THE JULIAN MEETINGS Magazine

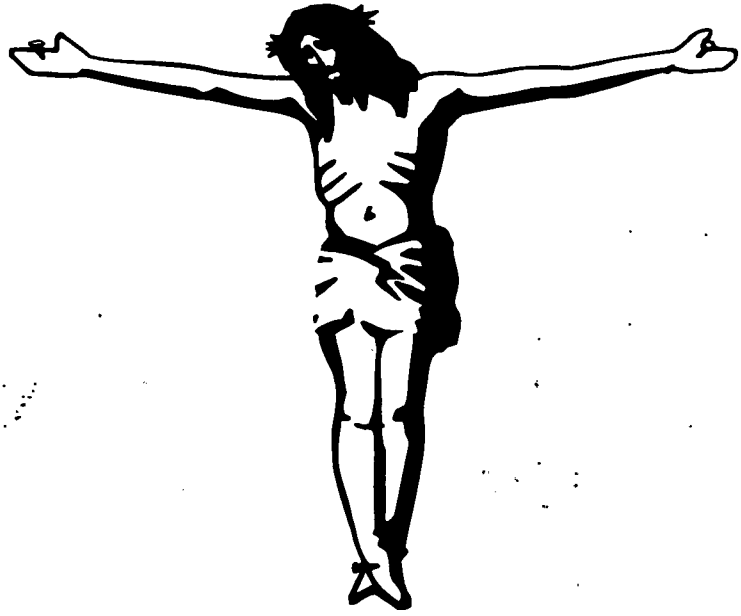


April 2006

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Yet it was our afflictions he was bearing, our pain he endured.... But he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement he bore restored us to health and by his wounds we are healed. We had all strayed like sheep, each of us going his own way, but the Lord laid on him the guilt of us all. He was maltreated, yet he was submissive and did not open his mouth.... He was arrested and sentenced and taken away, and who gave a thought to his fate - how he was cut off from the world of the living, stricken to death for my people's transgression? ...Yet the Lord took thought for his oppressed servant ...who had given himself as a sacrifice for sin... By his humiliation my servant will justify many..., for he bore the sin of many and interceded for transgressors.

From Isaiah 53 R.E.B.



Editorial

At an Advisory Group meeting in February 2006 we talked about the varied forms of Julian Meetings. Many start with a centring exercise, a Biblical or other spiritual reading, followed by silence. A reading or piece of music, and the grace may complete the formal part. Some Meetings share news as they gather; others share news and talk of spiritual matters over a cup of tea at the end of the meeting; A few don't share this type of exchange at all. Members of some Meetings also meet at other times, taking part in local community activities, while some only see each other at their Julian Meeting. For some a Julian Meeting provides a distinct space in an otherwise very busy week.

In most Meetings there are bonds of friendship as well as a desire to be still before the Lord. That friendship takes different forms, as does the grouping of the people who come together. in practice a number of Meetings have been formed by friends in a particular church, or area. Ideally, within the Christian Tradition, Julian Meetings should all be open to all, regardless of denomination or specific belief. Some Meetings change and grow as members come and go over time. Others have had a long period of stability. It can be refreshing to have new members and also change how the group is organised. While we give thanks for the many individuals who start Meetings we also see great value in a variety of people taking on the leadership role.

The Advisory Group is aware that many members may not have read our Julian Meetings booklets. We particularly commend the booklets *Starting a Julian Meeting* and *An Ideal Julian Meeting* - which explain how being prepared to share God's presence, being non-directive, spending time listening to God, and sharing leadership are all important features of a Julian Meeting.

The Advisory Group sees its role as encouraging, enabling, teaching, and supporting local Meetings. We can put you in touch with another Julian Meeting in your area. We encourage you to join with other Meetings in a Quiet Day. We can provide literature. We hope that you find help, encouragement and stimulation through t this Magazine and its associated Newsletter.

We know that we all have a lot to learn about prayer. God is revealed to each of us in a blend of unique ways but many can be shared. We hope that sharing the experience of a Julian Meeting, spending time in silence and stillness before God, will help each of us grow closer to God, and break down barriers that we put up to his love.

Please get in touch with the Editor if you wish to comment about the Editorial or anything contained in this Magazine.

Give to each of us a candle, O God, as we go down into the depths of our being. Show us the hidden things, the creatures of our dreams, the storehouse of forgotten memories and hurts.

Take us down to the spring of life, and tell each of us our nature and our name. Give us freedom to grow in order that we may each become that self, the seed of which you planted in us at our making.

Out of the depths we cry to you O God.

The Most Powerful Fuel

Wanda Nash

Fr. Gregory, the Founder of the Order of Julian [based in Wisconsin, U.S.A.], has written:

'The basic human stance before God is to

await,
allow,
accept,
attend [1]

Fr. Owen O'Sullivan points out that Jesus spoke of vigilance and wakefulness. He writes

Be aware,
awake,
alert,
alive'. [2]

But how can we do BOTH ? Aren't they opposites?

Some may feel it is simply a matter of temperament - those who are naturally introvert will prefer the first list of 'a's, and will happily focus on waiting for God, being attentive to Him, accepting His will, and allowing those things that point that way. Others, perhaps more extrovert, will prefer the second list; they might resonate with Hildegard's aim to be 'ablaze with enthusiasm, and an alive, burning offering before the altar of God.'[3] Does each set of aims necessarily cancel out the other?

The evidence from the early desert fathers and mothers - both in the stories of their lives and the fragments that have been put together of their sayings - focuses on phrases like 'cleave to God', and 'turn inwards', and 'annihilate all desire'. Their aim seems to have been to stretch the ideas of listening, receiving, obeying, right across the whole of life, not simply during the time of still prayer. But today – and increasingly as the popularity of fundamentalist Christianity grows - active behaviour is urged upon us. We are to make it visibly obvious that Jesus is Lord at all times and places, putting every scrap of energy into proclaiming the power of God. And still prayer seems to get rather puffed out.

In her 'Revelations of Divine Love', Mother Julian herself seems to be able to make it work both ways. She says - 'And here shewed our courteous Lord the moaning and mourning of the soul; in longing and in joying he shewed that which is contrariness to us... Then desire we to be in Heaven; then shall we only have joy in God and be well pleased with hiding and with showing.' [4]

But Julian was a saint, and she didn't have the distraction and demands of spouse and family to contend with, the facts of job and mortgage, the intrusion of advertising and celebrity opinion. She had poverty and disease, pillage and plague, fire and feuding at her window each day, but she could return each night and morning to the simplicity of her separated room and she had the structure of her formal devotions to lean on. It's really difficult to see how the two attitudes can co-exist in our over-busy lives today.

Sometimes I wonder if it's something to do with . . . **DESIRE.** That's something more than good intentions, deeper than merely prioritizing: It's something about discovering and tapping into the fuel that keeps us going and spurs us on.

As an individual, what do I really want? Is it to get more for my money? Is it to save for a 'better' holiday? Is it perhaps home improvements and reaching for a higher standard of living? Is it to appear younger, cleverer, more capable than I truly am? Or does my desire get mixed up - as so often in our media and publishing - with a lust for more and different sexual experience?

Or is it about a yearning, longing, thirsting, hungering for God, and for His desire? When I go to pray, and especially when I become still, is it out of duty, because I think I 'ought' to, or is it out of deep wanting, deep desire, a deep cry, and even the possibility of delight? God Himself wants to delight in us, and wants us to delight in Him, and the precursor of delight is desire. Desire for anything His Presence brings, whether it is comfort or darkness, questions or answers, contrition or gratitude, grieving or delight. Desire simply to be in that Presence, part of that Company, closer to that Three-in-One.

You may remember that lovely story told of Michael Ramsey. As Archbishop, he used to say "I want to pray: but when I don't want to, I want to want to pray. And when even that gets difficult I want to want to want to pray." Undeviating Desire.

Perhaps, when the early meditators spoke of annihilating all desire, they were thinking of desire for things of this world, the passions that materialism arouses. But it seems to me that the only way to hold the two lists of 'a's together is to hold in our deepest inner self the tune of desire for God, and for that Kingdom so much desired by God. Then the one list leads onto the other, and returns to the first as an obvious cycle. In fact it is not so much my desire, as the desire of Christ-within-me, and Jesus' own desire to return to his Father, carrying the world with him. [5]

Being fuelled by this desire, we find that 'there is nothing so like God as Stillness.' [Meister Eckhart]

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[1] JulianNews summer 2005

[2] 'The Questions of Jesus', Columba Press, 2003, p.7

[3] W. Nash; 'Gifts from Hildegard', DLT, 1997, p.141

[4] Ch.33[5] St. John chs 14 and 16



Winter Rising

Margaret Field

Soft orb paleness embedded in mist,
Hued in cold hardness
Dancing with skeletal trees,
Ghost moon misted bright stars
Frost morning, hard, yearning soul warmth
Sleep filled world wrapped in long night

Rook sharp caw commanding light
Raucously shouted new day,
Feather mastery defying iced air
Spring life, softly tender
Season in half-light
Joy of new life in sparkling light

Dawn rise, vibrant frosted beauty
Twig perched nests to praise sureness of seasons' gale
Breath of life, night reprimanding
Dormant creation tasted in clear air
Frosted stone earth
Masks beauty sweet to the heart

Rising praise in the cold light,
Joyful of Mercies abundance held for a moment
A song loud in stillness of moon's pale orb
Melting softly into morning's wide flung arc of plenty
Frost painted warm in its richness
Vibrant with hope of salvation

Chill oblivious,
Called to pause at Son's rising
A promise fulfilled in an instant of coldness
Surprised by joy beyond weariness
Winter darkness,
Exchanged in promised new life

Springtime Jesus

Joy Cowley : Aotearoa Psalms

You, Springtime Jesus,
just as I'd settled down for winter,
you broke into my heart
and danced your love right across it
in a mad excess of giving.
Just as I'd got comfortable
with bare branches and unfeeling,
just as my world was neatly black and white,
there you were,
kicking up flowers
all over the place.

Springtime Jesus,
I tried to find a way to tell you
that there were places
where you could or could not dance.
I wanted to guide you on my paths
and have you sign the visitors' book;
but you laughed right through my words
and sang to me your melting song,
causing sap to fire the branches,
causing the flames of bud
to flicker into green bonfires,
causing a windquake of blossom,
causing burstings, searings, breakings,
causing growth-pain,
causing life.

Springtime Jesus,
the fullness of life can be frightening
and I'm lacking in courage.
It isn't easy to live with a heart
that's wide open to invasion.

Teach me, Jesus, how to move with you,
step for step in your love dance.
Touch my fears with your melting song.
Gift me with your laughter,
and, in the mystery of your Springtime,
show me the truth of the blossoming Cross.

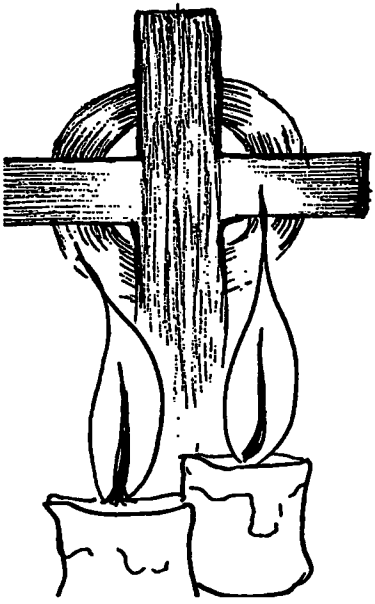
`He was in the form of God; yet he laid no claim to equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the form of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, sharing the human lot, he humbled himself, and was obedient, even to the point of death, death on a cross!

Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow -in heaven, on earth, and in the depths - and every tongue acclaim, ``Jesus Christ is Lord,'' to the glory of God the Father.'

Philippians 2 : 6 -11

Martin Luther

This life, therefore, is not righteousness
but growth in righteousness;
not health but healing;
not being but becoming;
not rest but exercise.
We are not yet what we shall be
but we are growing towards it.
The process is not yet finished,
but it is going on.
This is not the end, but it is the road.
All does not yet gleam in glory,
but it is being purified.



Meditation builds up the brain

Meditating does more than just feel good and calm you down, it makes you perform better – and alters the structure of your brain, researchers have found.

People who meditate say the practice restores their energy. Many studies have reported that the brain works differently during meditation –. But whether meditation actually brings any of the restorative benefits of sleep has remained largely unexplored. So Bruce O'Hara and colleagues at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, US, decided to investigate. Ten volunteers were tested before and after 40 minutes of either sleep, meditation, reading or light conversation, with all subjects trying all conditions. The 40-minute nap was known to improve performance (after an hour or so to recover from grogginess). But what astonished the researchers was that meditation was the only intervention that immediately led to superior performance, despite none of the volunteers being experienced at meditation

"Every single subject showed improvement," says O'Hara. The improvement was even more dramatic after a night without sleep. But, he admits: "Why it improves performance, we do not know." The teamis now studying experienced meditators, who spend several hours each day in practice.

What effect meditating has on the structure of the brain has also been a matter of some debate. Now Sara Lazar at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, US, and colleagues have used MRI to compare 15 meditators, with experience ranging from 1 to 30 years, and 15 non-meditators.

They found that meditating actually increases the thickness of the cortex in areas involved in attention and sensory processing, "You are exercising it while you meditate, and it gets bigger," she says. The finding is in line with studies showing that accomplished musicians, athletes and linguists all have thickening in relevant areas of the cortex. It is further evidence, says Lazar, that yogis "aren't just sitting there doing nothing".

Edtorial Note : *This is abstracted from an article in "New Scientist", used with permission- Would we all share in the experience that "Meditation makes you feel better"?*

Out of the Silence ...into the Silence

Jim Cotter

One of the great spiritual paths is the *Way of Silence.* For monks and nuns it is at the heart of the vow of obedience and it permeates even the walls of the cloisters. Their lives are soaked in silence. The very word *obedience* is derived from the Latin *audio, I listen.* We have to get our chattering selves out of the way if we are really to *attend to* the other. We need to carve out a cave of silence and wait upon whatever gifts may be given in that silence.

We choke on too many words, too much information. 'Google' and 'Wikipedia' give us access to every soundbite but no guidance on how to evaluate. The eldorado glitters but it is not all gold. It cannot give what only silence can encourage and enable - conversation among embodied beings and the wisdom that comes from leisurely discernment among the voices. It is a Quaker meeting or a Benedictine exchange at their best.

If you join in the corporate prayer of a monastery you are aware of the silence in which the members of the community gather and disperse. They bring their own recollectedness into the still air of their chapel. The words of prayer are said or chanted steadily, without rush. More is going on than merely saying an office. The words themselves are marinated in the silence of their lives.

In the Anglican tradition at the Reformation the daily prayer of the monasteries was reduced from seven to two, the Morning and Evening Prayer, that in Cranmer's hope, was to become a pattern for clergy and lay people in the parish churches of England and contribute to a holy life. Biblical in tone and content, the framework of the medieval office was maintained. The Psalms and Canticles remained the core, the actual readings from the Bible were much expanded, and there were prayers at the beginning and the end.

Cranmer's hope has never been more than fitfully realized, though there has been a renewal of interest and experiment in this form of praying over the last twenty or thirty years. Most of what has been offered has however been focussed so much on a quantity of words that the silence has been forgotten. Indeed, for many people there are too many words in, for example, the recent Daily Prayer of the Church of England and an abbreviated (!) Benedictine

breviary. Now this doesn't matter if the rest of the day has much silence in it, but it does very much matter when the volume of material feels like a bombardment from the Bible parallel to the bombardment of the media.

Like the emperor who may have said to Mozart about an opera, 'Too many notes', I've often muttered in church, 'Too many words'. And I've been guilty of that myself in writing and in speaking (at least according to my friends!). And by contrast to the unwieldy volumes, there have been a number of slim books offering a simpler form of daily prayer. The problem here is that there is too little variety over the year. They are excellent introductions but do not sustain prayer for very long. In my own work I have found that compiling such books seems to work best where there is a particular theme: the end of the day as in *Prayer at Night's Approaching*, creation as in *Prayer at Day's Dawning*, and pilgrimage as in *Pilgrim Prayer*. Indeed it is possible to learn by heart the simplest of these, and pray it in the darkness and into the silence.

Over the past few years I've been compiling a book that comes between the wheelbarrow needed to transport what the churches now produce or the pocket computer which can hold everything you could ever conceivably need, and the notebook that carries the few prayers that are close to your heart. It has recently been published as *Out of the Silence...Into the Silence: Prayer 's Daily Round*. It is a chunky book, pleasant to hold, straightforward in use, with enough variety through the year within a constant sequence day by day, a kind of serenade in eight short movements. There are ten to fifteen minutes' worth of words, with music composed for psalm refrains, and enough nudges to pause and and be silent to double the time. Words and silence weave through each other. The tone is reflective and quiet rather than declamatory and noisy. It is for those who appreciate few instruments rather than a symphony orchestra, who gather in small numbers and places rather than in large ones, for those comfortable with little seeming to be going on rather than lots of activity. Here is a diamond slowly rotating through the days and seasons, reflecting light from each facet in turn.

It may also suit those praying on their own. It is a paradox that those spiritual partners solitude and silence should in time prove to be a cure for loneliness: a solidarity in which we realize that we are bound together in an interconnecting universal web and a silence in which we lose our individuality in communion.

The book could have had fewer pages if all the words had been bunched up together, as with older prayer books. But the layout leaves plenty of space, breathing space on the page as well as in the practice. Is this a waste of timber or is it a sign of generosity? Another paradox of the Mystery into whose presence we pray.

Out of the Silence...Into the Silence by Jim Cotter and Paul Payton is published by Cairns Publications and retails at £20. Go to ***www.cottercairns.co.uk*** or email ***jim@cottercairns.co.uk*** or write to ***Dwylan, Stryd Fawr, Harlech, Gwynedd, LL46 2YA.***

A letter with the book invites users to participate in an ongoing conversation about it, and those who will commit themselves to daily use for a year from 1 July 2006 are being invited to join 'The Company of a Hundred'. By that time the book should also be available on the website in the form of each day's material drawn together in one scroll. The website also gives notice of occasions over the next eighteen months where the book is being introduced and presented.

A Community Initiative

Claire Munday

We've been a Julian group for several years now in Torridon – a fairly remote area of the north-west Highlands. I have found it a fantastic forum for bouncing my reflections off like-minded people. As I wrote that last sentence I had a flash that I often have when I think of Julian – "oops, we're meant to be a contemplative group and the important part is the silence!" You couldn't find a more chatty lot than our group ! But I suppose that's what makes the time we spend together special for me. Silent time with thoughtful people who will listen and share their views afterwards in an honest and non-judgemental way. Always accompanied by lots of laughter.

Out of our group last year we formed "Julian recycling" which holds monthly events in our various village halls – Shieldaig, Torridon, Kinlochewe. We provide information and outlets for our community on environmental issues (especially recycling) and on peace and justice issues (especially trade justice).

Is there any other Julian group out there who has initiated something new in their community as a result of discussions in their meetings ? It would be really good to hear where the Spirit has taken you.

Said Mary to Jesus?

Deidre Morris

On the last Sunday in Advent we remember the role of Mary in the Incarnation. I had been thinking of this a few days before and realised that Mary could have spoken to Jesus some of the words he was to use at his last Passover meal.

"This is my body ... given for you".

When a woman becomes pregnant these words become a reality. She does indeed give her body as a place of growth, nurture and safety for the developing child. The child's needs take precedence over her own.

And many mothers feel that this is only the start of a lifetime in which their body, their life, is never quite their own again. In parts of the world today (and in the past in our own country) many mothers quite literally give their bodies, their lives, as maternal mortality rates demonstrate.

If Mary had not said 'Yes' to the incarnation, had not said 'This is my body, given for you', Christmas could not have happened as it did, 33 years before a Passover meal in Jerusalem.

"This is my blood ... shed for you".

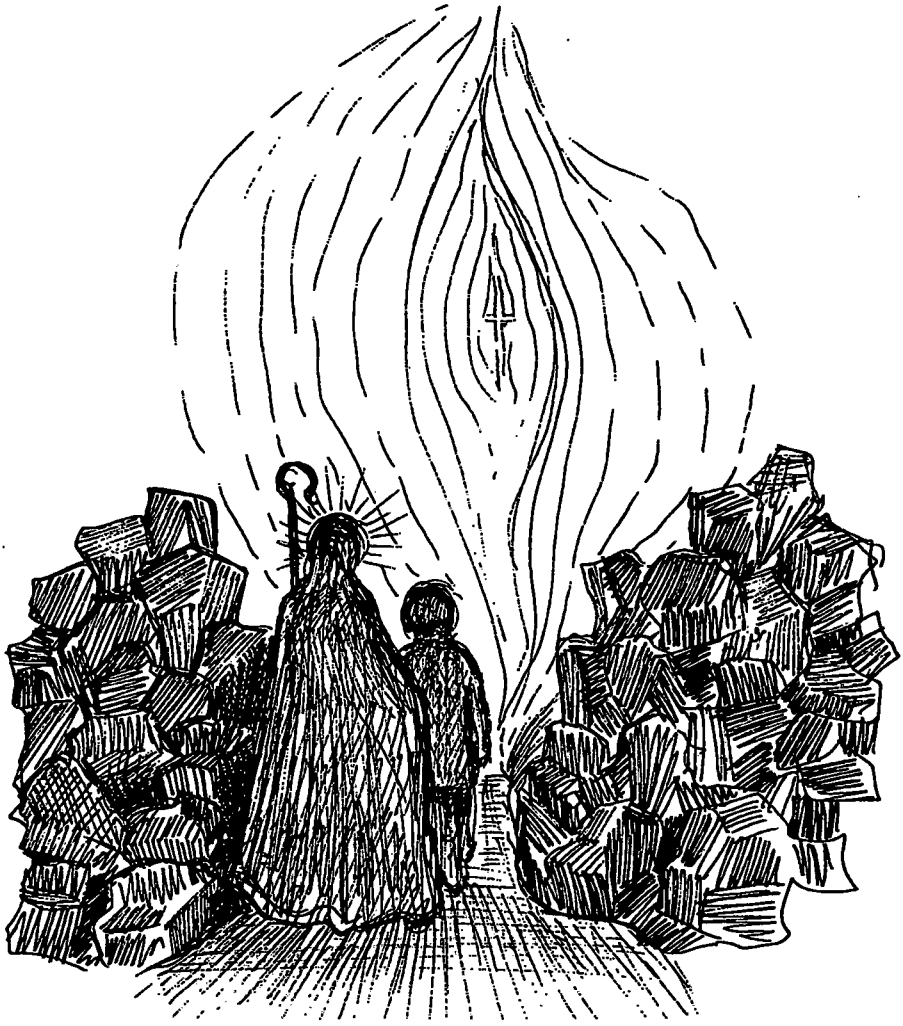
Babies are not conceived without the regular shedding of blood. There is no birth without the shedding of blood. Mary shed her blood for the life of her son, years before he did the same for the whole of mankind.

These thoughts made the communion so much more poignant on that Advent Sunday, that Jesus' Mother might have used his Easter words to describe to him her role at Christmas.

St.Augustine of Hippo

In the very thing that the Church offers , she herself is offered.

If you wish to understand what is meant by ' the Body of Christ', listen to the apostle saying to the faithful 'You are the Body of Christ and his members.' (1.Cor. 12.27.). It is the mystery of yourselves that is laid on the Lord's table; it is the mystery of yourselves that you receive. To that which you are you answer 'Amen', and in replying you assent. For you hear the words 'The Body of Christ', and you reply 'Amen'. Be a member of the Body of Christ, that the Amen' may be true. If you have received well you are that which you have received There you will be on the table, there you will be in the chalice."



Be thou a bright flame before me,
Be thou a guiding star above me,
Be thou a smooth path beneath me,
Be thou a kindly shepherd behind me,
Today and for ever more

Breathing I Pray
Ivan Mann

Darton Longman & Todd 2005 £9.95 *ISBN 0 232 52565 X*

Ivan Mann has written this book as 'an honest account of the experience of prayer as it has been for me.'His declared aim is to encourage his readers to see the connections between prayer and life in their own lives. With sureness of touch and with many homely illustrations, he covers, in the earlier chapters, most of the better known ways of prayer including Lectio Divina, the use of imagination in the Ignatian tradition, and the Jesus Prayer. He explores the role of music, poetry, silence and creativity in prayer. This reader was particularly pleased to find the psalms on this list, which Mann thinks of as being 'the place of encounter with the deepest mysteries of God' and 'full frontal honesty before God.'

If you are disabled in some way – in chronic pain of body or mind perhaps – and the tried ways and methods of prayer fail you, how are you to pray? Mann does not shirk this question. Perceptively, and often movingly, he explores the themes of 'myself', 'love' and 'tears': among the multiple connections he sees, for example, the nurturing of prayerful (not sentimental) tears as leading back to the Eucharist. In chapter 15 he writes eloquently, again from personal experience, about what he calls 'the scouring of love and pain', drawing on the teaching of St John of the Cross that this is God's way of transforming the soul as if by fire.

Firmly set within the mainstream tradition of Christian prayer, there are new and telling insights on almost every page of this book: highly recommended.

Paul Rea

Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places
Eugene H Peterson

Hodder & Stoughton 2005 £10.99 *ISBN 0 340 86388 9*

Eugene Peterson is a Canadian Presbyterian minister and currently Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Vancouver. He has written many books but he is perhaps most widely known for his contemporary language paraphrase of the Bible - The Message.

Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places is sub titled a conversation in spiritual theology and is the first in a series of books on spiritual theology. The

conversation is a blending of formal theology and the lived experience of people from various walks of life. Peterson stresses the need for congruence between our belief and living out our faith. He devotes three of four chapters to exploring how Christ Plays in Creation; Christ Plays in History; Christ Plays in Community. Each chapter includes two grounding texts, one from the Old Testament and another from the New Testament. While he welcomes the flourishing of spirituality which we have seen in recent years he has a real concern that it has resulted in a 'free floating' spirituality detached from faith where there is a danger of using God 'as an accessory' and 'self - helpism' threatens the grace we are so freely given. Some of his fears or reservations are similar to those of Gerard Hughes (who endorses the book) around a 'supermarket of spiritualities.'

This is a challenging work which repays sustained reading and reflection. I can imagine it on the reading lists of seminaries, but it will also appeal to a serious lay audience and is well worth reading. Subsequent volumes will cover spiritual formation and direction, spiritual reading and leadership.

Gail Ballinger

How Can I Let Go If I Don't Know I'm Holding On?
Linda Douty

Morehouse Publishing £8.99 2005 ***ISBN 0 8192 2132 5***

It was the title of this book that attracted my attention – such a familiar theme which we battle with from time to time throughout our lives. This inspiring and practical book, written from the compassionate depths of the author's own experience, takes letting go to a deeper level where the denial and excuses lying beneath the surface are brought to light. The author examines the how and why of eliminating some of the baggage that weighs us down and the barriers which keep us from drawing closer to God. Chapters of the book identify attachments to people, personas, patterns and plans and explore letting go through such strategies as availability, action and acceptance. The chapter on Awareness considers silent prayer, lectio and journaling. As each chapter ends with some useful points for reflection this book could be used for group discussion and some useful group guidelines are provided for this purpose. It is recommended for anyone interested in deepening their own spiritual journey and for those who accompany others. Two websites connected to this publication are www.lindadouty.com and www.explorefaith.org which is the website of the publisher.

Yvonne Walker

Lit by the Light of God: Prayers and Meditations through the Year

Melvyn Matthews

SPCK 2005 £9.99 *ISBN 0 281 05642 0*

In the first half of this book Melvyn Matthews has put together a collection of prayers taking you through the liturgical year while the second half is "other prayers" a wide variety of writings from Janet Morley, John Bell, Thomas Traherne, Julian of Norwich, Deitrich Bonhoeffer as well as Melvyn Matthews himself. Based on the concept of his popular newspaper column "Prayer for the Week", each prayer is followed by the author's short thoughtful reflection. The aim is to lead the reader (or pray-er) to deepen and enrich their own prayer life, encouraging people to pray reflectively and more contemplatively. This volume is ideal for personal use, for leading into silence and for preachers and worship leaders alike.

Recent popular and highly recommended publications by Melvyn Matthews are: Nearer than Breathing and Both Alike to Thee.

Yvonne Walker

Praying in Exile

Gordon Mursell

Darton Longman & Todd 2005 £9.95 ISBN 0 232 52228 6

Gordon Mursell, a priest who has worked for many years with refugees and asylum seekers, argues in this book that exile is any situation or experience in which you are not at home, and not in control of what is happening to you: one of the most common of all aspects of life. He writes out of his conviction that there are priceless spiritual resources to help us face this exile with hope.

Drawing first on Psalm 119 and John 9, he explores what it means to be a nomad, a ger, in this mortal life. 'Jesus is the nomad, unconfined either by religious structures or by the human condition.' Next, citing the experiences of St Augustine and the hostage Brian Keenan, he explains why memory and the telling of stories are so important in exile (they remind us who we are and where we come from and help us imagine a new future). Then, again referring to the psalms, he examines why the 'prayer of lament' is important to exiles (it enables them to challenge and question their situation). Finally, one of the resources of the exile is 'keeping the sabbath', keeping a holy time and space (because, in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic

Church, Sabbath is a 'protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money').

This short book offers an interesting, well-informed and unusual approach to spirituality and prayer, and does not shirk critical reflection on contemporary social issues.

Paul Rea

The Mystical Language of Icons
Solrunn Nes

Canterbury Press 2005 £14.99 *ISBN 1 85311 657 2*

Christ is our light : praying with Rembrandt's etchings
Anne Margo Boyd

Canterbury Press 2005 £9.99 *ISBN 1 85311 649 1*

These two books have recently been my bedside companions, each uses pictures in a different way to lead to thought and prayer. The pictures presented however are very different; the etchings of Rembrandt being in monochrome and the icons of Solrunn Nes glowing with gold and red.

Solrunn Nes is a modern icon painter who begins the book by describing, stage by stage, the technique of icon painting and the significance of icons in Orthodox spirituality. She helps us to 'read' icons illustrated by more than fifty of her own original works. These icons are beautifully reproduced, supported by explanatory text, the two together giving plenty of materials for reflection and prayer. I wish I had read this book before I visited Russia a few years ago.

Anne Margot Boyd has selected fifteen of Rembrandt's etchings to illustrate key moments in the life of Christ. She links the relevant scriptural passage to both events in the life of the artist and to our own lives. She points out details in the etchings which we could well miss and then offers 'words to ponder'. The larger etchings have had to be considerably reduced and, because some of them are very dark, you need a good light to be able to see them – my bedside light was not always adequate.

Both these books, in their different ways, provide a rich devotional resource.

Anne Stamper

Walk in a Relaxed Manner:Life lessons from the Camino
Joyce Rupp

Orbis Books New York £8.99 2005 *ISBN 1 57075 616 3*

At the age of 60 Joyce Rupp began a 37 day pilgrimage along the centuries old route to Santiago in northern Spain together with her travelling companion, a retired pastor. It proved to be a challenging and difficult undertaking. Throughout the walk, Joyce Rupp kept a journal of events and reflections on the life lessons which she reflected on each day. These reflections on such universal subjects such as let go, live in the now, embrace beauty, savour solitude and pause to reflect, are insights we can share on our own journey in life. I have used some passages as a lead-in to silence. This book is to be prayed and pondered, a call to slow down, enjoy life more and grow spiritually on our own journey, a refreshingly different book from a popular author on spirituality.

Yvonne Walker

Contemplative Prayer
Thomas Merton

DLT £9.95 new ed 2005 *ISBN 0 232 52604 4*

Written primarily for monks, Contemplative Prayer can be read with much profit by anyone on the contemplative path. It is one of the five or six 'Yes' books I keep at my bedside.

Merton, the 20th century American Trappist monk and writer explains what is, and what is not, meant by 'contemplation'. He deals with obstacles and difficulties; silence; liturgy; recollection; contemplation and the Church; self denial and sacrfice; and the necessity of good spiritual direction.

This down-to-earth approach to contemplative prayer, full of commonsense and lived-out experience, is highly recommended.

Sheila Waller

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He leads me
beside quiet waters,
He restores my soul.

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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 ISBN and price.

Contributions by email are particularly welcome.

Contributions for the next magazine should be sent to the Editor by 10 June 2006



