

THE JULIAN MEETINGS *Magazine*



December 2004

£2.00



Franz Gräbel

Gutacherin auf der Wiese / Woman from Gutach in the meadow (c.1900)

Created to be

Celia Jones

Your beauty beholding
I search for your meaning
as sunkissed you ripen
exploding with joy.

Now sweetness and sorrow
will join for a moment
at one with each other
and blessing for all.

As, mystery unfolding,
with new life emerging,
you fulfil your purpose
and meaning comes clear.

With love you are fashioned
by love you are nurtured
bound for eternity
in glory with God.

God in the depths of us receives God who comes to us. It is God
contemplating God.

—John of Ruysbroeck (1293–1381)

Gravid: 23 December

Judith Filkin

The image that resonates with me, particularly at this time of the year, is late pregnancy. The enormity of it, in every sense of the word, the necessity, for both mother and child, of letting go, of abandoning their previous existence. That until they relinquish their symbiosis they cannot know each other, they cannot see each other's face. I remember about a fortnight before my son was born feeling that he was safe inside me and that I did not relinquish him into the dangerous world, a world in which I would be less able to protect him, keep him safe from injury, keep him safe from being teased in the playground. But to continue pregnant would be to condemn both mother and child to death.

The newborn baby keeps its eyes mostly tight shut, as if everything was too much for it. Plethora of stimuli. But think how bored it would be, a few months later, if it was returned to the minimal stimulation of the uterus.

And the mother stops being two persons, her own Russian doll. Physically and mentally she can never return to her pre-gravid state, but no more than her child can she hang on to pregnancy.

And I feel my body pregnant again, that extraordinary experience of being inhabited by another personality, the casual kicks and thumps, the *strangeness* of inhabiting a body which is no longer your own, which you can no longer rely on for anything. The waiting – “Watch therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour” – dead right there, the extraordinary suspension of late pregnancy. Is that another Braxton-Hicks, or does it herald the Nativity?

You cannot know with *what* you are pregnant, to what you are about to give birth. You are both portentous and powerless.

And now, a quarter of a century later (and after a night in which *both* my children slept at home – no remote Antarctic tent for my son this Christmas), in the darkness of the year, nativity two days away, prodded by presence and gravid with prayer which elbow their way through my mind and body, I wonder what relinquishment is required of me in order to see face to face, to hold in my hands and arms, what has grown and been held within my body and mind.

The silent sermon

Anon

A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the minister decided to visit him. It was a chilly evening. The minister found the man at home, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for the minister's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a comfortable chair near the fireplace and waited. The minister made himself at home but said nothing.

In the grave silence, he contemplated the dance of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the minister took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet contemplation. As the one lone ember's flame flickered and diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and dead.

Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. The minister glanced at his watch and chose this time to leave; he slowly stood up, picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it. As the minister reached the door to leave, his host said, with a tear running down his cheek, "Thank you so much for your fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday."

We live in a world today which tries to say too much with too little. Consequently, few listen. Sometimes the best sermons are the ones left unspoken. What silent message would God have you share with someone today? "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven." (Matthew 5:15).

This article is from the spring 2004 issue of 'Network Review', the Journal of the Scientific and Medical Network. It was submitted by George Dobinson.

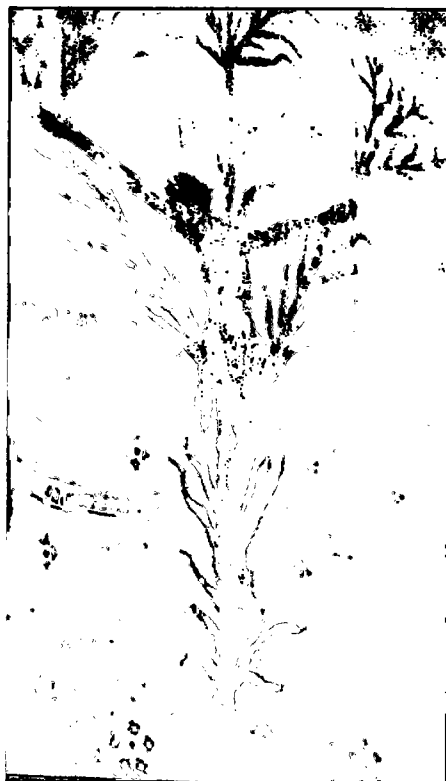
All Saints, Godshill

James Toon

The village of Godshill, on the Isle of Wight, recalls Psalm 68 verse 16: "This is God's hill, in which it pleaseth him to dwell." There has been a church here since the 11th century. The current building, the fourth, dates from the 15th century and is in the Perpendicular style. It is large, light, and spacious.

What sets the church apart is a mediaeval wall-painting of the Lily Cross: a picture of Christ crucified on a flowering lily. This is the only one in England, and there are only two more in the rest of Europe.

High on a wall is a painting by Rubens of Daniel in the Lion's Den. This must have been bequeathed to the church some time ago.



*Left:
The Lily Cross*

*Opposite, top:
All Saints, Godshill*

*Opposite, bottom:
"Daniel in the Lion's Den",
by Rubens (c.1615)*

Sheldon prayer meadow

Jenny Draffan

The path rises
only to come down.
My feet walk
as if they know the way.
I pause.
Nature cries out, see, see
the hills, the grass, the folds
where little houses nestle
as the sun goes down.
The grasses murmur
See, we know the way,
and bend beneath your feet
at close of day.

Sheldon is the Devon home of the Society of Mary and Martha, and a centre for retreats and quiet days as well as being the base for their specialist work of supporting ministers who need refreshment.

This year for the first time Sheldon's traditional hay meadow was carefully cut with a meandering path and opened for a week in July to people of any faith or none. Allowing the path to lead and taking in the beauty of grass and the surrounding hills moves people easily towards wonder and prayer. It was so well visited that 2005 will, conditions permitting, see its return.

The longest journey is the journey inward.
—Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961)

Carpe diem: seize the day

Joan Kerchhoff

Commonsense tells me
not to go riding again,
even when hoofbeats throb in my ear.

Commonsense tells me
not to go sailing again,
even when saltwind streams through my hair.

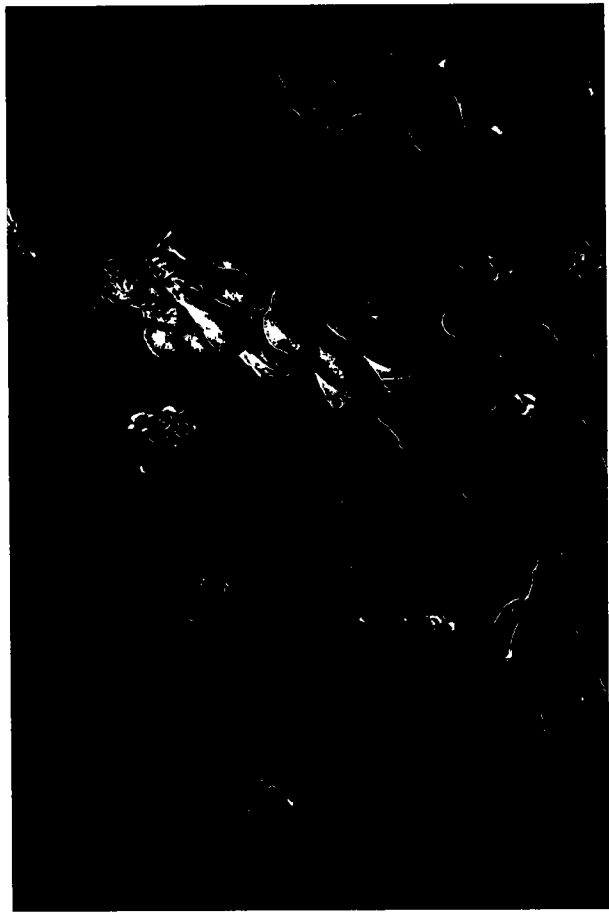
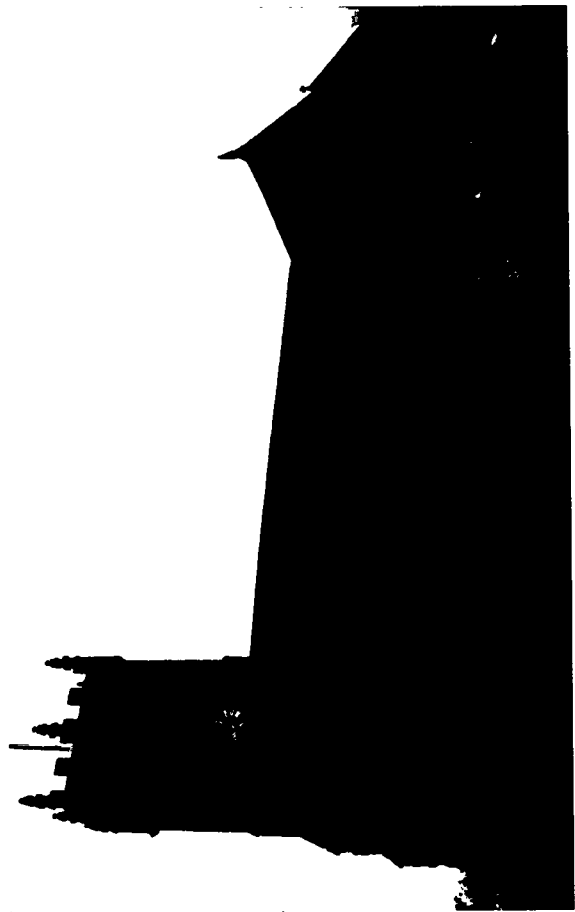
Commonsense tells me
not to hold placards again,
even when Justice and Love plead for air.

But what is that sound deep within me –
a mourning, a howling,
a crying of Soul?

I don't always listen
to Commonsense !

God's activity in the world, whether in creation or in redemption, remains
in an important sense mysterious.

—Peter Baelz



Contemplative drawing

John Hawkins

In the gospels, 'seeing' is often used as a metaphor for 'understanding'. Having been conditioned from childhood to pray with closed eyes, we may sometimes find it better to keep them open, allowing the imagination to work, or simply gazing lovingly on some natural object or work of art.

A landscape may have been formed over millennia; a tree grown over centuries; a painting taken many years to complete. Is it not worth spending ten minutes just gazing? The more we gaze, the better we can understand. Indeed, artists often speak in terms *identifying with* what they are drawing, painting or sculpting. This is what Augustus Rodin had to say:

"The artist is the *confidant* of nature. Flowers carry on a dialogue with him through the graceful bending of their stems and the harmoniously tinted nuances of their blossoms. Every flower has a cordial word which nature directs towards him."

This is not far from the language of contemplative prayer. A few years ago, I was introduced to the art of contemplative drawing on a Creative Arts Retreat. It is an art accessible to anyone, regardless of artistic ability, because it is about seeing rather than achieving: the aim is to become familiar with every detail of the object rather than produce a recognisable depiction of it. Process is more important than product.

Take as your object a leaf with an interesting shape, and place this on a flat surface in front of you. Tape a large piece of drawing paper onto a table alongside you. Resolve not to look at your drawing until the task is complete. Then very slowly, with your eyes firmly on the leaf, draw its outline, keeping your pencil on the paper all the time, and matching its movement with the movement of your eye as it follows every minute variation of the edge of the leaf.

Don't be concerned about what your drawing will look like. It probably won't look anything like a leaf. But for the length of time it takes to complete its contour, you have been giving the leaf your undivided attention (a kind of prayer in itself), the information passing direct from eye to hand without interruption. If you later want to make an accurate drawing of the leaf, this experience will have been invaluable.

A Creative Arts retreat offers many opportunities to look at nature contemplatively, to unwind, to spend time meditating on God's creation and to enter into the creative process oneself. Like the Julian Meetings, the retreats are fully ecumenical, bringing together people of widely varying traditions and often providing opportunities to share different forms of worship. Next year's programme of about 40 retreats at home and abroad will be published shortly before Christmas and may be obtained by sending a stamped self-addressed 9" by 6" envelope to the Creative Arts Retreat Movement, 136 London Road, Gloucester GL1 3PL.

André Kertész

Washington Square, Winter (1954)



Book reviews

Meditation and Contemplative Prayer

Rosalind Smith

**Friends Fellowship of Healing, £1.50 plus postage. Available from
15 East Street, Bluntisham, Huntingdon, PE28 3LS**

This introduction to meditation has the rare quality of being suitable for people outside the institutional church and people inside it as well. The author is a Quaker. Basically, she says, meditation is a stilling of the mind, then an openness, a willingness to receive. She outlines different approaches to that stilling, and includes a brief consideration of the chakras, the energy centres of the body.

The second half of the booklet moves into more traditional Christian language, talking for example of "infused contemplation" as the work of grace. Yet even here she retains a style that would not deter a non-churchgoer. And this fits with her assertion that more and more people are aspiring to the spiritual life – a life not of organised religion with priests and mediators, but of "a direct approach to the God-head or Source."

This is a sane, intelligent and very useful booklet.

Hilary Wakeman

Silence and Witness: The Quaker Tradition

Michael Birkel

Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004, £9.95

This book is one of a series which seeks to give extended introductions to the various Christian spiritual traditions. It presents the facts of Quaker history very clearly and shows the development and change in patterns of worship in Britain and the USA. The chapter headings are good indications of the salient aspects of Quakerism: spiritual ideals, discernment, nurturing the inward life, the testimonies. They also point the way to valuable insights for anyone wishing to enrich their life of prayer and of prayer leading to action. The author gives examples of the lives of individual Quakers to illustrate this. The choice of extended quotations is varied, providing a rich mine for prayerful use, and the footnotes are comprehensive. It is a valuable book which deserves slow and thoughtful reading.

Mark and Janet Robinson

Journeying Home: Unlocking the Door to Spiritual Recovery

Fiona Gardner

Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004, £9.95

Our experiences of growing up play a large part in shaping our ability to love and be loved: we carry expectations from the past into our present relationships, often unconsciously.

The author, a psychotherapist, explores some obstacles that prevent us from fully engaging with God, others and ourselves, and looks at how we might overcome them. She draws on both psychology and spiritual insights, and uses stories from literature and the Bible as well as her clinical experience to illustrate her reflections. I found her style clear and engaging, with some interesting angles on some well-known Bible stories.

Whilst she affirms the value of the psychological approach in helping us unearth and understand what is going on in our inner world, it eventually parts company with spirituality. Secular psychotherapy aims to help us make personal adjustments to become independent individuals. But the Christian's destiny is to grow in trusting dependence on God, only finding ourselves as we lose our self-absorption and focus on Him.

Yet she feels contemplative prayer is uniquely linked to both approaches: as we seek to make inner space for God, we are faced with what really lies deep inside ourselves, and can bring what we find into the healing presence of God's Spirit within. But ultimately we need to let go even of our own understanding and trust to the relationship: "to meet Him in the silence and in the present moment and to let God's silence work on us."

Julie McGuinness

The Spirit of Tranquillity

Jean Watson

Lion Books, 2004, £6.99

A small CD-sized book with ten meditations each on facing pages and an accompanying music CD. Both the introduction to each section and quotations seem very appropriate. The selection of classical music is well-known and fairly gentle. Words and music either together or separately can indeed set a mood of tranquillity and peace so could provide lead-ins or lead-outs for individual or group use. It would make a pleasant gift.

Francis Ballinger

Sounding the Silence

John Skinner

Gracewing, 2004, £7.99

This book provides some simple models of praying in silence for half an hour based on themes from a number of Christian traditions, including the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Julian of Norwich, George Fox, and Swami Abishhiktananda. The book has twelve sections for each month of the year, each containing themed readings and poems (suitable for use as lead-ins for groups as well as for individuals), and some beautiful seasonal woodcut illustrations for each section.

It has been a pleasure to use this book with its range of themes which are soundly based upon the author's background with Jesuits, and more recently with the Carthusians in England, now based at their Charterhouse at Parkminster in Sussex, with some of their contributions included in the text.

The author has set up a growing network of Hear our Silence house groups in England which use some of the approaches suggested in the book. Two quotations from the helpful Prelude – First Principles opening section of the book provide the reader with some insight into those approaches :

"prayer is entering into the depths of the heart and dwelling there in peace..."

"we do not know how to pray: but there is a spirit within who does..."

Michael Tiley

Waiting on God

Denis McBride

Redemptorist Publications, £9.95, 2004

I took this book on holiday and found myself reading a chapter, then walking and reflecting on what I had read. Even when visiting places of interest my mind was exploring images of the Biblical characters portrayed in various chapters.

In his very readable book Denis McBride reflects on the different understandings of waiting on God through the characters of Abraham, Sarah, Elizabeth, Zachariah and others. He gave me new insights into the experiences of Jesus as he too waited on God.

The writer explores the different feelings that experiences of waiting can bring: joy, hope anxiety, absence and so on. He brings to new life the stories and characters of the Old and New Testament through his theme of waiting and always connects them to everyday experiences in our modern world.

As I have said, I read this book on holiday. I have also just retired and I am learning to slow down and use the time and space that this time of my life gives me. In my case this was a very timely read and has given me much to mull over. I wonder, however, how I might have read it in a very busy and stressful context. I suspect I would have found it equally helpful but much more challenging to assimilate.

Anne Doyle

A Heart to Listen

Michael Mitton

BRF, £7.99, 2004

This is a very readable book. The author has a deep passion for the ministry of listening and this shines from each page. Speaking out of his conviction that we should all become listeners and that listening is a foundation to all human growth, Michael Milton writes from his own life experience, while biblical reflections and widely read spiritual resources provide the reader with food for thought. All areas of listening are covered: listening to others, to God, to our own hearts, to our wider communities and to the world in which we live.

Although the author's experience is in listening training, he states that this is not a handbook on how to listen. Rather it is an exploration of why listening is an important gift that is so necessary to heal so much of today's culture. The book's subtitle – Becoming a listening person in a noisy world – says it all. Alongside this, interspersed between the chapters, a narrative tale serves as a parable running through the book and providing additional reflections on the theme.

I would recommend this book for individual thoughtful reading and also for group study. We all need to listen to the wisdom of an author who writes out of experience and of deeply-held convictions about healing the noisy uncaring world in which we live.

Yvonne Walker

The Lord's Prayer Unplugged

Lucy Moore

BRF, 2004, £12.99

Fewer and fewer schools are praying this prayer regularly. Fewer and fewer children are growing up knowing it by heart. This book offers a wealth of ideas for opening up the prayer in ten sessions, each based on a phrase of the Lord's Prayer. Each session includes Get Your Bearings, Why Not Decorate Your Space?, Quiet Space, Ice Breakers, Bible Exploring, Puppets, Craft and Art. There are plenty of practical ideas in A4 format with photocopiable pages. Quiet Space is offered in each session as a way of introducing quiet and stillness; it is also suggested as a session on its own. The material might be useful for anyone wanting to run a day for children in tandem with a quiet day for adults.

It is written for KS2 7–11 year olds, but will stretch happily a few years either way and could be used with church groups or in families as well as in school for teaching or assemblies. This looks to be a valuable and flexible resource which aims to "turn the prayer from a parroted, meaningless series of words into a never-ending box of delights that grows as we grow".

Gail Ballinger

Sounding Heaven and Earth: New Voices in Prayer

Compiled and edited by David Grubb

Canterbury Press, 2004, £12.99

This book is an anthology covering many aspects of prayer. It was compiled in conjunction with the Spire Trust, a charity which supports pupils in secondary education. However, as we are all on a prayer journey, the book has a wider audience than teenagers. In fact some of the material requires a faith background and a level of maturity. The final chapter on questions and response would be useful as a starting point for discussion.

The book is refreshing in its contemporary approach. It explores a wide range of human emotion surrounding faith and doubt, through poetry and prose as well as movement, dance, stillness and silent reflection. I found the section on Stations of the Cross very moving and challenging, particularly the illustrations – paintings which evolved from photo journalism of recent events in the Holy Land.

I would certainly recommend this book as a resource which opens new doors, and encourages us to discover wider dimensions in our prayer lives.

Christine Rapsey

Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John
Jean Vanier

Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004, £9.95

The rear cover says:-

"What I share in these pages is the music I have heard
behind the words and the flow of the Gospel of John.
I have listened to the song,
which warmed and stirred my heart,
opened up my intelligence,
gave hope, meaning and orientation to my life,
with all that is beautiful and all that is broken within me,
and meaning to this world of pain in which we live."

Jean Vanier, the founder of the l'Arche communities and co-founder of Faith and Light, has devoted his life to working with people with disabilities. In this book is distilled a life's reflection on the gospel of St John, which is both reassuring and challenging. While I see biblical scholarship in the background, it is a personal testimony and reflection which stands out as one to be read and re-read regularly, for it brings the gospel to life not only in the time of Jesus but now, as it continues to help us become people who walk with Christ.

This is not a book to be read quickly but, as with the gospel itself, to be reflected over and ruminated upon. It clearly spells out the messages of the gospel in words of hope, faith and love leading to freedom and justice as well as peace both within and without. It does provide material both for personal meditation and as a lead-in to group prayer and reflection.

Having spent over 40 years studying John's gospel and reflecting on it, I have been amazed not only at the number of new insights this book has given me but also at the way it can speak personally to me in my own situation. It will probably speak to you in yours too. I would certainly place this book among my essential reading.

Francis Ballinger

Invitation to Solitude and Silence

Ruth Barton

Eagle, 2004, £8.99

Openness is one of the hallmarks of this book. The author chronicles her early encounters with silence fuelled "by the twin engines of desperation and desire" (for God) when, on the staff of a busy church, married with young children, she could no longer hold her over-committed, over-busy life together. "Dangerously Tired" is one chapter heading which will resonate with many people. With moving honesty about her shortcomings and her need to change, she relates her experience to that of Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-19) and invites us to do the same. Along with the joys of responding to God's invitation to solitude and silence, the sheer relief and healing, she admits how difficult she at times found silence. But this is not just one woman's chronicle, helpful though that can be. Each chapter contains helpful quotations and ends with guidelines on learning to be silent before God. This book is challenging, but also hopeful.

Gail Ballinger

Lost in Wonder: Rediscovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness

Esther de Waal

Canterbury Press, 2003, £9.99

"To take time to be apart, which I consciously give to myself as something positive and creative, is not a luxury, it is essential. The gift of space for myself seems so simple, and in a way it is; but it is also surprisingly difficult to do without some form of external encouragement. And that is the very simple purpose of this book."

These are the opening words of Esther de Waal's book, and many readers will agree with her sentiments. I was drawn to her book just by the picture on the front cover – a woman sits reading, the washing is hanging on the line to dry, and the stakes are propped up against a table ready for her to start gardening, but she is taking time to be apart.

The book is set out in nine chapters with titles such as "Seeing With the Inner Eye", "Silence", "Attention", "Change". Each chapter could be used as a guide to making a retreat at home, and each ends with prayers and reflections which are drawn from a wide range of sources, from the Psalms to the contemporary poetry of Bonnie Thurston.

Selected earlier this year by The Church Times for the reading group, the book was appreciated as a sort of annotated anthology of guides to the spiritual life. I read the whole book through quite quickly, but now I am going back to it a little at a time as it richly deserves. Apart from giving me an opportunity for deeper reflection, it is also going to provide me with some very useful material for lead-ins for my Julian Meeting.

Anne Stamper

Prayers and Poems

Monica Furlong

SPCK, 2004, £8.99

This is a short anthology of poems and prayers of a thinking theological woman in the second half of the twentieth century, reflecting their time and context. This collection traces Monica's life from childhood, through the doubts and deserts of early adulthood to the poems of a mature woman seeking her own experience of being herself within the mystery of God. The poems reflect her life as wife, mother, campaigner and friend. As a campaigner for women's rights in the Church of England, Monica was involved in setting up the subversive St. Hilda Community for which the short collection of prayers at the end of this book were written.

I found the detailed introduction by Clare Herbert a helpful guide in placing each poem in its context, adding understanding through knowledge of the background from which it developed. There is also a bibliography for those wishing to explore the writings of Monica Furlong.

Yvonne Walker

The Art of Waiting

Wendy Bray

BRF, 2004, £6.99

In 37 helpful daily reflections Wendy Bray leads us through Advent to Epiphany looking at waiting in the Bible, in the lives of others and in our own daily lives. Viewing an imaginary work of art in a gallery introduces each week. It is not specifically contemplative but we are encouraged to think about how we use waiting and to consider where we are looking while we are waiting.

Gail Ballinger

WELCOME BACK

It is good to see back in print the following, all of which were at one time on our Booklist. They have been reinstated there.

Enfolded in Love Series

2nd edition

DLT, 2004, £3.50

A series of small pocket-sized books which presents selections from the spiritual classics in a form suitable for daily reading and meditation. They are suitable for use as lead-ins for Julian Meetings. The series includes two new titles:

Creative Prayer: Daily Readings with Metropolitan Anthony

Circles of Love: Daily Readings with Henri Nouwen.

God's Space in You

Melvyn Matthews

John Hunt, new edition 2003, £4.99

In this pocket-sized book Melvyn Matthews approaches contemplative prayer from an unusual direction – that of space. Architectural, geographical, personal, psychological and spiritual, or the inner space for God. Contemplative prayer he sees as the source of all prayer, not its summit. Each of the six chapters ends with a series of revealing exercises.

Coming to God in the Stillness

Jim Borst

Kevin Mayhew, new edition 2004, £5.99

The author, a Dutch Roman Catholic priest, takes us through the steps of contemplative prayer, which he likens to charismatic prayer. A very practical book which has helped many people. In its first edition it greatly inspired Joyce Huggett.

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers.

—Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892)

A winter reflection – surprised by praise

Margaret Field

Chill wind lazily blowing,
driving coldness into marrow and bone,
shouts loudly at senses
drowning all hope in the hardness.
Dryness of spirit,
locked in long winter of carefulness.

Soft nod of paleness,
snowdrop's whisper locked in stark ice.
Portent of life in the harshness of living,
master of season, in gentle array,
a joy to the soul.
Life abundant, to give praise in the small things,
unnoticed,
the plain things,
heralds of springtime, assurance of hope.
There in the dryness,
life, to praise for winter,
the coldness, a promise of blossom in warmer days.
A chorus to grace in the wilderness,
thanks for the graspable sight,
singing of infinite love giving light.

© *Margaret Field 2004*

Hope is hearing the melody of the future.
—Rubem Alves

The Julian Meetings

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

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

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

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

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

Contributions for the next magazine should be sent to the Editor by **1 February 2005**. Please type, or write clearly, on one side of the paper. Contributions by email are welcome.



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Large-print magazine

The Julian Meetings magazine is also available in an A4 size, large-print format (as shown here).

If you would like a large-print magazine instead of the usual A5 size, please contact the Editor.