



Magazine

April

2017

The Julian Meetings

- *Foster the teaching and practice of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition*
- *Encourage people to practise contemplative prayer in their daily lives, and explore ways of doing this which are appropriate for them*
- *Support the individual ecumenical Julian Meetings — groups whose members meet regularly to practise Christian contemplative prayer together*



The Julian Meetings Magazine April 2017

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Sitting in Silence in Church

The churchwarden, arriving early to unlock the church, found the door already swinging open. So she was rightly cautious as she stepped inside. She found that all the candles had been lit – on the main altar, the side altar, one in front of Our Lady and 20 on the votive candle stand. There, a few pews up from the front, a solitary man sat still. He hadn't broken in to rob, or damage: he had broken in to pray. Judging by the candle wax he'd burned, he had been there half the night.

They chatted, he apologised for the door, and left. Later, at evening prayer, we agreed that there was much to admire in a man who had gone to such lengths simply to get into a church to pray. Would that more people were so keen to come to church.

A friend asked if the intruder was 'OK, if you follow?' That could mean anything. 'Are any of us OK, if you follow?' I replied, deflecting the question. I'm certainly not 'OK, if you follow' and never have been. And maybe that's why I also need to sit alone in a church and pray.

Years ago, when I had the keys to St Paul's Cathedral I would frequently sit in there on my own at night. And I do the same now in my bombed-out 1960's community church. Of course you can do it elsewhere, but these are places set aside for it. Here the silence creeps into me, a bit like the cold. Not the silence of empty nothingness but the silence of sitting comfortably with a friend. And in to that silence I bring all that is not OK with me.

The chemistry of prayer is the meeting of these two elements: that little surd of hidden desperation that some (most, all?) of us carry around with us, often without owning up to it, and that vast expanse of purposeful silence, the shorthand for which is God. In my experience, these two elements are drawn to each other. And the slow reaction between them is worth breaking into any church to find.

There are various accelerants to this chemical reaction – the repetition of liturgical formulas, even lighting candles. Like all organised religion, this is easy enough to sneer at. But key to the reaction is silence and time. For both of these eat away at our excuses, our false hopes, our lack of reality. Self-serving bull-shit doesn't easily survive the rigours of time and silence. And in this fantasy-busting environment I am lent the courage to open the most defended bits of me to the infinite love of God.

Giles Fraser

Giles Fraser is Priest-in-Charge, Newington St Mary, Southwark.

(This is a slightly edited version of the article which appeared in The Guardian on 6 January 2017. Used with permission)



I have never broken into a church to pray, but when I worked full-time I regularly went to the parish church, round the corner from our town centre offices, during my lunch hour. It was my place and time for silence and stillness, and on some days for intercession. I was usually the only person there, and so grateful that they were willing to keep the church open to anyone, yet unattended.

When asked why he sat in church for hours, the old man replied, 'I look at Him, He looks at me'.

A prayer by the Indian writer

Rabindranath Tagore

Father of all, with whom is no distance,
And to whom no one is a stranger,
Give us understanding of one another,
Seeing Thine image both in our likeness and unlikeness.
Give us courage to go on seeking to understand,
Humility to see where we have failed to understand
and still fail.

Lord of Truth, make us true.

Lord of Life, make us free,
and willing that others should be free

Lord of Love, teach us to love.

Break through our pride and make us lowly,
Break down our barriers and make us one -

One in common service and sacrifice,

One before Thee,

One in Thee.

Lord of Peace teach us so to live in Thy peace
That we may make peace.

Lord of Hope, give us faith to believe,
And in Thy light may we see light.

Amen

Weaving: Integration

"Weaving involves crossing two threads, the warp and the weft, one vertical and the other horizontal, one stretched taut and the other undulating and intertwined with the first. To produce the textile it is necessary for these two threads to be bound, otherwise each will remain a fragile and fluttering potentiality...if the meeting of opposites does not take place, nothing is created, for each element is defined by its opposite and takes its meaning from it."

Dario Valcarengi, *Kilim History and Symbols*,
as quoted in *ZATI The Art of Weaving a Life*

The art of weaving is a profound metaphor for understanding the workings of the universe and our place in it. Through the physical process of weaving, we gain a better understanding of this world and how we as human beings are woven into it.

We are bound to our bodies with the fragile threads of earth. Our skeleton is a loom on which every system is strung and woven with our blood. The meeting of opposite elements woven into a whole is the quest of every spiritual seeker. No wonder the art of weaving is so appealing: it is the essential art of creating the unified one out of two opposites.

Today we are weaving on the sky through which the space shuttle draws a thread of smoke. A computer is a loom of sorts, weaving a web of information on the grid of pixels and energy across the world.

Weaving has come down through the centuries as a woman's art. Women, who stayed home to take care of the hearth and child, could start and stop their spinning and weaving at any time. Thus the distaff, the staff which holds fibres for spinning, symbolizes the women's side of the family. Connected with the ancient goddess cultures, weaving is at the centre of creation as personified by the three fates (women weavers of Greek mythology), Clotho, who spins us into being, Lachesis who weaves our fate, and Atropos, who in the end, cuts the thread of our lives.

Because I realize my life could end at any time, I work to stay conscious of weaving my daily actions with that which I have deemed valuable. What a hero's journey it is to stay awake to what is valuable!

The weft is built thread by thread, weaving in and out between the warp threads, touching each one as it passes by; in the same way our daily actions weave through our values, touching each one on the way. Weave your threads in, remembering your values as you touch them and lift them to guide the weft threads through. Notice that with every little thread, you touch all your values one by one as you weave a row. This is ultimately all there is to a conscious life. This is how you integrate your life: you touch your values one by one as you guide your actions back and forth to build the fabric of your day. So how do your daily tasks touch your values? What parts of your life seem to miss them each time? How could you bring your threads back to touch your values?

Bringing them back brings us back to the selvedge, the edge of the weaving. Our selvedges are the self-edges of our lives. Each time you guide the thread through the warp, you reach the outer edge, and you turn the thread back into the warp. Each action you take with your values in mind, each daily task done with your inner structure as its reference, reaches the edge and turns back.

It is this turning back, this rhythm of turning, and turning, and turning that gives your cloth its strength; watch the edges: they will tell you where you are. If you are concentrating on the actions only, and forgetting the vertical strands of values, you will tend to pull them tighter, pulling the warp threads together, and even possibly pulling your values out of line. If you forget to turn back, and forget the values for a while, you may skip some warp threads, and find loose places and uneven edges in your life. This is all part of the natural way! None of us is perfect: our fabric, our process isn't perfect.

We are not here to judge, only to learn.

Turning back, turning and turning is like a dance that you learn over time, getting the tension too tight and too loose, and eventually seeing the pattern in your life. Patterns are created when our actions follow rhythms and cycle through the rhythms the way we cycle through our days. We wake, eat, work, rest; these make the stripes and textures of our fabric.

Some love the regularity of stripes of color; some work better without a regular pattern, letting the days come as they will, weaving through their values as they feel right, making a randomly beautiful fabric that is every bit as strong as patterned fabric. Each life is different; each fabric is made of its own threads, even to the individual thread crossings, where intention and action meet. These little moments make the whole, bit by bit as the threads are laid one on the other, day after day until the pattern emerges.

Beginnings and endings, emptiness and pattern:

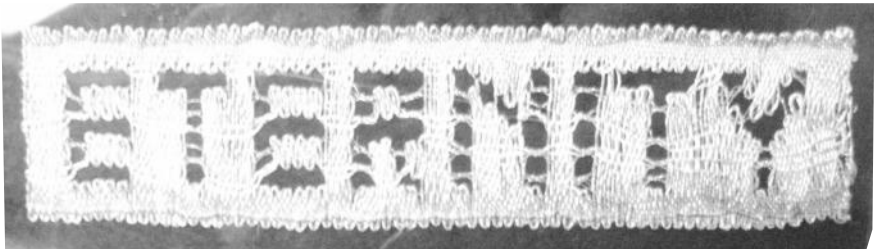
There is a method that intentionally leaves holes in the fabric. Kilim or slit weave leaves holes in a way that keeps the fabric strong. It teaches us that where there are places of loss, where the weft is interrupted, and there is a hole in the fabric of our lives, that fabric is still strong. The gap in the fabric becomes an opening through which to see from another perspective. In our woven lives, the empty spaces are the very places where we can see with new eyes, where we can look behind the day-to-day weaving for a moment to see our deeper truths within.

Our imagination is boundless, but we are not alone in the adventure. Even animals — birds, spiders and beavers — are weavers. And the weavers through the ages who have woven the fabric of history are with us in this moment.

Excerpt from Chapter 5 of ZATI The Art of Weaving a Life by Susan Barrett Merrill

In the morning light, O God,
may I glimpse again your image deep within me
the threads of eternal glory
woven in to the fabric of every man and woman.
Again, may I catch sight of the mystery of the human soul
fashioned in your likeness
deeper than knowing
more enduring than time.
And in glimpsing these threads of light
amid the weakness and distortions of my life
let me be recalled
to the strength and beauty deep in my soul.
Let me be recalled
to the strength and beauty of your image in every living soul.

J. Philip Newell (from *Celtic Benediction*, Canterbury Press 2000,
used with permission)

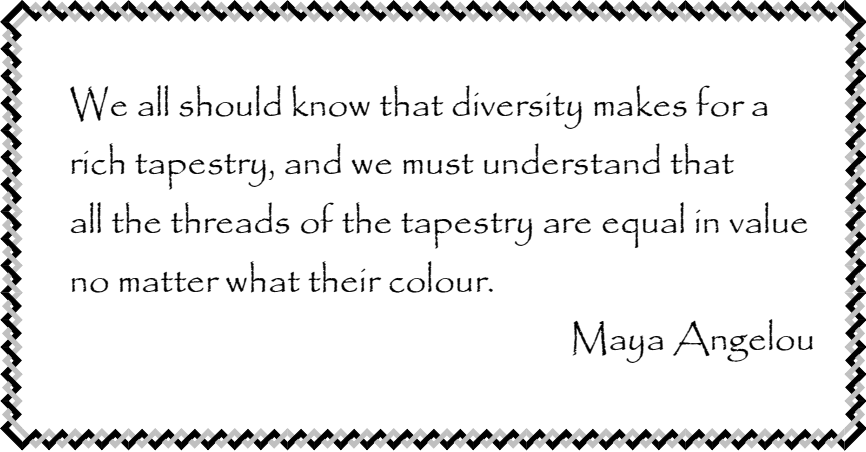


A clerical friend, knowing I made bobbin lace, asked if I could make the word ETERNITY to go on her desk. Enjoying a challenge I sorted out letter patterns for a design. But my first attempts did not work out - something felt 'not quite right.' Then it came to me. We glimpse eternity *through the fabric* of this temporal world, so the letters needed to be the spaces in the weave of the lace. After experimenting with the awkward R and Y letters, the design came together. The lower threads in the lace are browns and greens, to represent the earth, and the upper ones blue for the sky. The piece is mounted on black felt, in a clear acrylic frame. It is not a perfect piece of lace, but it gave us both a new perspective on eternity.

Deidre Morris

As I look back at the entire tapestry of my life, I can see from the perspective of the present moment that every aspect of my life was necessary and perfect. Each step eventually led to a higher place, even though these steps often felt like obstacles or painful experiences.

Wayne Dyer



We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their colour.

Maya Angelou

The tapestry of life continues to be woven. Occasionally a chance arises to repair an older, tattered piece of the weave. Something happens to jolt our awareness back in time to an event that resulted in tears and rips. With new, more mature vision, we see the circumstances in present time and have compassion for the unclear events of the past. While the new experience is being woven into the design, the old rip is simultaneously being repaired. All is well.

Bessie Senette

The Silence of Waiting

A single thread
Not woven
But hanging
Just out of reach of noise and thought and madness
Still, but never static
Its clarity un-nerving
Sending shivers
Then like snow that's fallen overnight
Everything is delicately different
Sprinkled with a knowledge never known
And never mastered
A knowledge only gazed at, now
Adored

A single thread
Not woven
But hanging

Change:

A single thread is rolled into a skein
And if left to itself will stay the same;
But left alongside other skeins
Will, over time,
Become a fiercely knotted tangle of impenetrable intricacy
which can only be unwound with patience and good light.

In the hands of one who knows
Such a thread can be laid alongside others,
Woven, or knitted, crocheted or laced
Into a beautiful pattern, or a warm sweater
Depending on the nature and thickness of the thread.

Both movements are the same –
each part of the thread laid over and under
the adjacent threads,
the force of friction keeping them in place
but not too tight as to be strained;
a gentle pressure as the craft is done
aligning each part of the thread correctly
and leaving it in place.
It is so simple that the worker may even
Hold a conversation
At the same time.

One way or another the thread is laid down:
To chaos
Or to beauty and order

One way or another a skein of thread becomes a piece of
cloth:

Sarah Cawdell



Crucifixion Sculpture by John Bunting

In the memorial chapel he created in N. Yorkshire

Silence is a particularly valuable language to use about God. At the end of his conversation with God, Job says of God, "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me that I did not know". (Job 42.3).

It's right that we should be reduced to the humility and riches of silence, because at this point the half-gods leave and God can arrive.

From John Pritchard's 'Something More' reviewed on page 23

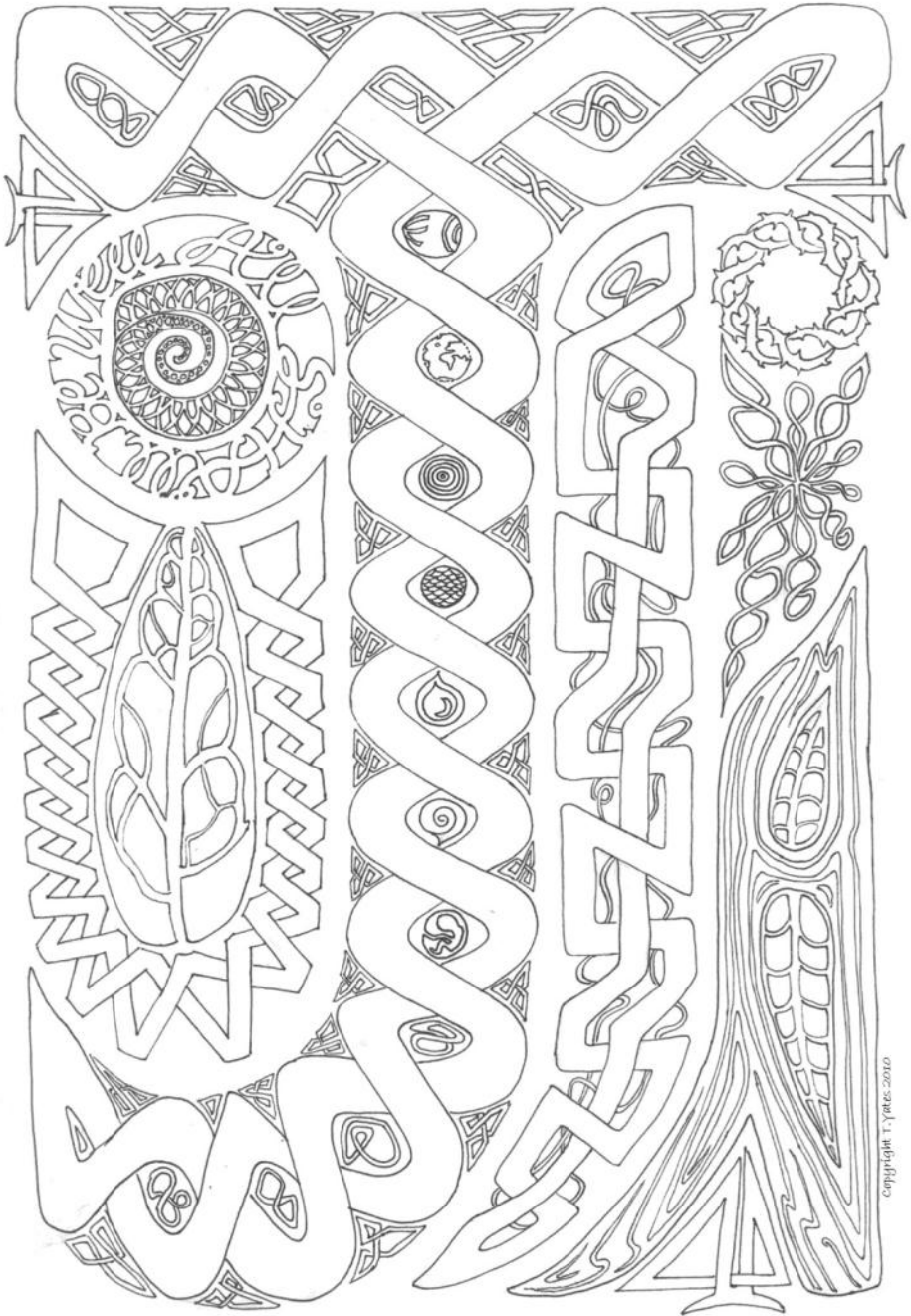
Father

It is the last picture of you:
standing half-turned away and smiling,
as though you are not ninety-one at all,
but twenty years your own junior
and ready to begin a walk
you'd planned for years and never done.

Is that where you went:
beyond the picture and into
the great landscape that you loved?
As though death was nothing more
than somewhere further than the camera could see;
made of the same moorland,
and full of birdsong that would never cease.

Kenneth Steven

From 'Letting in the Light' reviewed on page 25



A design inspired by Julian of Norwich and her hazelnut, drawn by Tracey Yates. Julian's Day is 8th May in the Church of England.

A prayer station used on a quiet afternoon, when candles were not practicable. A deep pink cloth was draped beneath and behind the cross; water was in a pale pink bowl; pale pink scarves were draped round, with many small white shells scattered on them. A notice at the side said:



This is a space to pray for yourself, or for other people. As you pray for a person or situation, place a small white shell in the water, to symbolise them being immersed in the love, care and mercy of God.

Another prayer station had some tangles of threads of many types and colours, and this notice:

Tangled Up?

When threads are tangled up you may feel like giving up on trying to unravel them. But if you take the time to sit down quietly you may gently, patiently, tease out the tangles, and find the individual threads again.

You may sometimes feel that your emotions, your life or your relationships are similarly all tangled up, and you cannot sort them out. But if you bring these situations and people quietly before God, you may find ways through.

You are welcome to take a tangle and sit quietly unravelling one or more of the threads, perhaps praying as you do so for particular areas of your life.

A short prayer.....'Thank You'

How often do we awaken in the morning and feel that we don't have time to pray, or are too tired at night to pray before sleep? Yet, there is a simple and short prayer that we can easily start and end our day with; that prayer comprises only two words, 'thank you'. By saying that simple and short prayer to God we are telling Him that we are truly grateful for everything he has given us, for everything that the day holds, for the night of rest we have just received or for the night of rest to come.

Think of how we feel when someone says 'thank you' to us; how it brings a feeling that we are appreciated and valued and how it brings a smile to our face. That is also how God receives the prayer and He will then reflect back to us His total and unconditional Love of us. So, whenever you can, say this short prayer to God with deep and heartfelt gratitude.

The 'thank you' prayer can also be said and focused upon, when we are in Silent Contemplative and Meditative communion with God; when we sit silently in His presence and perhaps do not know what else to say. Indeed, the 'thank you' prayer can be used as a beautiful and sincere mantra, gently repeated as we sit with eyes closed, focusing upon our inner being, the Holy Spirit; with Jesus Christ beside us and the Father before us; in the presence of the triune God. By repeatedly saying 'thank you' gently and with sincerity, we will experience those wonderful words seeping deep within us, to the very core of our existence and bringing a closeness to the Divine that words are unable to express. So when you next embark upon silent contemplation, be it alone or with your Julian Meeting, engage with the 'thank you' prayer and see where it leads; you will be amazed.

God bless and 'Thank you'.

Barrie Wright
Rye Julian Meeting

Meeting once a month, these times are hard to describe: they are like the greatest gift Himself.

It is Time
We three gather
Travelled contrasting routes
Women with our life's stories
Met round candle, cross, Word
Wise in years
 Wise in longing
 Wise in knowing the
source of Stillness
Listening for His Hello.
So, having paused,
recognised by name
Journey on -
Bathed in light
 Soaked in Presence
 Awestruck!

Jenny Thomas
Newtown, Powys

May I take time to be quiet
 That I may hear
 Your Spirit whispering

 That I may know clearly
 Your Wisdom and Joy

 That this day may be Yours
And every day that follows too...

Amen

Be Still and Know that I am God
Psalm 46, v 10

Elizabeth Mills

Quiet Garden Movement

Sharing outdoor space for the inner journey

The Quiet Garden Movement will celebrate 25 years of nurturing outdoor space for prayer and contemplation by publishing a new course in 2017 to help people explore the benefits of silence.

The Quiet Garden Movement is a global network of over 300 gardens in homes, churches, hospitals and schools. Quiet Gardens are made available by local hosts for people of all ages to experience silence, and spend time in prayer and contemplation.



“The Quiet Garden Movement is about giving people permission to step back and experience a sense of stillness and wonderment,” said founder Reverend Philip Roderick. “We are delighted to offer the Quiet25 course as part of our on-going work to help nurture silent space in our busy lives.

It invites us to use the ancient Christian traditions of contemplation, meditation and prayer, which are known to deeply nourish mind, body and soul.

Unhurried, undistracted time spent in the beauty of a natural environment, particularly wandering slowly or sitting and reflecting, focuses the mind in a way essential to wellbeing”.

The world’s largest study into the links between rest and wellbeing showed that *‘being alone’* and *‘in the natural environment’* were rated in the three most restful activities. (Rest Test Survey, 2016, of 18,000 people in 134 countries)

The **Quiet25 course** takes people on a journey through a range of contemplative exercises and practices to explore silence and will be run by local groups. Over 5 weeks it introduces people to experience times of silence together in natural surroundings and explore the health and spiritual benefits of taking a regular time of quiet in nature.

On **20 May 2017**, the Quiet Garden Movement will gather in London to celebrate the past 25 years, with speakers Rev’d Lucy Winkett (Rector, St James’s Church, Piccadilly), Rev’d Dr Andrew Walker (Director, St Marylebone Healing and Counselling Centre, London) and Rev’d Philip Roderick (Founder-Director, Quiet Garden Movement).

God is in the Garden: Celebrating 25 years of Quiet Gardens at St John’s Church, Waterloo, London SE1 8TY

on **Saturday 20 May 2017** 10.15am for 11am start - 5pm

All are welcome, but pre-booking is essential. Further information from Mary-Anne Hall 01494 578909 info@quietgarden.org

The Quiet Garden Trust, Copse End, Copse Lane, Jordans,

It is unfortunate that our JM event is on the same day. Many Julians also value the Quiet Garden Movement, and perhaps some who are not coming to Derby will be able to attend this event in London. If your garden is part of the QGM you could include it in your Meeting record and/or in the Members Area of the JM website.

May the outrageous welcome of the Father
accept us for who we are;
may the incarnation of the Word touch and hold us close;
may the wandering of the Spirit
help us to risk ourselves for love;
and the blessing of God Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer
be upon us this day and for evermore. Amen.

More on 'Thin Places'

Thin time and place

I arrive at the cathedral just before 9.00pm. The lights are dimmed, candles burning around the nave altar space. I find a big cushion, and sit on it propped against a pillar, my coat cushioning my back. Others lie flat on cushions; sit or kneel on hassocks; or sit on chairs. This is Lazy Compline. The clock chimes 9.00 and from St Mark's Chapel rise the voices of the choir men, singing the late evening service of compline. Prayer and plainchant fill head and heart, mind and spirit. For 20 minutes the world is just this space, this time, this worship, this connection to the other.

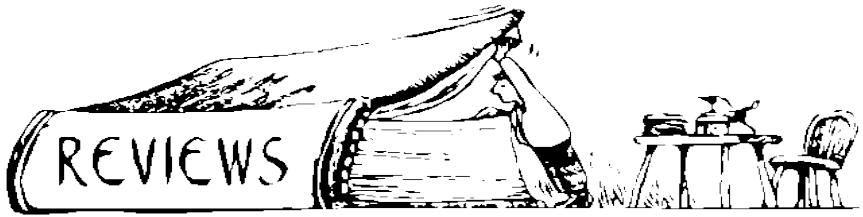
Iona

For many people Iona is a special 'thin place'. Whether you have been there or not, 'Iona: The Other Island' is a book that may take you back or draw you there for the first time. It is an evocative collaboration between two men who have known the island since childhood, visiting often, and they cover the *whole* island, not just the popular parts.

Iain Sarjeant has taken stunning photos, not only of landscapes and seascapes, but details of seaweed, shells, rocks, lichen, sandy shores - all could be gazed at contemplatively. Kenneth Steven complements the photos with memories, practical advice on exploring the island, and some of his own poetry.

A book to dip into time and again to appreciate this thin place.

Iona: The Other Island by Iain Sarjeant and Kenneth Steven
St Andrew Press 2014 Paperback ISBN 978-0-86153-830-0



EXPLORING DOUBT; Landscapes of Loss and Longing *Alex Wright*

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

Alex Wright regrets that in Christian history doubt has been little acknowledged or recognised as the essential incubator of a lively and robust belief. Capacity to doubt implies the capacity to believe, which suggests the capacity to question.

Wright weaves reflections on certainty, doubt, endurance and revival. He uses images from the tidal ebb and flow that has shaped the Norfolk coast, and shifts in his own life experience after an unexpected loss. Just as we must look below the surface to understand the landscape, we must dig into our own lives to come to terms with our griefs.

Wright emphasizes the dangers of unquestioned certainty that leads to fundamentalism: he doubts that conviction is a safe route to finding the divine. Certainty cuts us off from mystery, and from awareness to notice the unexpected. Like medieval mystics we too may find God in the Cloud of Unknowing, by accepting the reality of the Dark Night of the Soul. Mystics struggled to find what lies behind knowledge, and to express a faith based on the infinite and invisible. Julian wrestled for years to discern if her visions were from God. Doubt helps us search for God in the shadows, not just in the sunlight, in "those yawning and aching spaces of emptiness that sometimes threaten to swallow us up whole."

Paradoxically this book about doubt is full of hope for the future. The faith journey twists and turns, but if followed with perseverance, tenacity and courage we might, like Bunyan's pilgrim, reach somewhere worth getting to! Looking back at our personal histories, hope blossoms as we find that endings

lead to new beginnings: losses are seeds of transformation. "The present moment is nothing without all the earlier moments it contains."

This lyrical book deserves slow reading and reflection: when we draw on times past we discover they are the seed bed of the future: this is what the landscape, our history and our lives show. If we embrace the future, mystery and challenge of living with ambiguity, we will accept the gift God offers to us.

Ann Morris

FORGETFUL HEART, Remembering God in a Distracted World

Lucy Mills

Darton Longman & Todd 2014 £9.99

ISBN 978 0 232 53071 1

Lucy Mills, a graduate of London School of Theology, writes for various magazines, and is a regular blogger. This is her first book and it surprised me by its depth and usefulness.

This book has four logical parts: our present forgetfulness caused by our busy lives; a history of forgetfulness by God's people in the old testament; examples of faith and witness for us in the new testament; and finally five practical chapters on the Art of Remembering.

Detailed snapshots from Lucy's life show typical behaviours in western society, which show how barriers develop which make it more and more difficult to remember God in our lives. Lucy intersperses the text with her own poems, prayers and meditations which describe the tension and emotion that often results when we lose sight of God's protecting standard.

Each of the four parts has five chapters, which open with a short bible passage. Sub-headings make the book very easy to read. This is a book through which to make your own personal journey. It is also suited to small group study as the chapters close with searching questions for reflection.

Much of the book will not be new to most of us, but Lucy has an insightful way of drawing it all together and the final

section is positive and uplifting. I used it with a small group, and it brought a refreshing perspective to tackling the daily struggles of the human condition.

Fiona Elliott

TRANSFORMED BY THE BELOVED: a guide to spiritual formation with St John of the Cross

Daniel Muñoz

Bible Reading Fellowship 2014 £6.99

ISBN 9781841015842

The Spaniard Daniel Muñoz is an Anglican priest, writing on the 16th-century Catholic mystic and poet Juan de la Cruz. He outlines his life and its religious context of the Jews and Muslims expelled from Spain, the Protestant reformation and the Catholic's "Holy Inquisition". Many religious orders were renewing their spiritual life and John helped Teresa of Ávila reform the Carmelite order. As a result he was kidnapped, and during his 9 months imprisonment his poetry was born.

We are introduced to John's teachings and spiritual wisdom so that we can reflect on and respond to aspects of the spiritual journey that he considered crucial. Muñoz discusses John's central metaphor of the night, and "the dark night of the soul". For John meditation happens in our minds as "a discursive act carried out through images, forms and figures, fabricated and imagined by the senses" (eg Ignatian prayer): contemplation (which John regarded as the higher form of prayer) takes place in profound silence, internal and external, with the soul "naked" before God. Subsequent chapters cover: "Encounter: the God of intimacy", "Creation: the connections with nature", "Transformation: becoming like the Beloved" and "Love: the beginning and end of the journey", each chapter ending with suggestions for prayer and reflection.

The book ends with some of John's poems, in the original Spanish and in Muñoz's English translations, in some of which his ear for English fails him. Muñoz's book will lead many to explore this great mystic. It is very much commended.

Richard Skinner 23

A LITTLE BOOK OF UNKNOWING

Jennifer Kavanagh

Christian Alternative 2015 £4.99

ISBN 981 1 78279 808 8

Jennifer Kavanagh is a Quaker and a retreat leader. In this little book she writes from her own experience, but also draws on the works of well-known spiritual writers, Julian of Norwich, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and Evelyn Underhill to mention a few.

She points out that *Homo sapiens* means 'wise man' not 'Homo omnisciens', 'man all knowing'. However we often behave as if we are the latter when really we are the former. She explores what it is to 'know', in the sense of know someone. Can we really say that we fully know anyone, even a life partner or close friend? If we cannot say that, how can we say that we 'know' God?

She then takes the reader through a series of interlinked chapters to show a way of 'unknowing'. I think many Julians, as I did, would find this a helpful and encouraging book, as we try to 'be still and know'.

Anne Stamper

SILENT PRAYER

Fr. Andrzej Muszala

Catholic Truth Society 2016 £2.50

ISBN 978 1 78469 130 1

This small (48 page) paperback is a gem. Accessibly written by Father Andrzej, it has become my handbook for entering into interior prayer during personal and Julian prayer times. Taking inspiration from John of the Cross and his *Ascent of Mount Carmel* it presents to the reader the simple principle of 'the Five Nothings' which are:

1. Standing in the presence of God
2. Spiritual reading
3. Closing your eyes
4. Looking at Jesus
5. Making your act of faith

Although published by the CTS it is in no way a book of Catholic doctrine; it is for anyone who desires to still their mind and enter deep personal communion with God, as this extract shows: 'What do we think of when we refer to interior prayer? We have many ways of describing what we mean by prayer; communion with God, a form of request, adoration or thanksgiving, a conversation with God or even a monologue. We may even regard praying as a means of achieving merit! It is astonishing how complicated we can make prayer seem. No wonder we get tired and abandon the attempt. St. Teresa of Avila was able to describe prayer as nothing other than a close sharing between friends: "being on terms of friendship with God, with Him who loves us". In her view, the essence of prayer is to love a lot, not to talk a lot, just like two people sitting together in silence, bonded by their love for each other.'

From this introduction the reader is led gently through the Five Nothings and shown how easy it is just to sit with God and say nothing; when in the presence of God words are not necessary.

I heartily commend this small book to anyone who wishes to explore a deep and personal relationship with the Divine and no longer be attached to words or formal prayers.

Barrie Wright

LETTING IN THE LIGHT

Kenneth Steven

SPCK 2016 £9.99

ISBN 9 780281 076703

'It's when we are broken we let in the light'. In these poems Kenneth Steven explores intensely painful, personal times of loss, bereavement, marital breakdown, and separation from his beloved young daughter. Some poems resonate with the landscape and nature themes that typified his earlier collections, but more encapsulate moments of hurt, regret, and recognition, as in the opening two lines of 'Alone': *That*

Christmas I camped in the house / surrounded by a marriage in boxes.

Kenneth Steven's language is skilful and condensed. Re-reading reveals layers of insight, and allusions that are not obvious at first. The light is certainly let in by his brokenness, as he struggles with the concepts of 'home', 'me', 'hope' and 'regret'. We glimpse moments of love, tenderness, spiritual insight, and growth in the midst of his personal struggle.

Deidre Morris

(see page 13 for his poem "Father")

MIXED BLESSINGS: being the People of God

Barbara Brown Taylor

Canterbury Press 1986, 1998, 2015 £10.99

ISBN 978 1 84825 29 7

A book of 17 sermons from 30 years ago - surely they will be out of step with current trends and imagery? I have seldom been more pleasantly surprised. The robust, colloquial style carries the reader along, via unexpected twists and turns, to a deeper understanding of our relationship with God: down-to-earth but touched by the Spirit.

The book has three themed parts. *A Cloud of Witnesses* goes through aspects of the Old Testament from Abraham's relationship with God (seen by the author as a wedding covenant) to the Magnificat of Mary who 'just wanted to thank God for visiting her, but ended up bearing his son'.

The Firstborn of All Creation goes through the Church Year from Advent to All Saints, reminding us that all the baptised are saints, even if many of our halos are wobbly.

Inhabitants of Earth challenges our doubts and reminds us that 'we are called to live out our own stories, to search for the unique shape our lives will take in communion with God'.

Brown Taylor encourages us to see differently, to truly open our eyes. Don't pretend. Really open your eyes. Be prepared to be refreshed, challenged and inspired. This is good stuff.

Richard Bryant

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