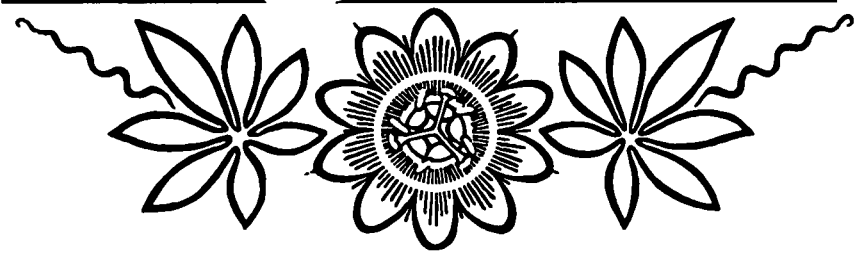
THE JULIAN MEETINGS

Magazine



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TITIAN
Noli me Tangere (1511–1512)

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father."
John 20:17

The Julian Meetings 30th Anniversary

Hilary Wakeman

Thirty years ago this May, I left my young family for a week and drove off to six towns or cities in southern England and Cardiff. In each place a group of people were waiting to meet me, people who had responded to my letter about contemplative prayer in about six different Christian denominational papers. The group had been brought together by one of the correspondents from that particular area, whom I had asked to find a meeting room for us and overnight accomodation for me. In each place one or two were clergy but the majority were, like me, lay people. We had coffee and biscuits, or a packed lunch, and talked. We talked about contemplative prayer, and how so few people – including clergy of all denomonations – seemed to know about it, which was very hard on those who felt drawn to it. We agreed that what we all wanted was some sort of network of practitioners, with regular meetings where we could pray together in this way. Before we parted, arrangements for future meetings had been made.

The next month I made a similar trip to northern England and Glasgow. Another five meetings: similar circumstances and results. It was wonderfully encouraging to us all. The next year we had our first national meeting in London, and our one-page duplicated newsletter turned into a magazine. But the heart of JM has always been the Meetings themselves, and will continue to be, even though the movement has spread to other countries.

At our 10th anniversary I said I hoped JM would eventually be made redundant as silent prayer became common. At our 21st, I was sad it hadn't happened like that. Now, at our 30th, I have no idea where we are going. I have just heard of a multi-faith silent prayer group (not JM) beginning in Winchester. Wonderful. God knows where we are going: thank God.

The annual national meeting for JM in the UK will this year take the form of a one-day celebration of the anniversary. It will be held in Oxford on 5 July. We would be delighted if "Julians" from other countries who are in Britain at the time could join us. Details for JM-UK people are in their newsletter; for those from other countries, please contact the Magazine Editor. Be sure to tell us which country you are from, so that your badge can identify you.

Music and Julian Meetings

Mary Thomas

At the first Julian meeting I attended, Evelyn Glennie's *Light in Darkness* was played to bring us out of the silence. So began a journey of exploration into using music in a new way – as a means of discovering and affirming a different relationship with God.

Why do we need music during a meeting whose prime aim is silence?

Approaching the silence is an important element in the Julian meeting and music can be useful here. If we have had a busy day then music can help us to relax at the start of the meeting before any words are read. (For example, Enya – *Shepherd Moons;* Arvo Part – *Spiegel im Spiegel;* James Galway – *Songs from the Seashore.)*

Some music is written in such a way that we can visualise its theme as we calm ourselves (for example, Beethoven – *Pastoral Symphony;* Copland – *Appalachian Spring)* and it may provide us with an image to which we can return during the silence.

Taizé chants both choral and instrumental can be used at the beginning of a meeting and they will provide a mantra which can be used for re-focusing during the silence.

Coming out of the silence provides an opportunity for an appropriate piece of music. As we leave the unknown we can be helped by hearing a familiar piece (for example, Mendelssohn – "O rest in the Lord" from *Elijah;* Faure – "In Paradisum" from the *Requiem;* any of John Rutter's *Blessings).* Yet the opposite is also true. After our Julian Meeting in September 2001, I played The Protecting Veil by John Tavener – a piece, 7 minutes long, which no other member knew – and it was appreciated by everyone. Perhaps this is an example of another kind of music that can enhance the silence. Some pieces have a definite spiritual insight in the way in which they are written and choosing them can indeed enhance our time of silence. (For example, pieces by Margaret Rizza, Bernadette Farrell, John Michael Talbot; arias from oratorios.)

Deciding on the length of a piece of music will really depend on how well you know your group. Sometimes you sense that a longer musical introduction is necessary and at the end of a silence you may feel that it is

appropriate to continue into the next track (providing it is suitable!). There is a track on Evelyn Glennie's *Light in Darkness* CD called "Marimba Spiritual" that lasts for 15 minutes but it can be used effectively in shorter sections.

Using the same music before and after the silence can also be beneficial (*Melon Collie* by the Smashing Pumpkins is a good pre- or post-silence piece and is an example of modern music).

A word of warning! Be sensitive to other people in your group and fade in the music at the end so they are not jolted out of their silence. Rehearse the track number you want to play (it can be different from that given on the notes). And take care when using the PAUSE button. I chose the second movement of the *Cello Concerto* by Finzi to go into a time of quiet at a recent meeting and did not realise that I had touched PLAY instead of PAUSE before the words of introduction – the end of the movement is very different from the beginning!

Enjoy choosing the music for your group but don't worry about getting it right – the shared silence is the most important feature of our meetings.

From time to time the Julian Meetings are asked to recommend music for meditation. We have been reluctant to compile a list of suitable music, being aware of the pitfalls involved, not least those of personal taste. However, we feel that, following on Mary's helpful suggestions, we might attempt to compile a short list, similar to our booklist which fits on to a sheet of A4 paper.

If you would like to recommend something which you have used successfully, please could you send details to the Magazine Editor explaining how you have used it and which movement or passage you have used. Details of the recording would be useful.

Nothing is more conducive to a communion with the living God than a meditative common prayer with, as its high point, singing that never ends and that continues in the silence of one's heart when one is alone again.

—Brother Roger of Taizé

Words Placed In Silence

This is one of the meditations in Angela Ashwin's book "The Wine Danced", published by Eagle in 2002 and reviewed elsewhere in the magazine. Reproduced by permission of the publishers.

The collect and moments of quiet

Take heed, be quiet do not fear...

—Isaiah 7:4a

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you:
pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself,
and so bring us at last to your heavenly city
where we shall see you face to face.

—From the Collect for the
Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity,
Common Worship

As music needs pauses,

and poetry needs white space around it,

our worship needs moments of quietness,
so that our words have room to breathe
within the flow of the liturgy.

A time of quiet before the prayer of penitence
helps us to gather our scattered thoughts
and remind ourselves that we are in the presence of God.

There may also be a pause before the Collect,
the prayer which draws together the aspirations
of everyone present.

Silence can also follow the scripture readings,
giving us a chance to "mark, learn and inwardly digest"
what we have heard

In the end, all our words concerning God
lead us into a mystery that we can never fully grasp.

Silence surrounds the Eucharist itself,
and it is good to ponder this gift
in a moment of stillness together
at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer,
or after receiving Communion.

—Angela Ashwin

Liturgical silence is pregnant, purposeful and controlled –
the thunderous quiet of people communicating that which
escapes being put into words.

—Aidan Kavanagh

Let all mortal flesh keep silence
And with fear and trembling stand
Ponder nothing earthly-minded,
For with blessing in his hand
Christ our God to earth descendeth
Our full homage to demand.

—Liturgy of St James, trans G. Moultrie

A Word For Weaving

My soul waits in silence.

O God, make us children of quietness, and heirs of peace.

—Clement of Rome (1st century)

Contemplative, Meditative or Silent?

Diana Cooke

It was good to read the article about Contemplative Prayer ("the simple prayer of a loving heart") by Hilary Burn in the last JM magazine. I would endorse all that she said and would like to add an insight which I received during a Julian Meeting a few years ago. The experience of contemplative prayer can be likened to that of someone having his portrait painted. Whilst the subject is being painted, he sits or rests in passive mode. The artist selects the colours and definitions he wants to use and paints them on to a canvas. In similar fashion, God the Holy Spirit paints our hearts and souls with his fruit in all its glorious shades and colours of love, joy, peace and so on. But it takes time and can't be done when we are rushing around! So enjoy being in God's presence, knowing that he is developing a work of art, the end result of which only he can see.

I would also like to clarify the difference between contemplative prayer, meditative prayer and silent prayer, as I understand it. The three get confused all too easily. Contemplative prayer is the passive prayer described above. Meditative prayer uses the mind to chew on a scriptural passage or visual image and reaches down to the heart. In both cases, it can be helpful to approach these kinds of prayer using Ignatian exercises to "focus the mind and anchor the heart." Silent prayer, as sometimes used in the middle of a service, is saying words in our heads, and maybe our lips, but not vocalising them. In certain situations, however, words are inadequate and prayer is a matter of just being still, which brings us back to contemplative prayer.

As long as the soul is not still there can be no vision, but when stillness has brought us into the presence of God, then another sort of silence, much more absolute, intervenes.

—Anthony Bloom

He is Risen!



A painting from the Coptic Image Archive

Awakening

Paul Leigh

On the edge of morning,
in the pause
between the darkness and the light,
the world stands quite still
and holds its breath.
I hold mine too
before the spotlight of the day
falls upon me,
before the script is put into my hand,
before the grinding round of everyday
breaks me into fragments.
Wisps of dreams float round about me,
wild hints of memory from a distant shore.
What was that twisted tale
of seeking what was lost?
Who was that sweet companion on the search?
The mist slips through the fingers
of my mind.
The light deepens within me,
healing the unquiet places of my heart.
I slowly come to rest
where past and future melt
into the piercing clarity
of now.
Is this the reality of who I am,
and what it is to be?

All things become young again, the nearer they are to their source.

—Meister Eckhart (?1260–1327)

Hard of Hearing at Julian Meetings

Joan Wilton

I am elderly and hard of hearing, with 50% hearing loss and two NHS aids. Up to seven people come to our Julian Meeting, which is held fortnightly at four different homes in turn. We arrive quietly, greet each other and start promptly at 8.00pm. After the silence, we share any thoughts, experiences and news.

All who come know that I have a hearing problem. I find it is no use pretending that I have heard when I have not, as this leads only to mistakes and embarrassment. Often the gist of the matter is all I need to know. Where I sit is crucial. This is usually almost facing the leader and within the circle. "Come and sit next to me" is useless, as words go forwards from the speaker's lips, not sideways! I do not expect people to speak "slowly, clearly and towards me": this happens only in lip-reading classes.

Recently I have been much helped by an invention called "Conversor." It consists of a small microphone and a receiver that I hang round my neck. I hold the microphone in my hand or put it on a small central table. Using the T switch means voices go directly and clearly into my ears. It has other uses too: for conversation in a crowded room, in small meetings or discussions, in a car, or at a lecture if the speaker hangs the microphone round his neck. I had it from the RNID on a 28-day trial and was soon persuaded to buy it. The equipment has taken much of the strain and disappointment out of attending our Julian Meeting.

The important thing is to be entirely open about the disability. People who use sticks and have a mobility problem nearly always get immediate consideration. Those of us who are hard of hearing have to speak up for ourselves. Perhaps life would be easier if we used ear-trumpets!

This was sent in response to the article "How do we belong?" by Gail Ballinger and Deidre Morris in the last issue of the magazine.

Afflictions are but the shadows of God's wings.

—George MacDonald (1824–1905)

Amergin

This is a version of the Song of Amergin from the Irish "Book of Invasions". Amergin was one of the leaders of the Milesians, who invaded Ireland from Spain in around 1500BC.

I am the wind which breathes upon the sea,
I am the wave of the ocean,
I am the murmur of the billows,
I am the ox of the seven combats,
I am the vulture upon the rocks,
I am a beam of the sun,
I am the fairest of plants,
I am a wild boar in valour,
I am a salmon in the water,
I am a lake in the plain,
I am a word of science,
I am the point of the lance in battle,
I am the God who creates in the head the fire.
Who is it who throws light into the meeting on the mountain?
Who announces the ages of the moon?
Who teaches the place where couches the sun?

Hadewijch of Antwerp

Hadewijch of Antwerp was a 13th century Flemish mystic. She was prominent in the Beguine movement (an organisation of lay women dedicated to the religious life).

All things
are too small
to hold me,
I am so vast

In the Infinite
I reach
for the Uncreated

I have
touched it,
it undoes me
wider than wide

Everything else
is too narrow

You know this well,
you who are also there

These two pieces are taken from "A Deep but Dazzling Darkness", edited by Lucy Lethbridge and Selina O'Grady and published by DLT in 2002. This anthology is reviewed elsewhere in the magazine. We would like to acknowledge copyright but neither we nor DLT have been able to trace the copyright holders.

Skellig Michael

James Toon

One day last summer, Andrew and I took the boat to Skellig Michael. It was about eight miles on a calm sea. The ferryman moored at the East Landing and we walked along the tarmac road that hugs the edge of the island. Soon we arrived at the base of the stone staircase that zigzags its way up the face of the cliffs. Some 600 steps later, just beneath the summit, we entered a walled enclosure. Here we found half a dozen stone beehive huts, a graveyard hedged by crosses, and the remains of a chapel. Andrew darted through and between the buildings and found a Manx Shearwater sitting inside in the darkness.

Skelling Michael is uninhabited now. No-one comes here apart from the scientists, the tourists and the seabirds. But this was once the home of a small but enduring community of Irish monks. The construction style of the beehive huts suggests that they arrived around the 6th century. Somehow they survived the storms, the Viking raids, and the challenges of living together, high above the sea, in this inhospitable place. Eventually, several centuries later, they extended their chapel. And then history records their departure from the island and their return to the mainland monastic community at Ballinskelligs.

As we walked around the remains, it was natural to ask what kept these monks here, praising God for centuries in the most extreme conditions. We had some kind of answer as we sat on a ledge just above the main path to eat our lunch and look out to sea. There in the silent air, gazing at an expanse of blue that stretched forever, we found ourselves by degrees wrapped in an eternal calmness. It must have been so for the monks – even when the storms lashed the island and there was no sun and sea and sky. This was indeed a Thin Place where heaven and earth come close.

And why did they go, soon after completing a building project that must have signalled an intention to remain? The passing of the centuries shortens the perspective but both building and leaving must have seemed the right thing to do at the time. Maybe their life was so provisional that they were able to live each moment to the full, just as our greater security leads us to spend more of our lives in the future. We had much to think about as we sat on the quay waiting for the boat that would take us back to the mainland.



A Mystical Sea

Nicky Lord

The sea sighs, her body softly undulating,
breathing in a deep sleep,
nestling against the silent cliffs,
which lie with open arms
like a mother who in her slumber
takes her child to her breast.

The cormorants motionless on rocks
stare out to sea in unison.
Crickets sing their praises in the warm sun,
and the thrushes perching in the still trees
harmonise.

Butterflies flutter in the gentle air,
dancing on blue Scabius.
A seal with wondering eyes
allows its body to move in synchrony
with the intake and outtake
of the peaceful sea.
Anemones with upward tentacles
wave rhythmically towards the sunlight.
A gull glides through the air,
and not wishing to disturb
such reverence,
pauses in flight, alights on a rock
and preens itself discreetly.

And people who tread softly,
with eyes wide open,
to a place
which floating on a mystical sea
has become

detached from discord, pain and inaction,
and settled apart,
will sit with awe and wonder.
Joined with nature
which has momentarily
paused
to worship
its Maker.

Lighting a Candle is a Prayer

This meditation is printed on cards in some English cathedrals.

Lighting a candle is a prayer:
When we have gone, it stays alight,
kindling in the hearts and minds
of others the prayers we have
already offered for them
and for others, for the sad,
the sick, and the suffering -
and prayers of thanksgiving too.

Lighting a candle is a parable:
burning itself out,
it gives light to others.
Christ gave himself for others.
He calls us to give ourselves.

Lighting a candle is a symbol:
of love and hope,
of light and warmth.
Our world needs them all.

Book Reviews

The Cosmic Dance: an Invitation to Experience our Oneness
Joyce Rupp; art by Mary Southard
Orbis Books, PO Box 308, Maryknoll, NY10545, 2002, £17.95
This is a new departure for the popular American writer Joyce Rupp – a hardback collection of poems and meditations on a cosmic theme with attractive full-colour drawings by an artist completely in tune with the author, together with sensitive attention to layout and design.

The combination is stunning and inspiring. The cosmic themes explored include The Dance, Awareness, The Heavens, Earth, and Creatures. A feast for the eyes and the soul, this book is not cheap but well worth the price. Add it to your birthday present list quick!
Yvonne Walker

A Poet's Calendar
Denis Parry
United Press Ltd, 2002, £3.99
As usual last Christmas, we received a number of letters giving news of the year from friends across the country. In this short collection of poems, Denis Parry traces the course of the year – mainly, but not exclusively through the Church's calendar – and offers a series of reflections on times and places. The mood changes with the seasons, and there is something here to speak to a variety of situations, from the solemn to the playful. Denis is clearly at home in a world in which the mountains dance and the trees clap their hands before the Lord – tradition we have too often lost in British poetry!

Asked to define poetry, a young child is alleged to have said, "It's the stuff in books that doesn't go to the edge of the page!" Perhaps it would be more true to say that it is what takes us to the margins of the spirit and leaves us free to explore what is taking place there. Perhaps this is easier when, like Denis, a major part of your ministry has been spent on the margins, in coastal Pembrokeshire. While it helps to know the setting, it isn't essential. As in his other works, there are a number of verses that could serve as a focus for prayer within a Julian Meeting. A number of these poems also serve as modern hymns; and these may be freely reproduced for use in worship.
Brian Morris

A Poet's Advent
Dennis Parry
United Press Ltd, 2002, £3.99

On the Feast of Epiphany this year, our local supermarket stocked its first hot cross buns! In a similar way, I sometimes feel some of our churches have lost Advent, crowded out by the pressure of Christmas events. For those who value – or wish to rediscover – a sense of space and rhythm in their spiritual discipline, Denis Parry offers a series of reflections on the traditional themes of Advent.

Poetry works best by what it leaves unsaid: it enables the poet's vision and experience to speak to ours, and calls forth a response. You are likely to find that reading a number of these poems is like meeting an old friend, the kind of friend who reminds you with stories of "Do you remember when...?" But they are never merely nostalgic: Denis Parry is very much a man with his eyes fixed on the future. Use them to stimulate your own imagination; join him on his journey through Advent; and, whatever else you do, don't spoil yourself by reading the last poem first!

Brian Morris

The Eternal Vision: the Ultimate Collection of Spiritual Quotations compiled by William Sykes
Canterbury Press, 2002, £25.00

Based on William Sykes' experience of struggling to meet God and also of leading reflection groups as a University Chaplain, this book contains 122 themes arranged alphabetically under subject headings, with a personal comment after a definition of the heading of each theme.

While I have only dipped into this book, I found it very helpful, in particular in starting a train of thought. Slightly akin to a thematic Christian dictionary of quotations, it will serve for me not only as a starting point when approaching sermons, but could also be a lead-in for Julian Meetings or a manual for daily use over a long period.

Well-indexed and with good notes, this large book would serve well for anyone leading a group, or thinking about their life and faith, and would be so for years to come. It can be used by those seeking to be found by faith, those new to an experience of God, and those more mature in their belief.

Francis Ballinger

Journey to the Light
ed. Linda Jones and Sophie Stanes
DLT, 2003, £10.95

This book is about doubt or loss of faith and resurgence of faith. It takes the form of a series of interviews, each followed by the interviewee's favourite spiritual writings. They are arranged in three parts: "There is no God"; "Doubts on the Journey"; and "The Phoenix of Faith." Contributors include Tony Benn, Bruce Kent, Gerard Hughes, Joan Chittister, Lionel Blue, Geoffrey Duncan and John Bell. Their choice of writers includes Nelson Mandela, Wordsworth, the Book of Genesis, Edwina Gateley, Basil Hume, Shakespeare and TS Eliot. A book to dip into, be challenged by and reflect on over a long period.

Gail Ballinger

The Glenstal Book of Icons: Praying with the Glenstal Icons
Gregory Collins OSB
Columba, 2002, £9.99

Two unforgettable aspects of a visit to Glenstal Abbey, near Limerick in Ireland are being present at the singing of the Office, and spending time in the Icon Chapel. Seventeen reproductions of those icons are here combined with the principle of *lectio divina*, so that a selection of short prayers are presented with every picture. The prayers are not always opposite the picture, but that is because each also has a very enlightening description of the details of the icon.

The long introduction is most helpful at a time when icons have become almost fashion items. To divorce the icon from its historical and geographical roots, says Fr Gregory, is a denial of "the incarnate reality it seeks to affirm." An icon is a sacramental object, mediating a personal communication with the divine. It kindles the flame of contemplative prayer, so that the heart is carried out of itself. But the aim should not be experience, but self-abandonment into the hands of God. The printed prayers enabling us to meditate on the imagery of the icons are only an aid: the author says that the desired end of the looking and the praying is the silent communion with God that is beyond prayer itself. In praying before them we pass "through the sense of sight to the one who is beyond all vision."

In the section on the theology of icons he says that material reality has a

capacity for deification and transformation. But I am a little uneasy when we are reminded that Islam and Judaism both forbid images of God, yet because Jesus has bridged the gulf between God and the world "it is now possible to make an image of God." Maybe that is just because I am a westerner. The final two icons in the book are of the Trinity, eastern style and western style. The eastern one contains three figures, the western one two figures and a central glow of light.

So many books about icons are the size of coffee tables. This one is all the better for being pocketable. It is a pity that the reproductions are not of better quality, but then the price might have had to be even higher.
Hilary Wakeman

Jesus the Teacher Within
Laurence Freeman (foreword by the Dalai Lama)
Continuum, 2000, £9.99
The author is a Benedictine Monk and the Director of the World Community of Christian Meditation which was founded by his teacher and spiritual guide, the late Father John Main. Laurence Freeman is also a Jungian Spiritual Director and a New Testament scholar and has used these talents to write this book in the style of a theological text book which sets out to provide some answers to Jesus' key question: "And you (my disciples) who do you think that I am?" (Matthew 16:15).

It was therefore difficult to get involved with the book during the early chapters and its wordy didactic style, which were rescued and brought to life by the author's autobiographical accounts of his own spiritual development which he reflects upon during a series of brief descriptions of a recent visit to his maternal roots on Bere Island, Bantry Bay in South West Ireland. These brief personal pieces set the scene as inviting prologues to the main chapters of the book.

The author rightly states in chapter 10 that "Jesus emphasises verbal economy in prayer" and no doubt Jesus would have encouraged us to use a similar verbal economy in answering his question at the beginning of this book with fewer quotes, comments and pages for the clarity of most readers who like me were probably looking for more spiritual instead of theological insights in this work!
Michael Tiley

Face Value: God in the Place of Encounter
Vanessa Herrick and Ivan Mann
DLT, 2002, £9.95
The authors explore the transfiguration, and the defining moments in which we face God and each other, and the transforming impact these moments can have on who we are and how we think about God, ourselves and the world. The theme uncovers some of the mysteries of Western Christianity that are so often neglected, enabling the reader to reflect on personal "God moments" when God makes himself known, and on the challenge and change which the encounter can bring.
Brenda Smith

Finding Grace at the Center: the Beginning of Centering Prayer
Basil Pennington, Thomas Keating and Thomas Clarke
SPCK, 2002, £8.99
This is the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of a slim volume of essays on centring prayer: silent, contemplative prayer. Originally published in various journals twenty five years ago and subsequently gathered together in book form, these essays offer guidelines on cultivating centring prayer. They include a reflection on the prayer of A Cloud of Unknowing and also a history of contemplative prayer. It was interesting to read that prayer was not compartmentalised into discursive meditation, affective prayer and mystical contemplation until the 16th century and that all three commonly took place during one period of prayer and were interwoven one into the other. "Like the angels ascending and descending Jacob's ladder, one's prayer was expected to go up and down the steps of the ladder of consciousness."
Gail Ballinger

The Wine Danced: Meditations on Eucharistic Themes
Angela Ashwin
Eagle, 2002, £7.99
Angela Ashwin is well known to the Julian Meetings. In her latest book she offers a series of 64 meditations on the Eucharist, drawing on the Eucharistic liturgies of the Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic Church as well as ancient liturgies. The meditations are designed to "deepen our understanding of the Eucharist, strengthen our commitment and delight in worship, and

increase our openness to its transforming potentials." She suggests that "We need to strive less in our prayer and worship so that God can work in us." The meditations contain a passage from scripture, Angela's own reflections on the theme, and quotations from various rites. Each ends with a "word for weaving" to help bring to mind the meditation at any time in everyday life and to serve as a reminder when coming to church. The meditations are arranged in four sections:

1. Take this cup of my blood – the Cup of Life – at the Last Supper
2. Take this cup from me – the Cup of Suffering – Gethsemane
3. Take this Cup of my Life – the Cup of Openness – our response
4. The shape of Eucharistic worship. These meditations (42-64) work through the liturgy and reflect on such themes as "The Gloria", "The Collects and moments of quiet", "The importance of the meal", and "The Lord's Prayer."

The great value of this book is its ability to help us bring together our personal prayer at home and our worship in church so that both are deepened and connected, particularly when we share together in the Holy Communion.

Gail Ballinger

A Celtic Primer
compiled by Brendan O'Malley
Canterbury Press, 2002, £14.99

It is hard to categorise this book as it serves many purposes. One of these is to create what looks like a Celtic version of the Daily Office, with psalms, readings, canticles and prayers drawn from Celtic sources. The book is also a resource for planning corporate worship – the Celtic eucharist, based on a 9th century Irish liturgy, looks interesting. There is a Celtic reader, with many poems and meditations for reflection. There is also a version of *Plygain,* the Welsh Christmas Carol service traditionally held in the early hours of Christmas Day; some of the liturgy is in Welsh. And much more besides. To assist those planning liturgies, the text is also included on an accompanying Word disk.

For anyone with a love of the Celtic tradition and an interest in liturgical worship, this book will be an essential resource.

James Toon

[The Daily Telegraph] The Best Spiritual Reading Ever
ed. Christopher Howse
Continuum, 2002, £16.99
This book comes with three sections: "The Search for God", "Discovering God", and "Responding to God", each containing quotations, preceded by a brief introduction. Many of them come from ancient writings, and many of the translations of ancient works are in the language of past ages. While I found the introductions useful, I had problems in working out why the particular excerpts and translations had been chosen.
Francis Ballinger

A Deep but Dazzling Darkness: An Anthology of Personal Experiences of God
ed. Lucy Lethbridge and Selina O'Grady
DLT, 2002, £10.95
In what way does it make sense to speak of a "personal experience" of God? Years ago, mystical experience seems to have been regarded as the special preserve of a few far advanced souls: a view which left most people toiling in the valleys of intercession. This view was outmoded by the time I got started on contemplative prayer. Authors such as John Dalrymple, Ruth Burrows and Thomas Green warned against an emphasis on feelings, experiences and ecstatic visions. They stressed the ordinariness of the contemplative life and its availability to anyone. Indeed, it was now seen as the normal culmination of any serious attempt at the life of prayer.

And this made sense to me. My contemplative life has been spent in the exploration of a vast dryness, a strange but comforting arena in which nothing much happens but God is usually understood to be present in some way that I can't describe. Sometimes he appears to have withdrawn completely. At other times he appears closer to me than I am to myself. Most of the time, however, the life of prayer is an endless waiting.

In the past decade, theologians such as Denys Turner and Melvyn Matthews have emphasised two ways in which the encounter with God can start to be mediated in language. One of these is the negative way of *The Cloud of Unknowing,* in which the experience of God is actually a kind of non-experience. As TS Eliot puts it in *Burnt Norton:* "I can only say, *there* we have been: but I cannot say where." The other is an affirmative way in which the experience is described in superlatives, in metaphor, in poetry, in ways

that push language to the limits. Melvyn Matthews joins the two together in words from Psalm 139: the darkness and the light are "both alike to thee."

So it was with considerable interest that I approached this anthology. The compilers quite sensibly stand back from the debate, to allow their choice of material to speak for itself. They present a selection of writings in which people down the centuries have sought to make sense of the meeting of the human and the divine. Apart from a chronological sorting there is no attempt to categorise. Nonetheless some themes emerge: the coming and the going of grace in the life of prayer; the value of interior silence; the fleetingness of mystical moments in which the unseen and eternal touches the visible and temporal; and the vividness of the encounter, when it happens.

The first 20 pages or so consist of encounters with God from the Bible, such as Jacob's wrestling in a dream, Samuel hearing the Lord calling in the dead of night, and Elijah hiding in the cleft of the rock when the Lord passed by. This is, of course, no more than a taster, since the whole Bible is a record of God's encounter with humankind. My only quibble is that the compilers have taken these passages from the King James Version. The language is archaic, and for me it obstructs the meaning; but others may find themselves more at home with it.

As with all anthologies, the selection of authors and pieces leaves room for debate. The coverage is wide and readers will recognise some familiar passages, for example from *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich – although one of the most anthologised pieces (George Herbert's poem *Love bade me welcome)* is purposely omitted, simply because it is so much quoted elsewhere. The modern authors who have formed my thinking are largely absent too. But there are also gems to be discovered, such as *The Song of Amergin* and the extract from Hadewijch of Antwerp, which are reproduced elsewhere in the magazine. I also particularly liked the quote from Pindar that prefaces the book.

The compilers have looked for extracts "which give voice to individual moments of this felt experience of God or God's absence and which also capture and reveal the flavour of each period." Their hope is that readers find these pieces as moving and revealing as they have. Some pieces in the collection may also help readers to make sense of their own encounter with the living God.

James Toon

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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.

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