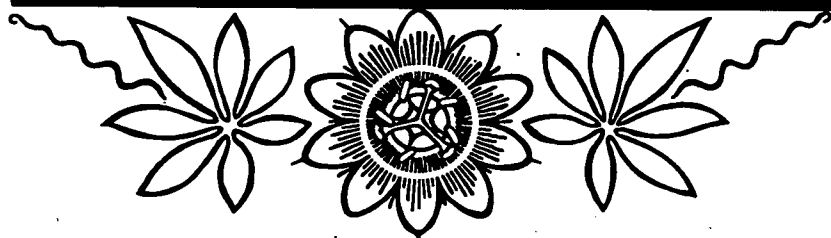


THE JULIAN MEETINGS

Magazine



August 2007

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**BE STILL
AND KNOW
THAT I
AM GOD**

Psalm 46:10. New Revised Standard Version

Jesus and Stillness

Wanda Nash

I have been asked to 'concertina' material offered to the annual Julian Meetings' conference held at Salisbury in June. The intention of the meeting was to encourage each other in our spiritual journey, and after a brief description of my own, we did something infinitely more important: we explored Jesus's development of stillness in the relationship he had with his father. At the time of Jesus's life on the earth, silent communication with God was a very esoteric idea, a hidden notion rooted in Judaic scripture but only taught to 'advanced' seekers. In those days the ideas and teachings of the Kabbalah were oral not written, and reserved for those with highly developed religious awareness. They have since been developed by the Jewish Hasidic movement. Maybe the amazement shown by the Temple doctors, when they met the enquiries of the boy Jesus, was around this very teaching of communicating with God in silence. Certainly such questions couldn't be answered by the local rabbi in Nazareth.

Following Jesus through his constant practice of withdrawal is gripping. It is recorded he withdrew to meet his father on his own at times of personal crisis; at times of public demonstration - either of approval as on Palm Sunday, or of disapproval as at Nazareth; at times of important discourse with the Jewish leaders; and of course at Gethsemane.

When Jesus withdrew from the public eye, it helped him to maintain his own equanimity and peacefulness in the face of great challenge. But was there something even deeper? Does being still with God actually affect *the spiritual warfare in high places*. This 'warfare between the powers' is becoming so much more obvious to us these days. Could it be the most useful and urgent thing we are being asked to do today? To offer ourselves to God in silence ready to stand in his unknowing, to be used by him in ways we may never recognize; not simply for our own balance but to help rebalance the battle between the light and the dark.

All the world's religions have their own tradition of stillness before God. Is it too fanciful to imagine getting together with each other to pray without words, may change the apparent direction of world today? Might it be the very most important thing we can work towards?

What would the Jesus Christ of Dame Julian's 'Revelations' say?,

Editorial

For our gathering at Salisbury there was a reflection by Wanda Nash, and in the afternoon four workshops: SWOT, The Book Room, Art and (The most popular) Silent Prayer in Other Faiths. There are reports from these workshops, plus an article from Yvonne Walker about deeper exploration into God. I suggest that inter-faith dialogue can develop both trust and understanding in our community, and possibly our own understanding of God. Therefore included is a commitment from the web pages of The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom. Can I also commend The Oxford Book of Prayer as a resource for prayer from many backgrounds?

The illustrations, apart from the Anne Stamper's 'I am', come from The Pilgrim's Progress, retold in Modern English by Jean Eatson from the original story by John Bunyan, Illustrated by Peter Wane, Scripture Union, used by permission of the Scripture Union. Do they reflect Christians we have met on our Journeys?

SWOT

Anne Stamper and Francis Ballinger

At the Julian Day in Salisbury about 20 people attended the SWOT workshop. This group analysed the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the Julian Meetings. At first they discussed and compared their meetings in small groups and then shared their ideas. Here are some of the points raised – you might like to think of them in relation to your own group.

Strengths

Most valued the *corporate* silence of the meetings and appreciated the non-directive and interdenominational nature, as well as belonging to a national network. The simplicity of the meetings, where only short preparation was required, was seen as a strength which offered people an experience of silent prayer not found often in church services. The mutual support given by members and the chance to share spiritual matters was important.

Weaknesses

In some meetings one denomination can dominate, which might alienate others, in other meetings one person can dominate so that the people do not share the leading. In some groups that meet after the silence to have tea or coffee there can be too much 'chat'. There are not many JMs in big cities and there are not very many men involved.

Opportunities

JMs present stillness in a troubled world and offer personal growth in prayer by experience. By visiting other JMs you can experience other ways of running a group and get fresh ideas, for example using objects and pictures and music to aid contemplation, and varying the times of meetings to suit a wider range of people. We need to find new ways of telling people about JM, for example through Diocesan spirituality advisers and their equivalents, and by arranging Quiet Days and Workshops

Threats

JM is so loosely defined that it is difficult to explain to others – the name can be confusing – what have we got to do with Julian? Has the vision faded over the 30 years? How can we renew that vision? Increasing age can lead a group to close. It is sometimes difficult to find people prepared to take on the leadership role – contact/ administrator/ host do not all have to be the same person. If a group gets too big it may need to split.

Perhaps this raises more questions than answers, but it might provide a basis for appraising your own Meeting and the National Advisory Group will certainly be discussing these points at their future meetings.



Some Thoughts from 'The Book Room'

Christine Rapsey

The people who came to this workshop were asked to bring a book which had been a help to them on their spiritual journey and needless to say we had an interesting collection to look at. Each person spoke movingly about their choice of book and we saw how God speaks to us through reading and how it does have the ability to guide, challenge, inspire and sometimes discipline us! We heard how some find sustaining a book easier than others, but all expressed the benefit which they had received from their reading.

The choice of books included moving accounts of the lives of faithful Christians; others were guides into contemplative prayer and finding space in our busy lives. Another was a Lent book which looked at the part played by some of the less familiar characters in the Passion Narratives. We also heard how sharing a book with a friend can stimulate some thought-provoking discussion. So here is the list of books which come highly recommended!

The Enduring Melody by Michael Mayne (DLT)

A reflection on his faith and retirement becomes also an account of dying.

God has a Dream by Desmond Tutu (Rider & Co ISBN1844135675)

An extremely personal and liberating message of hope and light in dark times.

The Heavenly Man by Paul Hattaway and Christian Brother Yun (Monarch Books ISBN1854245977)

A remarkable story of the power of faith found amidst persecution in China.

The Flame of Sacred Love by Brother Ramon (BRF)

Contemplative prayer based on Wesley's hymn, "O Thou Who Camest From Above"

Into the Silent Land by Martin Laird (DLT)

The practice of contemplation. Recommended by Rowan Williams and Desmond Tutu

Tune in Chill out by Jenny Baker & Moya Ratnayake (Christian Education)

Varied approaches to using contemplative prayer in youth work

Finding Sanctuary by Christopher Jamison (Weidenfeld & Nicholson)

The Abbot of Worth Abbey reaches out to those who are not sure what they believe by offering a new approach to life.

Power and Passion by Samuel Wells (Zondervan)

Six characters in search of resurrection- vividly paints the stories surrounding Jesus' cross and resurrection.

Silent Prayer in other faiths

Michael Tiley

Wanda Nash was our main speaker for the day and she also led this very popular and well attended afternoon option. Wanda began by telling us three stories related to the theme of the session about:

Her use of silent meditation with a group of prisoners. On one occasion there were only three attenders, and they were all unknown to her.. Asked, diffidently, what 'meditation ' meant to them they replied, in turn: 'I am an Afro-Caribbean boxer; and I always meditate before I go into the ring.' The second said 'I practice martial arts; we can't do it unless we meditate first'. The third, wearing dreadlocks, said 'I worship Wicca; we use white magic; it only works if we meditate'. Wanda commented that these examples show that the use of silent meditation is not as confined as some would imagine to Christian or to 'New Age' groups.

There was a Daoist hermit that she once met who shocked some of the unexpected, uninvited, Confucian visitors to his hut when they saw that he meditated without clothes on. He explained that he wanted to be completely open both spiritually and physically before God and felt that if he wore pants he would be covering up not only his physical 'private parts' but also his spiritual 'private parts,' his deepest centre. Wanda commented that we need to be as sensitive in discussing deeper issues with members of other faiths as we would in discussing matters relating to an individual's spiritual 'private parts'.

In one city the Inter-Faith Prayer Group was formed following a large public meeting organised by the Inter-Faith Forum for Christians, Jews and Muslims. Of the 400-500 members of the public who met, about 40% put up their hands to indicate they prayed in silence on a regular basis. It was then agreed that an inter-faith silent prayer group should be set up. However the mix of attendance has been disappointing as only one Jew and one Muslim attend on a regular monthly basis. The majority are Christians even though they meet in a 'neutral' setting in an H.E. College. The format of the monthly meeting is a reading of the 'Three Faiths Shared Prayer'(see below) followed by short readings from the Torah, the New Testament and from the Qur'an with silence between each reading and a longer silence at the end. The readings are simply absorbed, not analysed.

Wanda has a sample of prayers read at one of their previous meetings with the theme 'Better Than Violence'. She can e-mail this to anyone who is seriously interested in setting up an inter-faith group and sends a request to her at wandanash@tiscali.co.uk

A discussion followed about the importance of making contact with members of other faiths via the use of inter-faith silent prayer groups. This can lead to growth together, with a serious shared activity, while initially keeping points of difference to a minimum at the important initial stage. Other shared activities could be established once the participants from different faiths have developed a feeling of shared confidence in each other through the need for shared silence. This avoids the trap of merely coming together for 'inter-faith socialising' or 'cèrebralising'.

Some suggested the use of regular 'peace walks' with visits to the main participating places of worship where there could be brief presentations on the main practises and beliefs with traditional refreshments at each place. Most of us were aware of the fear of members of non-Christian faiths of running the risk of having to confront Christians from narrow minded evangelical backgrounds who would only want to use the occasion to make converts. Clearly it would be very important to assure those coming that only those who are genuinely interested in inter-faith activities would be invited.¹ Others wondered whether one could get over the initial diffidence of people from non-Christian faiths about attending inter-faith silent prayer groups by inviting their leaders to come initially with a group from their place of worship and possibly to lead a session following the format suggested above. Wanda commented that she had learned a very effective technique from a Sikh Leader for improving the quality of personal silence by:

A. holding the palms of your hands facing upwards while B. resting the backs of the hands on your legs and C. putting the tips of your thumbs and forefingers lightly together just above the centre of the nails in a circle for the time of the silent meditation. If you can then feel a slight pulse or rhythm you are 'getting there' and it can help you to maintain a deep silence. (It's not for everyone but I have found it to be beneficial.)

Since attending Wanda's session I have come across the newly formed Multi-Faith Chaplaincy which opened this year at Bristol University and details can be found on its website www.bristol.ac.uk/depts/chap and Wanda tells me

1. The Editor has experience of groups where different faiths 'put their cards on the table' developing mutual respect on the way

that similar multi-faith chaplaincies have opened at the Derby and Leicester Universities.² I would also recommend that you visit St Ethelburga's Church and Centre for Reconciliation and Peace (and the octagonal Arabic meditation and meeting tent in the garden) near to Liverpool Street station in the City of London. Its website is www.stethelburgas.org/index.htm

Three Faith Shared Prayers:

Introductory Prayer:

God of Hope and Compassion, friend of Abraham whom You called in faith to journey to a new future: we remember the ancient lands of the Middle East, birthplace of great cities and of our civilisation.

May we who name ourselves children of Abraham, call to mind all the peoples who honour him as father:

- * those who guard and celebrate the Torah;
- * those for whom the Word has walked on earth and lived among us;
- * those who follow the Prophet, peace be upon him –

Lord of reconciliation, we long for the day when You will provide Your blessing of peace for all nations of the earth. Help us to see in each other the family likeness which You have created, and the spiritual heritage which You have given us through Your faithful servant Abraham. Grow within us a generous spirit which recognises the common humanity in us all.

Short silence

Lord of all Creation, we stand before You impelled by visions of the harmony of humanity.

We are children of many traditions – inheritors of shared wisdom and tragic misunderstandings; of proud hopes, and humble successes.

In that which we share, let us see the common exchange

In that which we differ, let us wonder at the freedom You have given us;

In our unity and our differences, let us know the uniqueness that is God.

May there be an end to boasting and vainglory, and may arrogance dwindle in our time.

Help each one of us to bring our own offering of understanding: then in tranquillity may we go forward to build Your kingdom in the world, until the earth shall be filled with Your knowledge as the waters cover the sea.

Short silence

2. *Most hospitals have inter-faith chaplaincies* Editor.

Images of exploration which take us deeper into God

Yvonne Walker

There is an aspect of our spiritual journey which invites us to be explorers, venturing into the unknown, setting out on an adventure, not knowing where we will land – expressing both a foolhardiness in the not knowing as well as a trust in God's providence to land us safely on some distant unfamiliar shore.

The adventure into the unknown is made with the help of a trusty navigational aid, a compass. For it to work properly we need to stand still for a moment, let it settle and feel the magnetic pull it exerts. Although the image of the journey may be one of being on the move and keeping busy, it is also important to find time to settle and be still in order to feel the magnetic attraction of a loving God who is always calling and inviting us to a deeper relationship (remember God is a beckoning word).

Perhaps we might spend some time reflecting on the following questions:

- *Am I willing to risk exploring a sense of being drawn beyond my own security towards the unknown mystery - a sense of something more - in the silence of my prayer life and spiritual journey?*
- *Am I willing to leave my well satisfied comfort zone for a journey into the unknown?*
- *Does this attraction show itself as a restless heart forever searching for a Home that perhaps is not here?*
- *Am I being challenged to go beyond the maps which have securely charted my journey so far?*

It may not be comfortable in prayer or life to let go of certainty but by acknowledging that God is mystery we learn to grow in faith. It is good also to be aware that at no time does God force us to go out and explore uncharted waters, rather his is the gentle nudge of encouragement or the welcoming path of exploration. If we so wish, we can always choose to drop anchor in the shallow waters of the secure territory which is familiar and comfortable or we can sail on towards a new horizon.

Another helpful navigational aid is the map provided by the Bible and the life of Christ. It is reassuring to know that someone has been on this journey before so the lives of saints and writings of the mystics can also be helpful companions for our exploration, accompanying us as we face not only fear of the unknown but doubts, hesitations, anxieties and insecurities about the way ahead. We thank God for the gift of significant persons who, known to us and unknown, are or have been exploring the same journey and supporting us in their prayers.

When all else fails we have the wonderful image of the night sky with the stars to guide us in our uncharted territory of exploring the mystery of the spiritual life. This brings to mind the poem "Old maps no longer work" by Joyce Rupp in her book about the path of midlife spirituality called "Dear Heart, Come Home". She is reluctant to toss away the security of having a map then her soul whispers: "There was a time before maps when pilgrims travelled by the stars" and she realises that she can walk out into the dark night, wait for the stars and trust their guidance. This type of exploration is open-ended, full of promise and opportunity where every direction is possible.

It is good to remember that it is not so much the individual stars as the patterns of the constellations which can be a guide on our journey. So it can be helpful to look back each day at the pattern of our activities and ask the question "What has been life-giving, what was today's high point?" looking at the ordinary things we have done today. This may help us to reflect on what has been drawing us closer to God. Another way of asking the same question is "When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, to others, to God and the universe?"

As we journey deeper into these questions we may find ourselves reflecting on the fact that stars only shine in the dark, something that is worth remembering when we feel our journey is taking us to a very dark place: it is precisely there that we may discover God's plans for us most plainly.

If we are prepared to take risks, to leave the safety of harbour behind and seek the challenge of the actual voyage itself, we will find that we journey towards greater inner freedom and more wholeness as we grow closer to the loving God who is constantly inviting us to draw near. Exploration in the prayer of silence and on our spiritual journey can be both profound and meaningful if we allow it to be so by trusting God as our guide and companion on the way

Thoughts after the Quiet Day at Llangasty

Janet Robinson

These thoughts may be no one's but my own, aided by some of my favourite writers, so forgive me if I take refuge behind a communal pronoun
Our dealings with God and God's dealings with us are many and varied

People

There are good dealings with God in people, times when we do "Walk cheerfully over the world, meeting God in everyone" and the God in them reaches out to us in encouragement, comfort and love. At other times we can find nothing of God in the people we are engaging with. Then the God in us may be the God who nudges, offers humour, tolerance, even an admonitory shake of the head. Perhaps, in retrospect, we acknowledge regret, contrition and the hope that we will do better next time.

Church

The God we seek in church is not always there for us. There are times of vision, awe, thankfulness and comfort but there may be an absence, irritation, even boredom. The kernel of God may be in the community, the fellowship, the rejoicing or grieving together. At best, the waft of incense and the drifting smell of the unwashed, wood-smoked tramp in the back pew mingle and become one.

Absence

Often we have no dealings with God. Absence is more on our part than on God's. We forget, are too busy, neglectful, deliberately elsewhere. Yet sometimes even when we are trying to Be...Here...Now... there is apparent emptiness.

"Why no! I have never thought other than
That God is that great absence
In our lives, the empty silence within".

Duty

And what of

"The daily round, the common task ...
To furnish all we ought to ask.
Room to deny ourselves,
A road that brings us daily close to God"?

What God offers and what we accept can be a fruitful meeting place too often forgotten.

Rewards and Punishments

Our dealings may be coloured by old concepts, the grey fog of guilt, the crimson of a vengeful God. But:

"Whose little virtues deserve everlasting life in the vision of God? And whose vices deserve the gnawing flames of everlasting remorse?"

Sickness

In sickness of body or mind it may be that our dealings with God are fragmentary, an inarticulate hanging on. In the depths we may find reassurance or perhaps none:

"No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief
Comforter, where is thy comforting?"

It may not be until the pain has lessened that we look back and recognise the upholding and the infinite care – God dealing with us through the hands of others, for he has none but ours.

Anger, Bewilderment, Hurt

Dealings with God may be raw and angry. Why...? Why...? Was the creation worth it? Why don't you...? An honest rant may bring us closer to that unfathomable mystery we call God, though the unanswered questions may turn some of us away.

Beauty

And what of beauty? The blue of the lake and the greenness of the shore; Louis Armstrong's husky voice and the robin's winter song; the bliss of the bed and the benison of a good night's sleep. Are these momentary whiffs of eternity? They are certainly moments "in and out of time".

Silence

In solitary or communal silence or contemplation there may be, and it is always uncertain, a moment when we and God almost merge.

"The eye with which I see God is the same as that with which God sees me. My eye and the eye of God are one eye, one vision, one knowledge and one love. My eye and the eye of God are one."



Trinity

Gail Ballinger

The tracery of the north window of St Felix church, Felixkirk (North Yorkshire) contains a 14th century stained glass window depicting The Trinity. It shows the Son crucified on the hands and feet of the Father. The Father's arms are opened wide with the outstretched hands of his Son nailed to them. On the Father's left foot are nailed the feet of his Son. At the Father's feet is 'creation'. This globe is three quarters covered with waves and one quarter a growing sprig which I take to be corn. The Holy Spirit is shown by the Dove on Christ's left shoulder, reminding us of the Dove at his baptism and the Dove Noah released from the ark. The whole is surrounded by red glass and red glass fills the space between the Father's hands and feet as only his hands and feet are shown. The window itself while not strictly cross shaped, suggests the shape of the cross.

I have not seen this window. I know it only through a postcard received nearly ten years ago. In the intervening years it has spent part of its time in a box and part as a bookmark. This postcard has been the focus of my morning meditation for the last few days and will be for some time to come.

Sitting with this image...looking at it...absorbing it, it seemed to transcend and embody so much - and all and far more than doctrine can attempt - not only of Trinity but also of atonement. Both are doctrines I repeatedly hear people say they struggle with. The hands and feet of the Son and the Father are pierced at the same point and by the same nails. It reminded me in a new way that Jesus said I and the Father are one.

If I look up Felixkirk and St Felix Church on the internet I learn that Felixkirk is four miles ENE of Thirsk. I learn that the Domesday Book's name for Felixkirk was Fridebi and meant peace village. I learn about local families, about architecture.

But only the image on a 4 by 6 piece of card and ink is showing me that 'I and the Father are one.' It reminded me also that 'Of God himself no man can think. He may well be loved, but not thought.' Perhaps one day I shall see the window as it really is'. (*Cloud of Unknowing*)

Perhaps the postcards we send when we are on holiday are more significant than we can realise?

Press the 'Pause' Button

Deidre Morris

I recently led my first Julian Meeting since moving to Wakefield last autumn. I was using two consecutive tracks from the same CD, the first to lead into the silence, the second to lead out. As I am not technically minded, and the equipment was unfamiliar, the simplest thing was to set the machine up, put it on pause until ready to start, and pause it again between the tracks.

As I activated the pause button at the start of the silence, I realised that this is what we do at every Julian Meeting. We activate a pause button in our own lives. The world, like the CD, is still there but we choose to pause all the busyness and noise of our lives and give this 'pause' over to God.

Note that I did not switch off the CD – and neither do we switch off at a Julian Meeting. Rather, the power that could play the CD, or be used by us to be active in the world, is channelled into creating space and attention just for God.

Hopefully the practice of using the pause button at a Julian Meeting helps us to use it more often in our daily lives – to be proactive in making those spaces for God, however short they may be.



Julian comes to a care home

Joan Wilton

I'm just over 90, can get about only with a Zimmer frame and have recently come into a care home. I have been going to Julian meetings for a good many years, and thought sadly that it would be no longer possible. But no. Pauline, our convenor, asked, "Would you like us to come to you once a month?" Yes, indeed I would. So Marion brought a lovely gold candle – and I managed to get my candle-snuffer from my flat before it was sold – I had my Bible, the telephone could be unplugged, the kitchen timer produced in case I fell asleep – all things are possible! And we were off!

We usually meet in my room on a Friday afternoon. One Friday, it was hot so I left the door open. My room is the last one in the corridor so it's always quiet. But one day we were well into the silence when, without any hesitation, a carer walked in, squatted down beside me and said in her ordinary voice, 'What would you like to have for lunch tomorrow?' I quickly looked at the menu and silently made a few marks on it, and the carer left. We quickly went back into the silence, but had a good laugh afterwards.

A few weeks later, we were again well into the silence when there was a knock on the door. Without waiting for a reply, another carer came in with tea for three on a tray, quite unasked-for. She looked at me enquiringly. Spontaneously I said with a smile, "Thank you. We're being very holy in here." She retreated, somewhat bemused, and shut the door quietly. What next??

Silent Mud

Elizabeth Mills

As we enter the silence we are fed. We may not realise this. We may not perceive anything, but we are asked to exercise patience and to wait on God. God's action will take place in our lives if we can give this space to Him to be with us and in us.

So, as we enter the silence, we are seeking to draw closer to God. Silence can feed us on different levels. Space in our lives to be still even briefly can change our perspective. It may give us broader vision or a deeper insight or a clearer mind.

Think of muddy water gradually settling. As it does so, it separates and the mud and the water are gradually seen to be separate elements which do not actually belong together. They may have become mingled through the action of life, but actually their essence is quite different, quite apart.

When we are silent, we allow the 'mud' to separate from the water, for that which is thicker and more condensed in our lives to separate from that which enables us to flow and see more clearly.

The action of Love through silence should not be denied, for its momentum brings change, makes things new.

Take this time to be still and allow the 'mud' and the 'water' to separate, so that that which needs to be reflected in life, may become visible and apparent.

Bible Gateway: a resource for 'lead-ins'

Gail Ballinger

I discovered biblegateway.com when I asked a friend if I could borrow a Bible translation not among the several on our bookshelves to look for a less familiar translation of a familiar passage. By all means she said, but there might be an easier way...

www.biblegateway.com is a useful tool to find sentences, phrases or passages for 'Lead-ins' to a time of silence or for reflection during a quiet day. It is 'A free service for reading and researching Scripture online-all in the language or translation of your choice! We provide advanced tools you can use to search the Bible by keywords or verse, as well as other tools to enhance your study of the Bible.'

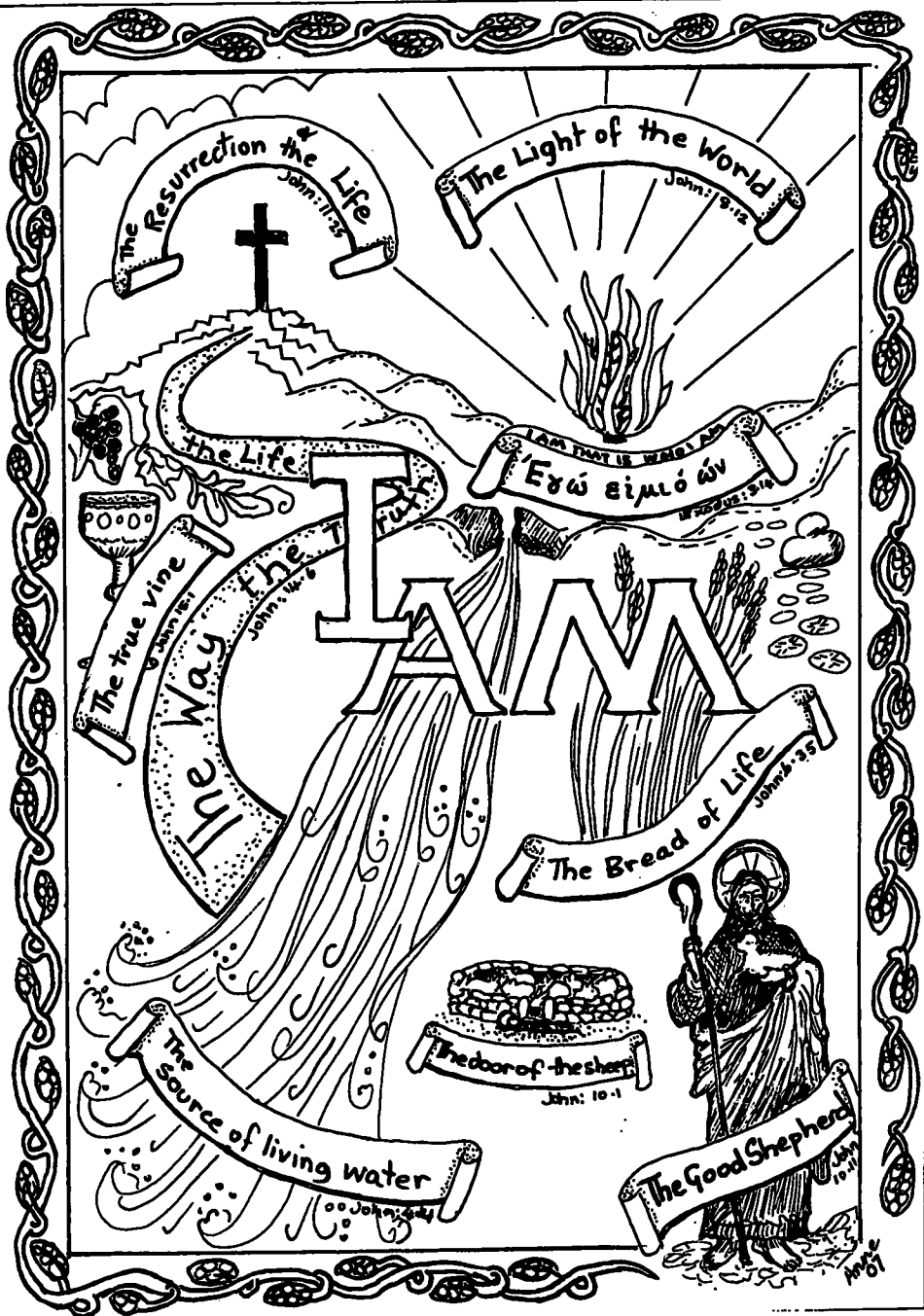
It can be used like a concordance and to download passages from a variety of translations and in a number of languages. Font sizes can be selected from extra small to extra large. There is a 'Verse of the day' and the ability to add the verse of the day to your website. It can also be listened to.

Working in Ghana

A Julian member, Gillian Portch, recently spent six months in Ghana. She was attached to the Anglican Eye Clinic at Jackie, Kumasi and did Outreaches into the rural villages picking up glaucoma and blindness, sometimes in the children. When asked about the possibility of silent prayer during her stay this was her interesting reply:

'Ghana is so full of life that it is noisy all of the time and also I got homesick and this tended to take over the silence. In the end I had to pray the rosary in the traditional way, concentrating on the Life of the Lord with intercessions on the Lord's Prayer and found this very calming with little silences along the way.

Ghana expresses its Christianity all of the time with texts on every vehicle, like Psalm 23, or on a shop By His Grace and this was very refreshing and I became more aware of God's will in the lives of the people around me and how they expressed it- and how we need to look for this in the very secular society around us here in England in the workaday world.'



Painting and Prayer

Anne Stamper

There are many ways to enter 'the sacred space of prayer'. Using imagination in prayer is well established in many traditions, as is using pictures and icons as a focus, but using our own creativity can add a new dimension.

The 'I AM' drawing on the opposite page is a pen and ink version of a larger gouache painting of mine and is a sort of visual meditation. People looking at my paintings often ask me 'where do you get your ideas?' so here is the background to this picture.

When I was taking my Certificate in Christian Education one of the texts was *The Theology of the Gospel of John* by D Moody Smith. When reading this book I was struck by the linking of the 'I am' sayings of Jesus as recorded in that Gospel with the Exodus story of the burning bush. As I read the pictures came into my head (I sketched the first ideas on the fly leaf of the book) and from that the painting grew. The border holding it all together is based on the Tudor plaster work in the Lady Chapel in my church where our Julian Group meets, and the Good Shepherd figure is taken from a small stained glass window, also in my church, but the rest just evolved.

I put the painting on a table in a side chapel in the church and a few other people saw it. It subsequently became a focus for a meditative Taizé style evening service which also used the 'I am' sayings.

Painting and prayer can compliment each other – **try it**

Shared act of reflection and commitment by the faith communities of the UK

The Inter Faith Network was invited by the Government to assist the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in developing and organising, as part of the official Millennium celebrations, a Shared Act of Reflection and Commitment by the faith communities of the UK. This complemented the Millennium Church Services held in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London.

This unprecedented event was held in the Royal Gallery in the Houses of Parliament on the morning of 3 January 2000 as part of the First Weekend Millennium celebrations. It was hosted on behalf of the Government by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, (DCMS) and the opening welcome was given by its Secretary of State, Rt Hon Chris Smith MP. It was held in the presence of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester and was attended by the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Speaker of the House of Commons together with faith community representatives and other distinguished guests.

Some 45 speakers and musicians from all parts of the UK took part in the programme of the event. Towards the end of it, leading faith community representatives invited the audience to join them in the Act of Commitment. The text of this (which has been used subsequently in a number of other events) is reproduced below. The event ended with some concluding reflections from the Prime Minister.

The occasion had major significance as an expression of commitment to an inclusive society which recognises the contribution which all the faiths make to national life.



An Act of Commitment

Faith community representatives:

***In a world scarred by the evils of war, racism, injustice and poverty,
we offer this joint Act of Commitment as we look to our shared future.***

All:

***We commit ourselves,
as people of many faiths,
to work together
for the common good,
uniting to build a better society,
grounded in values and ideals we share:***

***community,
personal integrity,
a sense of right and wrong,
learning, wisdom and love of truth,***

***care and compassion,
justice and peace,
respect for one another,
for the earth and its creatures.***

***We commit ourselves,
in a spirit of friendship and co-operation,
to work together
alongside all who share our values and ideals,
to help bring about a better world
now and for generations to come.***



**Promoting mutual respect
and understanding between
the faith communities
of the UK**

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Films on DVD

Into Great Silence

Directed by Philip Gröning

2 DVD set, Latin and French with subtitles; 162 minutes

Soda Pictures (Soda 033), 2007, £22.99

In 1987 Philip Gröning approached the Grande Chartreuse monastery in the French Alps to ask if he could make a film about the life of the monks; thirteen years later the monks agreed, but with strict conditions: he would have to live with them as part of the community. There could be no camera crew and no lights, no spoken commentary or accompanying background music and he must not interrupt the monks' devotions. Gröning lived amongst them for seven months, sharing in their monastic life and duties. He filmed alone.

The film opens with the biblical text on screen from the first book of Kings 19: 12 ... after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire and after the fire a still small voice...then moves to a novice at prayer. At intervals he stokes a wood burner to keep his room warm enough to pray in the cold winter in the French Alps. Monks are shown going about their daily manual duties and at prayer. Scenes are often shot from an unusual angle or are of part of an object. The pace is slow and measured, the atmosphere contemplative as we are drawn into the monastic life, almost becoming part of it. There is a moving sequence of still shots of still faces. There is no speech apart from the monks chanting and only the sounds of daily activity – sawing wood, clattering feet, stoking the stove – break the silence. The only exceptions are conversation on occasional recreational walks when, for example, monks discuss monastic life and toboggan in the snow. Towards the end a brief interview with a blind monk gives the viewer some additional insight into his life and monastic life in general.

The camera moves very slowly throughout, lingering over each scene – whether of monastic life or the surrounding countryside – recording the passage of the seasons and the rhythm of monastic life. Snow – falling and as a blanket on the landscape, melting waters, green and growing scenes of tree and field and above all the devotion of the brothers to God and to each other all contribute to a work of art. To see it is a deeply contemplative experience.

Into Great Silence was not widely screened in this country so its recent availability on DVD will be a blessing. The second disc contains 'extras': additional footage, a personal account of the filmmaking process and a guide to the Carthusian way of life. I was able to borrow a copy from my local public library. It is available from W H Smith (in store and online) and also on the internet e.g. from Amazon and MovieMail; prices vary.

Gail Ballinger



Books

Living the Lord's Prayer

Rowan Williams and Wendy Becket

Lion, 2007, £7.99

ISBN 978 0 7459 52338

This 78 page book, based on a BBC's Songs of Praise programme, is beautifully illustrated. Each short chapter has some paragraphs by the two authors on a phrase of the Lord's Prayer, often with commentary. Each of these paragraphs could on its own be a lead in to a time of meditation, either on one's own, or with a group.

This example is taken from page 68: reflecting upon "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Jesus' teaching often returns to this idea that a great time of trial or crisis is coming. A time when we shall find out what we are really capable of. So it is worthwhile praying to God, 'Give us what we need to face crisis when it comes and please God don't let us be precipitated into that too soon...' Pray that when the time of trial comes, when things get really difficult, you will have the resources to meet it.

Francis Ballinger

Do Nothing to Change Your Life- discovering what happens when you stop

Stephen Cottrell

Church House Publishing 2007 £6.99

ISBN 071514118-2

Many will have seen photos in the press of the author, who is the Bishop of Reading, handing out free egg-timers to commuters at Reading station in an attempt to help them to slow down and to re-develop a sense of wonder and purpose in life. Perhaps the title is a bit misleading until you take in the sub-title and you realise that he is not suggesting that you continue to 'carry on regardless' with your life. He says: *When I speak about what happens when we do nothing I am not in any way wanting to exalt laziness. Rather I want to celebrate what happens when we dare to stop and reconnect with the hiddenness inside ourselves where rest and play issue forth in all sorts of wild, unexpected and creative ways.*

This book is short (90 pages) and practical with many useful insights into the inner life including Chapter 9 'A Beginner's Guide to Sitting Still' which gives an excellent guide to going into meditation and centring by sitting correctly, observing our own breathing and closing your eyes with the option of leaving your palms facing upwards.

I certainly would endorse the cover blurb about this book: *Start an adventure of self-discovery, play and renewed creativity that will improve the way you see life and help you catch a glimpse of God.*

Michael Tiley

Early Methodist Spirituality: selected women's writings

edited by Paul Wesley Chilcote

Kingswood Books, 2007, £21.99

ISBN 0-687-33416-2

This is a well documented volume of selected writings of early Methodist women of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The editor must have had a very difficult task in selecting and editing the items he states: "I have included in this volume material that points specifically to the intersection of theology, prayer and practical Christianity."

The book is divided into three sections: spiritual autobiography, practical divinity and letters related to living and dying. In the introduction, setting the spiritual writings in their context, the editor explores the social and spiritual background of early Wesleyan Methodism, a life rooted in scripture, integrating the sacraments, prayer and community life with service to the oppressed.

The section on autobiography is fascinating, showing that women had a prominent place in early Methodism, they pioneered social services, Sunday schools and work with children and had leadership roles in the movement as class leaders, preachers, spiritual mentors involved in conducting prayer and fellowship meetings.

I found this hefty tome a compelling read, the women's diaries, journals, letters, prayers and sacred poems providing plenty of food for thought and reflection. On a personal note it has been affirming for me as a Methodist lay woman to read the actual words written centuries ago by these amazing women about their way of living out their Christian faith. It is important that their voices should be heard.

Yvonne Walker

Exploring Prayer

Sue Mayfield

Lion Publishing, 2007, £6.99

ISBN 0-7459-5237-6

When I read the names of people who had influenced and inspired Sue Mayfield, I just knew this book must be good – names like, Margaret Silf, John Pritchard, Angela Ashwin, and Wanda Nash to name but a few. The book is divided into two parts: the first looks at the many aspects of prayer including Encounter, Celebration, Awareness and Listening. The second part looks at how to pray and includes praying with the senses, with pictures, with music, with touch and words etc. Each chapter has exercises to help readers discover what works for them. The bite size sections are interspersed with beautiful full-colour illustrations which Lion Publishing do so well.

This is a very accessible and practical book recommended for those starting out on a journey of prayer as well as for those seeking some fresh ideas for spending time with God. Members of Julian Meetings may find some of it too busy. It would make an excellent resource for a house group or Lent course on prayer. For those involved in quiet days and retreats there is a wealth of excellent material to be explored.

Yvonne Walker

Making the Most of Midlife

Julia McGuinness

SPCK, 2006, £8.99

ISBN 0-281-05787-7

Making the Most of Midlife is subtitled Christian choices and growth. The author uses a wide range of insights gained from her roles as a writer, counsellor and Myers Briggs consultant, to examine the challenges of midlife from a Christian perspective. She quotes many examples from characters in the bible and from the way Jesus dealt with people as well as individual case studies.

The book includes sections for reflecting, responding and individual exercises. It examines relationships and acceptance of the ageing body. It reminds us of our need to trust in God's sovereignty, that some questions have to stay unanswered and that ultimately all will be taken away from us requiring a mature detachment from material things. Nevertheless, it demonstrates how God is faithful to His people, whom he made, and works with us rather than starts afresh. He wrestles with us to bring us to maturity. The emphasis in the book is on the opportunity midlife gives for seeing new possibilities and finding a new point of balance.

Whilst the book examines many of the issues that are particularly likely to arise in midlife they are ones that could helpfully be faced by us all at different times.

It could be an aid to personal development during a period of reflection or on a retreat or be used in group discussion by any adults. The book concludes with a chapter of eight "Midlife meeting ideas" each comprising of an ice-breaker, Bible reading and discussion and prayer activity. This could profitably be presented as a "Making the most of Life" course.

Diane Harrison



Safer than a known Way: personal prayers with a Christmas supplement

Ruth Etchells

SPCK, 2006, £9.99

ISBN 0281057850

The title of this book is taken from the well known quotation used by King George VI in his Christmas broadcast of 1939:

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied, 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.'

Minnie Louise Hoskins

The book provides two readings for each of 31 days and is followed by a seasonal supplement for Advent, Christmas, New Year, and Epiphany.

For the morning and evening of each day the author provides a short reading. These are drawn from a variety of sources, some are scriptural but many are from other inspirational writers varying from St Augustine to Lancelot Andrews and RS Thomas. Each reading is followed by Ruth Etchell's own reflections and prayer; as she explains in the introduction 'our own daily converse with God...inevitably starts from where we are ourselves in relation to him and the world'. This means that sometimes these reflections may seem right for the reader and at other times they may not fit, for example on the morning of the 13th day I read 'here I am, my Lord facing another ordinary rather grey day with its routine and its tedium and its pettinesses' which was not true for me on that particular day! However there were other times when her sentiments matched mine and I was able to feel comforted that there were others who felt the same and allow her prayer to lead me.

Overall I found this a helpful book and it introduced me to a number of poems and writings with which I was not familiar – the notes at the end give all the sources. I followed this book for the month of March and so I did not use the seasonal supplement, but come Advent I intend to do so.

Anne Stamper

Walking the Story

Jane Leach

Inspire, 2007, £12.99

ISBN 1-905958-07-8

Jane Leach walked the pilgrim route from the French foothills of the Pyrenees across northern Spain to Santiago, setting out in Easter Week 2005 and arriving five weeks later in time for Pentecost. This book is her account of the experience of pilgrimage – but more than that it also invites readers to make a parallel pilgrimage. The invitation to the pilgrim is to *listen to the echoes of their own heart*.

There are five chapters – one for each week of Jane's walking. In them we are invited to reflect upon the key questions raised by the experience and, as she did, to keep a journal. At the end of each chapter there are six meditations with a Bible passage, with beautiful photographs, some searching questions, prayer. *Walking the Camino means surrendering one's freedom, albeit for a short time... Once the path is chosen there is little to do but follow it*. We will gain most if we are prepared to surrender some freedom and take time to read slowly and reflect – in other words to be committed to *our* pilgrimage. We will find ourselves reflecting on our creatureliness, vulnerability, what it is like to battle with extreme weather in open, isolated spaces; on hospitality, what it feels like to be a stranger, a refugee and on Christ the Pilgrim.

Although the author envisages that those who read the book will make their own devotional journey and individually work through the meditations, a final section includes valuable notes for group leaders for those who would like to do their exploring in a group.

Beautifully produced on high quality paper, excellent layout and illustrated with photographs, this book is a truly inspiring read.

Gail Ballinger



The Julian Meetings

Foster the teaching and practice of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition

Encourage people to practise contemplative prayer in their daily lives, and explore ways of doing this which are appropriate for them

Support the individual ecumenical Julian Meetings - groups whose members meet regularly to practise Christian contemplative prayer together.

The views expressed in this magazine are those of each writer, and are not necessarily held by the Editor or the Advisory Group.

The Editor is always pleased to receive original articles, short meditations, stories, poems or artwork for use in the magazine. Book reviews for publication should include date, publisher ISBN and price.

Contributions for the next magazine should be sent to the Editor by

10 October 2007

Contributions by email are particularly welcome.

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