

# the JOURNAL



Baptist Union Retreat Group

Spring 2012

## What Kind of People are We?

*What's special about members of retreat groups and spirituality networks? Are they different from other Christians and in what way?*



These are questions that have been floating around my mind since I was pointed to a nine year old article in an American magazine, *The Atlantic*, called *Caring for your introvert* by Jonathan Rauch. It is the most frequently read article on their website.

When some of us took the Myers-Briggs personality type test at Baptist House a few years ago, we learned that introverts are not shy people but those who find their strength from within. On the other hand, extroverts are energised by other people and social interaction. It is said that if an extrovert is left alone for two minutes he will reach for the telephone.

Jonathan Ruach explains that for introverts to be alone with their thoughts is as restorative as sleeping, as nourishing as eating. They need to turn off and recharge.

Do you see yourself here? Are those of us who like quiet days, retreats and aloneness with God to be seen as introverts?

As a member of BURG of course it is not being alone that matters, but being alone with God. It is not just being quiet that is important  
***Finding a place of stillness where God's voice can be heard*** but finding a place of stillness where God's voice can be heard. It is not merely turning off so as to recharge ourselves from some undefined source of power within, but allowing the Holy Spirit to fill and refresh us.

Rauch points out that only around 25 per cent of people are introverts. However as far as gifted people are concerned - writers, artists, musicians, actors and the like, they are in the majority.

Unfortunately, like all minorities, they are misunderstood. Evidently it is easy for introverts to understand extro-

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The Baptist Union Retreat Group is a Founder Member of the Retreat Association.

*All views and opinions expressed in this Journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of BURG or of the members of the Committee.*

*I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly. John 10:10*

Lord, we praise you  
for coming to this world  
not to exploit or steal  
but to offer life  
abundant life  
for people to realise  
their full humanity  
with all  
its possibilities;

and we thank you  
for giving yourself  
spending yourself  
laying down your life  
as the Good Shepherd  
not counting the cost  
of your mission of love.

Lord,  
we have heard the call  
to follow you  
wherever you may lead;  
prepare us then,  
equip us,  
and  
as you promised  
be with us always

\*\*\*

*You shall do homage to the Lord your God and worship him alone. Matt 4:10*

Sometimes it is easier  
to worship  
Christian symbols  
to invest in buildings  
and traditions  
to hold on  
to the furniture of faith,  
rather than worship  
the Lord our God  
and come  
face to face  
with the demands  
he is making  
on our lives.

Lord,  
show us what is  
essential to our faith  
and what we can  
easily discard.

verts, but not the other way round. They can't understand why anyone would want to be alone!

Politicians, in the main, are extroverts as are most people who dominate public life. They don't think before they speak but speak in order to gather their thoughts. An exception to this was American President Calvin Coolidge who once said: 'Don't you know that four fifths of all our troubles in this life would disappear if we would just sit down and keep still? Amen to that.

Now where does this leave us? If there is a link between personality types and the way we express our Christian faith, particularly in worship, then we are in a minority? But are we

***Are we misunderstood ?*** a misunderstood and oppressed minority?

If we understand why extrovert Christians are uncomfortable with silence in worship and love to make a glorious and glad sound, why can't they understand that some of us are different? In church meetings it is the extrovert who speaks first and also who volunteers to take on responsibilities. Introverts have to think a bit before coming forward, if ever they do.

Of course all extroverts are not the same, neither are all introverts. There are many degrees of difference. Nevertheless, maybe BURG ought to produce an occasional paper entitled *Caring for your BURG member*.

A few years someone once said that the trouble with our churches is that most of the members are stuck in stage three of James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*. This is a stage where faith depends on conforming and being part of a group identity. Faith is informed by ministers, church leaders, and other

***When circumstances change faith dries up*** Christian friends. Sometimes even the church building is important. If circumstances change, ministers and friends move away then their faith-energy dries up also. Professor John Hull once said that we need to help such people move forward in their faith journey. If they are extroverts I wonder whether they will listen.

Perhaps you think I'm way off beam. These are only a few initial thoughts which I would love to explore further. Perhaps you can help with a few thoughts and experiences of your own.

DEP



*'Don't you know that four fifths of all our troubles in this life would disappear if we would just sit down and keep still?'*

# Silent Retreat at St Beuno's

*with thanks to the late Will Thompson for his introduction*

Last autumn, you may have caught a series of three programmes on BBC2 called 'The Big Silence'. Christopher Jamison, former abbot of Worth Abbey, introduced five people to the experience of silence. After some preliminary talks and exercises, the five were taken to St Beuno's, a Jesuit retreat house in Denbighshire, North Wales, for an 8-day individually guided silent retreat.

I have been making such a retreat at St Beuno's every July since 2005. At the mention of a retreat, most people's reaction is, 'Ooh how lovely; I wish I was going!' Visions of time to oneself, perhaps long walks through beautiful countryside, or being curled up with a good book come to mind. The thought of life without mobile phones, emails, blogs, radio, TV or iPods is bliss to some, but unsettling for others.

Certainly I do appreciate being in a lovely old house with beautiful grounds and, from my own good-sized room, enjoying lovely views of the gardens and the copse. From the top of the terraced garden, there is always the chance, weather permitting, of viewing the sun setting over the sea and of scanning the surrounding fields dotted with cows and sheep. An idyllic scene disturbed only by the soft drone of traffic on the nearby A55, a useful reminder of the everyday life from which I have 'come apart' for a few days, but which cannot drown out the bird song.

I have to confess that I do enjoy having all my meals cooked for me, the break from shopping and household chores, and no interruptions. So what could be more perfect, with no one to listen to - but God? Ah, therein lies the rub! As a distance education tutor, I would always warn my students that I would be incommunicado for these eight days. To those who asked me about it, I replied that

**'Spiritual deep therapy'** while a retreat could indeed be very restful, it could also be like spiritual deep therapy; in other words quite bruising. Certainly, if you go with the intention of taking the risk of placing yourself for prolonged periods in the loving gaze of God, you can expect to learn a lot about *him*, and about yourself, which might not always be comfortable. Nevertheless, I always feel excited at the prospect of spending this time with God and wondering what *he* will have to say to me.

I am often asked, 'What do you do all day?' The simple answer is, 'pray', but this can take various forms and is usually preceded by being given a passage of scripture, although this may be augmented by poems, or various other spiritual writings. Sometimes I take the opportunity to go to one of the chapels or prayer areas within the house, or the little ancient rock chapel set on a nearby hill, to read and meditate on my text, or even stay in my room.

At other times, I walk in the extensive grounds (circular walks in the area are readily available for the more adventurous), use the labyrinth, or sit by the lily pond or in the herb garden. If I find my head full of confusing thoughts, a visit to the well-stocked art room can often help to clarify my thinking.

Although this is a silent retreat, as well as a daily Eucharist, you have an opportunity once a day to meet with your spiritual



*View of the main house at St Beuno's*

*How little faith you have!*  
Matt 14:31

How little faith!  
- and they were close  
to Jesus,  
watching, touching,  
listening to his voice,  
secure in his presence.

How little faith!  
- we have today  
and some turn  
to images and to magic  
to things to touch and see.

How little faith!  
- in one we know  
and trust  
afraid to move  
for fear  
of being swamped  
by social need  
and swept away  
by dark problems  
of the spirit.

Give us faith  
Lord.  
Give us courage  
Lord  
to serve  
in your name  
knowing  
you are always there  
our help  
and  
our friend.

director or accompanier. In this session you talk through anything that has particularly caught your attention in the last twenty-four hours. It may be a phrase in a bible passage that has jumped out of the page, something on a walk that you have noticed, indeed anything that has made you pause. Remember God saying to Jeremiah, 'What do you see?' He replies that he sees an almond branch (the almond is known as the Watchful tree, the earliest to flower) and God says, 'You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it'. Those of you who saw 'The Big Silence' may remember the young restaurant manager who picked up a fir cone from the woodland path one day. He took it back to his room and each day as it opened a little more, he understood that this was what was happening to him.

Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, is particularly known for imaginative contemplation and I often find this helpful when I am studying a story, particularly in the Old Testament or in the Gospels. Having read the passage through several times until I have the story clear in my mind, I play out the scene in my head, feeling the ground beneath my feet, savouring the sights and sounds and smells around me and imagining myself in the scene.

Sometimes I find myself becoming one of the central characters, at others times an onlooker. Often at the beginning of a retreat, you will be given a passage where Jesus at some points asks a question such as, 'What do you want me to do for you?' If you find yourself on the receiving end of such a question in your

### ***'What do you want me to do for you?'***

meditation, your response will help to guide your readings for your next prayer session. Within these prayer times a voice, which is not your own, may cut across your imaginative thoughts. Jesus may issue a direct challenge, or have a brief exchange with you. You may be given a word of encouragement, or have a vision, but such experiences are not to be sought for their own sake. They may have a message that needs interpreting, or they may be a one off assurance from God that you are heading in the right direction. The important thing is that you open yourself to all that God wants to give you, to receive his unconditional love for you and to learn to love and trust him in return.

Imaginative contemplation requires you to use your mind and your imagination to 'talk' your way into a scene, but there is another type of prayer, which involves sitting still, and being silent in God's presence without using your mind. Some people simply concentrate on their breathing, but others find it helpful to repeat a word or phrase to keep their mind occupied, for example: God, love, *maranatha*, or Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner. This word becomes an undercurrent after a while, but it is something to return to when you find your mind has wandered, which it will. Christopher Jamison says that 'when we enter into periods of silence, we start to see things with greater clarity. We come to know ourselves, and come in touch with that deepest part of ourselves.

I believe all of us need to give ourselves space and time to re-think our attitude and evaluate our response to God, to events, ourselves and others; time to reflect on the experiences of life.

*Sue Sheppy*



*Entrance to Rock Chapel*

*...until we all attain in the unity inherent in our faith in our knowledge of the son of God - to mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ.  
Ephesians 4:13*

*'Measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ' and yet most of us settle for much less, measuring our lives by the standards of the world, going our own way, caring more about what people think rather than whether we are doing your will.*

*Lord,  
help us  
to be still  
so that  
we may listen  
to your voice  
and understand  
the unity  
inherent  
in our faith.*



# Our New Logo...

*They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
bearing fruit in due season,  
with leaves that do not wither;  
everything they do shall prosper.*      Psalm 1:3

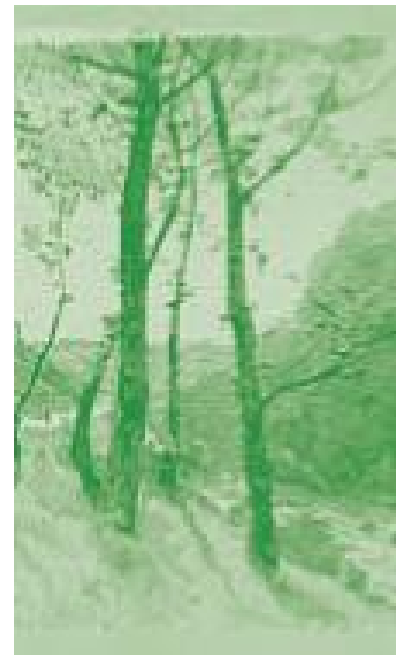
**S**o Lord,  
there are two sorts of people,  
the happy  
who delight in your word,  
who meditate on it day and night,  
and the wicked,  
who ignore what you have to say.

Whom am I Lord?  
How do you perceive me?  
I read the Bible,  
quite a lot actually  
but I can't say I meditate on it day and night,  
what with all that life asks of me  
and that demanding call  
to your mission of love in the world.

So it's good to have opportunities  
for thoughtful silence  
snatched within the busyness of the day,  
or on programmed times of retreat,  
they are like putting roots into the moist earth  
beside a life-giving stream of water  
preventing my faith from withering away.

Forgive me Lord for those times  
when caught up in a hectic life  
there are few moments  
to stop  
and think  
and listen.  
And thank you for the many chances  
I still have to feast on the riches of your word.

Happy indeed is this man  
even though he strays often  
to walk  
in the way  
of the Lord.



# ...And Website

**A**t long last our BURG website is up and running. You can find us at: [www.burg.org.uk](http://www.burg.org.uk)

It is a wonderful new resource for BURG members with constantly updated news of upcoming retreats, quiet days and other events.

There are also pages, which we are adding to, from which you can download articles, papers and archived editions of *The Journal*.

Since it has only been on-line for a relatively short time we are still adding to it. So pay it a visit and let us know what you think.

# Forthcoming Retreats

As this Journal goes out, 15 of us will be on the Lent Retreat at Ivy House, Warminster, under the leadership of Chris Ellis and Barbara Carpenter. There is a sense of lively anticipation. It's a lovely way to approach Easter!

**Scargill House** Later in the year Monday - Thursday (1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> October) we have planned to visit Scargill House in North Yorkshire. Over recent years we have deliberately planned retreats in the north to enable as many members of BURG as possible to participate in an annual retreat in one place or another.

Ron Ayres and Tasker Lewis had agreed to lead this, as they have previously but sadly, both of these dear friends have decided that they are no longer able to. Currently, we are investigating other possibilities. I'm sure that we shall soon have more details. In the mean time, please let me know if you are interested, so that we know what numbers to plan for.

**Group Individually Guided Retreat** Also, we have made a reservation for a Group Individually Guided Retreat at Holland House in Advent - Monday-Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> December. Numbers are limited and early reservation of places is recommended - certainly by 15<sup>th</sup> September.

**Lent Retreat** Finally - for the moment! By popular request, we return to Holland House for a Lent Retreat in 2013. A reminder of the dates: 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> March. Feel free to make provisional bookings at any time by e-mail to : [gill-roberts@live.co.uk](mailto:gill-roberts@live.co.uk) or [retreats@burg.org.uk](mailto:retreats@burg.org.uk)

**BURG Bursaries** Bursaries are available. One suggestion is that you might encourage a young person to go on a retreat and apply for a bursary.

I look forward to meeting you again soon - maybe with a friend!

*Gill Roberts - Retreats Secretary*

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*The Editor welcomes contributions, related to the retreat movement, in the form of articles, reports, prayers and poems but cannot always guarantee to include them.*

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## THE BAPTIST UNION RETREAT GROUP MEMBERSHIP 2012

Unfortunately, in order to pay our way, we have had to look again at our membership rates.

It has not been an easy decision, but for 2012 we have decided to increase our rates. They are as follows:

£20.00 Single  
£27.50 Couple  
£32.50 Group or Church  
£37.50 Retreat House or College

If you currently pay by Standing Order please contact your bank or building society to adjust your payments accordingly.

## BURG AGM

A reminder that the AGM this year will be held during the Retreat Association Conference at Swanwick, Derbyshire on Wednesday 16 May at 4 pm.

At previous conferences there has been a good number of BURG members present and we hope many of you will be able to attend.

The dates are the 14 to 17 May.