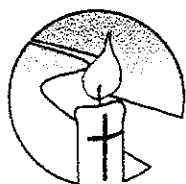


# the JOURNAL



Baptist Union Retreat Group

Spring 2014

## Surfing through the Lent Retreat

Gill Roberts reports on our first visit to Buckfast Abbey for a retreat. BURG members in the West Country have used it on a number of occasions. It was led by Ivor and Anthea Hughes.

**I**t certainly was an excellent time, although a weekend is too short! Ivor drew us into the stillness and on to holy ground through Mole and Rat's encounter with 'Him'!

**We Listened** like Elijah at the cave's entrance - and responded to questions provided by Ivor (e.g. "What people, places and events in my life have been ..... leading me to desire a more intimate relationship with God?")

**We Let Go** of things which held us back from trusting God (We did this symbolically by holding chains and letting them go and receiving anointing.)

**We Looked** at paintings expressing Jesus in different ways (The Gentle Jesus, the cruelly crucified Christ, the Korean Christ and Jesus the Guru) and considered how our understanding of the Person of Christ has changed during our lifetime - and how we express Christ to others in a relevant way.

**We Left** with the deep desire to SOAR - like the surfer,\* through discipline, solitariness, awareness and surrender - and to experience ecstasy!

\* Please see the quote from William McNamara, *The Human Adventure: The Art of Contemplative Living* (Amity House 1974) pp.160-61 on page 6.

On page 2 there are comment from some of those who took part in the retreat.



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[www.burg.org.uk](http://www.burg.org.uk)

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.



## BURG Retreats

When we planned this retreat, we feared that the journey into Devon might be a step too far for many - just as our retreats into Yorkshire in the past might have been! We need not have feared! What a happy situation in which to find ourselves! Fully booked!

Now we are already looking to our Advent Retreat at Holland House with 14 places already taken! This is very satisfying and exciting.

For many of us, returning to a familiar and well loved place causes great anticipation. Will you share this anticipation with someone else? This is not to simply fill spaces, I doubt that will be a problem, but rather to extend the retreat experience to others.

To encourage this, the BURG committee wishes to help those who might find the cost prohibitive. If you know someone who would benefit from a subsidy (e.g. because they are unemployed, on a pension or a student) Please encourage them to apply for the retreat, or do it on their behalf.

There is an application form in your pack which you may copy. Any enquiries can also be made to me, Gill Roberts, Booking Secretary by email ([gill-roberts@live.co.uk](mailto:gill-roberts@live.co.uk)) or telephone 01494 677281

## Comments from participants at the Lent Retreat

**H**ow could I forget the Lent Retreat? Come to think of it how shall I remember it? First, the place; the utter beauty and quiet of the surroundings was stunning; the silence of the countryside spoke peace to us all. And what a magnificent set of buildings there is. It had changed a lot since I last saw it sixty years ago but the essential glory of the church itself has not. One part of the genius of the intervening years has been the raising of the tower and the adding of the bells. The other wonder is the addition of the Lady Chapel. The bells reminded us of the disciplines and dedication of the monastic life, summoning us too to a life lived in the constant atmosphere of work and prayer. As for the Lady Chapel, well, I sat and sat and sat there among all that glorious stained glass and the Lord reached out his arms to me and I surrendered again to his calling.

Second, the leader. I had never met Ivor before and maybe I was a bit cold when he started but by the time he got to his master stroke, letting Carl Jenkins take over completely on the Saturday evening, I was won over. I am grateful to God for him and his lovely wife Anthea. And what a lot of work he put in to the booklet. It will stay on my shelves!

Then thirdly, though perhaps it ought to be firstly, there was brother Stephen, there to welcome us. He was the Community's guest master, doubling as kitchen maid and goodness knows how many other small roles. He was never seen without a smile on his face, even in the rain. We owe a great deal of thanks to so caring a host.

Then the bits and pieces; the reconstruction of the Southgate has turned it into a really comfortable conference hub, kitchenette and all. (Those of us men sent to lodge in the monastery didn't have so much as a kettle though we did have new beds!) And as for the food, wow, what portions! and what quality!

*David Clark*

**W**hat an excellent Lent Retreat! What a great place to be - to be in peace; to be in silence in such beautiful surroundings - being with God. "Listening" (Teach me Lord to listen); "Forgetting" (the former things in the past), "Soaring" (Like the eagle - spreading my wings and moving on to work and walk with God). Stay close to God; hear his whisper; let go of what holds back and "SOAR".

*Anne Plympton*

**I** could concentrate on God and "God things" without worrying about meals, kids, dust and church things. You couldn't do this the same without going away. The work Ivor and the team put into everything was such a blessing. A great time that helped in the lead up to Easter.

*Margaret*



*Participants at the BURG Lent Retreat held at Buckfast Abbey.*

# The Language of Art, Faith and Spirituality

On a recent day off BURG Chairman, Ian Green, went into London and enjoyed two very different experiences.

The first was a visit to the Saatchi Gallery in Chelsea, housed at the old Duke of York barracks. The exhibition was on the theme of 'paper' and so we strolled through gallery after gallery of conceptual art trying to connect to the theme, or at times just wondering what these pieces were actually saying to us. Of course 'modern art' has a very different language from its 'fine art' cousin and in a way every piece we saw had an intrinsically 'elastic' breadth of interpretation.

We finished our Saatchi experience with a visit to the print room where originals could be purchased. A work by Damian Hurst comprising four dots placed around the edge of a white canvas had an asking price of £4,600 – over a thousand pounds per dot! We didn't buy it.

I surprised myself, because I'm a Philistine when it comes to conceptual art, by being more inspired by some of the pieces I saw than I thought I might have been.

We continued on something of a cultural pathway in the evening with a visit to Saddler's Wells and the first night of a new production of West Side Story. Now this was a medium whose language resonated with me. The dancing and singing were simply stunning and the heartbreaking story of Romeo and Juliet set in New York with the Jets and Sharks seemed to touch every member of the audience.

West Side Story contains so much which is, in essence, the contradiction within our humanity: a love match that crosses the divide but is unable to thrive because of the tragedy of suspicion and self-destructive conflict. I understood this language and instantly appreciated its means of communication.

I suspect that art and faith have always been intimately connected and it is often the case that sometimes the deepest part

## ***Art and faith are intimately connected***

of our spirituality finds its best expression through painting or music.

Yet the truth is that these visits in just one day gave me a very different experience of two types of art – or might we even say 'spirituality'. At the gallery I battled with the language and came out confused, which may have been a good thing. In the theatre I seemed to understand instantly what Bernstein was trying to do with every tune I heard.

This issue of language, in its broadest sense, is important in our understanding of Church and Spirituality.

I have no problems singing 18th Century hymns and, most of the time, understanding theological sermons but that's because it's what I've been doing now for over five decades! But I sense fewer and fewer people in society speak this sort of language or appreciate this type of culture anymore. Just the other day someone said to me with disarming honesty, 'I love the people at your church I'm just bored whenever I go to the services.' I appreciated their honesty – really!

To counteract this 'language/cultural gap' some newer church groups are currently experimenting with what it means to be



## FOR YOUR DIARY

2014

An  
Individually Guided Retreat  
is being arranged  
for early autumn.

\*\*\*

Advent Retreat  
at  
Holland House

5th - 7th December  
2014

Led by

Rev Dr Chris Ellis  
and  
Rev Dr Ruth Gouldbourne

\*\*\*

Updates on these retreats  
can be found on our  
website:  
[www.burg.org.uk](http://www.burg.org.uk)

Enquiries and bookings  
to:  
Gill Roberts  
01494 677281  
[gill-roberts@live.co.uk](mailto:gill-roberts@live.co.uk)

'church'. So they don't meet in gothic buildings, sing hymns, listen to sermons and take up an offering. They gather in homes or coffee shops, discuss a home grown theme, pray without words and form an ongoing community without rigid structures or obvious leadership.

Although this seems to appeal to many I readily confess such a way 'of being' scares me silly! But perhaps that's the point. I have found a way that suites me and that's 'traditional church' and I believe there is still a future for such an expression, but I'm deeply interested in alternatives, or what are sometimes called, 'fresh expressions' because the truth is the 'one size' model of church doesn't, and probably never has, fitted all.

In all of this I suspect the core values are the same but the language, we might even say the expressions of spirituality found in these newer contexts, are not 'better' or 'worse', simply 'different'. Rather reminiscent of my experience of the Saatchi Gallery alongside Saddler's Well Theatre. Indeed isn't it true that human spirituality is simply too diverse and provocative to be bound to any one tradition or understanding? And that, I suggest, is something worth celebrating and exploring.

## The Retreat Association

*New Chair of the Retreat Association, Ian Green, reports the year's activities.*

**T**hroughout 2013 the Retreat Association benefited from its new 'Incorporated' status which offers its trustees the necessary security of 'limited liability'. The re-fashioned Constitution and Articles of Association give the RA a clearer basis of operation in the increasingly regulated and audited 'charity world'.

The RA is grateful to BURG for increasing its contribution. This money will help the Retreat Association continue its national ministry at a time of increasingly scant resources.

**New office** In 2013 the RA relocated its office (due to redevelopment on the old site) from Amersham to the Clare Charity Centre ([www.theclarefoundation.org](http://www.theclarefoundation.org)) at Saunderton, near High Wycombe. Alison and her staff now work in an excellent office sharing catering and 'in-house' facilities with many other charities who are also tenants of the building.

**New patrons** During this last year it has been a real delight to welcome new Patrons to the RA - these are the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, Margaret Rizza, Christopher Jamison and our very own Graham Sparkes!

At the December Board Meeting I formally took over from Malcolm Rothwell as Chair - so I very much look forward to working with Alison as Director and Roger Seaton as Treasurer.

As Christmas approached the new edition of Retreats (now in a popular A5 format) was published - in my view it is one of the most important and comprehensive pieces of work the Association does.

**RA Conference** Planning is now under way for the RA Conference (now to be held every three years) at Swanwick scheduled for 22nd-25th June, 2015. Graham Sparkes is heading up the planning group - the first session, at the invitation of Rowan Williams, was held at Magdalene College, Cambridge where!

*Ian Green*

## BURG AGM

Saturday, 28th June,  
2014

at Amersham Free  
Church

Coffee at 10.30  
AGM business meeting  
at 11am

Graham Sparkes will lead our time together, introducing his theme before lunch and continuing afterwards.

**Title: *The Gift of Uncertainty: spiritual resources for unknown journeys***

Explanation:

*Both the world and our society are in constant flux. We are part of a changing church.*

*Baptists amongst others are searching for new ways forward.*

*In the midst of such challenge and change we look to our faith for clarity and security.*

*At the very least we want to be sure of God!*

***But what if uncertainty is itself a gift of God?***

*What if we are called to live with the unknown?*

*We will explore this theme together, seeking spiritual resources for our uncertain journeys.*

We close with communion at 3.30pm

Lunch will be provided. Please let Gill know if you will be attending. Either fill in the form and send it, with a cheque to:

Mrs Gill Roberts,  
31 Long Grove,  
Seer Green,  
Beaconsfield,  
Bucks  
HP9 2YN

OR e-mail ([gill-roberts@live.co.uk](mailto:gill-roberts@live.co.uk)) to notify and pay on the day.

# Spiritual Journals

*What is a spiritual Journal? What do you write in it? Who is meant to read it. Christine Hutt, who started journaling three years ago, shares some thoughts.*

**J**ournaling is about creating a spiritual autobiography. It is a matter between us and God, based on our spiritual practice of where we find or don't find God. Key moments such as a response to a scripture passage or the lyrics of a hymn can be included as can photos, poetry and drawings.

It is best to aim to write something daily or weekly to begin with. In a time of stress it can be a tangible reminder of God's care, and is helpful for discernment – we may be able to see signposts of where God is leading us.

However there can be a fear of emptiness – what do we write if we feel there is nothing to write about? It can be helpful to read other people's writings – such as Mother Teresa 'Come be my Light'.

I started journaling only three years ago but certainly don't write in my journal on a daily or weekly basis. I aim to write something in it at least each month but am aware, looking back, that sometimes I have been too busy to write which prompts me to reflect on what is going on in my walk with God.

I have included my responses to sermons and newspaper articles and often my feelings and emotions in relation to events happening around me. It has certainly been a useful tool in my faith journey.

## Honesty in Journal Writing

The first thing to remember about creating a spiritual journal is that you are writing it for yourself and for God. You are not writing it for posterity or necessarily for others to read.

Yes, the journals of spiritual greats have often been preserved and are now must-read classics. For instance, the journal of Thomas a Kempis became *The Imitation of Christ* and the notes that Oswald Chamber's wife compiled in her journal from Oswald's talks were eventually published as *My Utmost for His Highest*. (see *The Journal* Winter 2011). But publication should never be the intention of someone creating this kind of journal.

Entries in a spiritual journal are about your growing relationship with God. Honesty is essential and that is not easy.

We become so skilled at hiding our real selves from the world that we even begin to believe the image of ourselves which we project towards others. But we cannot hide from God however much we may try. So in our journal entries we need to work hard at honesty. We learn as we go along and if we date our entries we can later look back and see how much we have grown spiritually.

## WHAT SHOULD I WRITE ABOUT?

Anything that comes to mind as you study the Bible.

Whatever comes out of your times of meditation.

What you sense as you observe the world. What inspires? What saddens? What frustrates? What do you hear God saying through world events?

Your travels: is there a feeling of pilgrimage about them? Record what you draw from different places. Do some places feel more spiritual than others? Why do you think this is?

As you live in the world write down any new insights which God offers. How is God speaking to you through the people you meet?

Why not set down the prayers you have offered during the day. Some of them may have been quickly uttered. Others you may have taken time over. Yet others may come to mind as you write.

Whatever has surprised you and however you have surprised yourself.

Memorable or touching words that you have read or heard.

Go back over what you have written at other times. Is God saying something new? How differently to you view what you wrote then. Record your thoughts.

Some people record their dreams, if they can remember them, especially if there is something spiritual about them.

# 'Such Exquisite, Abandoned Delight'

**T**he surfer is my favourite example of the disciplined wild man, the man who has a perfectly balanced ascetical-mystical life. Check out his style.

He gets up early in the morning. That's a touch ascetical act of self-denial. Then he attends carefully and reverently to his board, polishing and waxing it with love.

Next he puts the board, this burden of love, this sacred tool, on his head and walks silently and solitary to the sea. There he faces a lonely and forbidding beach hardly perceptible in the fog.

He then plunges into cold water, works his way out into the deeps against the waves, and no comes the keenest ascetical act of all: he waits; no impulsive action, no rush, no rash moves.

He looks, listens, sees the distant waters, watching intently, contemplatively for the right wave, letting all the others go by. Finally, he sees the big wave coming. Deftly and adroitly he moves into position – timing is important – not to master the wave, but to meet it and become one. They meet. He is caught up in the magnificent, mounting momentum of that majestic wave; his muscles relax, his spirits soar, he lets himself go, surrenders himself to the mighty swelling and roaring onslaught of that wave; and he rides and rides and rides in utter delight and sheer ecstasy. That is the mystical goal of a surfer's asceticism.

Such exquisite, abandoned delight in God's cascading glory, flowing through the parched human soul made ready for the pinnacle of all human achievements, spiritual matrimony with God, is the mystical goal of all human asceticism.

*William McNamara, 'The Human Adventure: The Art of Contemplative Living,' pp 160-61 (Amity House 1974)*

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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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## A BREEZE

We had been thinking about the Holy Spirit. Phrases had been used like 'being drenched by the Spirit.' This had been linked with the 'mighty wind' of Pentecost and the Hebrew word 'ruach' which was translated as wind. However it can also mean breath or breeze as does another Hebrew word, 'nephesh.'

God's Holy Spirit does not always come in overpowering ways but often as a calm and gentle influence upon our lives.

*Have I got it wrong,  
Lord?  
Am I missing something  
when I don't experience  
the turbulent buffeting  
of the Holy Spirit  
turning my life  
inside out  
and upside down?*

*Perhaps you think  
I don't need  
to feel it that way  
or that my personality  
doesn't suit it  
or that you have other  
ways of helping me  
to function as a  
Christian.*

*What I do know is  
that you have always  
given me  
the words to speak  
and the words to write  
when I've needed them  
and that you have used  
them to help others.*

*Thank you.*