



# Evelyn Underhill Association Newsletter

Volume 14 – November 2004

## Lives Matter: Evelyn Underhill

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Whiteside Lecture, 2003  
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I'm delighted to be here and delighted that you are here with me to share this exploration of someone with whom I've spent many years - Evelyn Underhill. Before I begin with Evelyn Underhill I want to stake out a prior subject - why lives matter - why telling lives and living extraordinary lives is important, especially for those whose work is to impart the Christian message. For Christians, lives matter centrally. The message of Christianity is embedded in a life narrative told by a community of faith haunted by a person and his provocative and inspiring life.

Although telling lives has always been a part of the Western literary tradition, in the last twenty years life telling, biography, has become increasingly important. I want to maintain that biography has implications for explicating Christian life as well.



We see biography's appeal everywhere. One has only to look on the shelves of new books in your local library, or check the book reviews of any major newspaper. The narrative of a life has alluring power. It has a beginning, middle and end. It tells a story. It connects the subject to a context, and hence provides an anchor of meaning, or at least interpretation. Through the small and large choices of a life, vicariously, we see meaning unfold. As Kierkegaard said, the problem with lives is they have to be lived forward, but can only be understood backwards. Biography helps us see backwards, holistically. Hence its contemporary attraction.

One of the burdens of being a 21st century person in the West is to live at a time when ideology and liberal religious systems no longer offer the individual the kind of meaning, challenge and solace they did in the past.

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## News & Noteworthy

The Retreat House at Pleshey in the Anglican Diocese of Chelmsford, England, occasionally has retreats on Evelyn Underhill. Check its website at [www.chelmsforddiocesan.sageweb.co.uk](http://www.chelmsforddiocesan.sageweb.co.uk)

The literary executor of the Evelyn Underhill estate is Ambassador Richard Wilkinson, British Embassy, North Forest 0125, The Counts, and Santiago, Chile. Please contact him for question about permission to publish Underhill's writings.

As an act of generous friendship, Mary Clemente Davlin, OP completed an article by Mary B. Durkin, OP that was left unfinished at her death last year. The article, "Evelyn Underhill: Her Life and Religious Thought," has now appeared in the March/April 2004 issue of *Spirituality*.

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### Evelyn Underhill Association

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***“Probing for the self, the biographer finds that her subject eludes.”***

Unleashed from the framework of meaning, the individual sinks to a kind of subjectivism which becomes increasingly narcissistic. Ironically, the alternative response to the disintegration of structures of meaning is to re-embrace them again, only more forcefully. While ideology seems near dead, religious fundamentalism is resurgent. This new orthodoxy eliminates doubt, asserts truth, and provides a basis for judgment and even vengeance. It is in this context that I see great potential for biography to illuminate the creation of individual meaning.

Biography also has appeal because it sets out a life's inherent contradictions, perhaps never resolving them, but holding them in tension. These contradictions do not collapse. They remain, but by focusing on the living through them, they become intelligible. A life can then be critiqued, but it also can be forgiven, respected, and in short, understood. As such, biography can help the reader grasp another human life and prompt one to greater personal self-reflection.

Biography models how self-identity is created. Life writing shows with exquisite specificity how a subject confronts the human condition with all its joys, sorrows, opportunities and failures, how a particular biological entity in a particular time and place both finds meaning and makes it, and thus creates a life. By laying out the development of the subject's choices, the desires of the subject become evident. The uncovering of these guiding desires - be they security, fame, money, the good, pleasure, whatever, reveals the subject's life intent. It was Yeats who said that there is some one "myth" for every person, and if we knew it it would help us understand all a person did and thought. Although this may be a bit hyperbolic, the truth is that we are defined by what we believe, hope and love - our "myth." Those ends act as both a lure and a shaper of our decisions. By tracking this aspect of self-identity, the biographer models how this process unfolds.

Finally, biography has potential to provide theological insight. William Stringfellow claimed that biography is inherently theological, that by virtue of the Incarnation every life contains the news of the gospel, that each of us is a parable.

The journalist Kenneth Woodward suggests that biography can be a kind of primary theology. As a specific study of a life transformed by faith, biography can be an example of on-going revelation. And hence it can inspire, provoke, inform, challenge and prompt the reader to critical self-examination.

Of course, the use of biography for religious purpose has its perils as any of us knowledgeable about the history of Christian hagiography knows too well. The hagiographic tradition not only idealizes one's subject, but it flattens out a life, minimizing its inherent freedom. Hagiography knows the subject's answer before the question has been asked. Its goal is instrumental: to see the subject in service to some other end - in this case God. The purpose of biography, on the other hand, is to understand the subject and the process of identity creation. Neither hagiography nor its opposite, the expose, is capable of this. Neither adulation nor hatred should motivate the biographer. To idealize, to mock and unmask, or to consider the subject in service to some other end inhibit understanding. In search of this understanding the biographer continuously asks, "Who knows my subject?" The subject herself? Her contemporaries? The biographer? All of the above? None of the above? By so doing the biographer asks what it is to know a subject or a self.

Probing for the self, the biographer finds that her subject eludes. The best I could do was to attempt to hem in the subject, to circle around her spaciousness. In moments of reverie when I thought I had my subject cornered, locked up, figured out, she'd be gone. This elusiveness forced me to acknowledge the ineffability of the person. However, this realization opened up the possibility that, like a sacrament or symbol, the person points beyond to the self's desired end which is actually active in creating the life. In this sense biography can be a form of primary theology.

My point is that biography and telling lives matters, especially in our time. Thus far I have suggested that the work of the biographer is like that of an archeologist drilling down through the debris of a life to its inner space which is always unknown and mysterious. Yet we know that space is important. It is there that personality is transformed and a new way of being in the world is given birth.

It is in this arena that the work of Evelyn Underhill is meaningful. She explored that space, first as she encountered it in the mystics, and secondly as she guided her contemporaries. All of Underhill's writing, the 39 books and several hundred articles, are about that inner space and experience therein. Who then is Evelyn Underhill and what is her contribution? Let me tell you straight away, there is no definition which is fully satisfactory. On today's program Underhill is defined as an ecumenist, a pacifist, a religious writer, and a contemplative. None of these designations is in-

correct, but they miss the point. She has also been called a Christian philosopher and a mystic; those terms are even more problematic.

I can remember being asked innocently enough, who is Evelyn Underhill? This was after I had worked on the Underhill biography for seven years. I was speechless. Not merely because I believe that every person is ineffable, but I knew too well the limitation of each of the monikers applied to her. Of course, I could have easily fallen back to the historical designation and locked her in terms of time and place - 1875-1941 - London, Kensington. Since her world was a fairly narrow one, I could have even gotten it down to the actual streets. I could have placed her in a family lineage, barrister father, philanthropist mother. I could have recited her pedigree, referred to her huge corpus, and chronicled her retreats. I could have given the litany of her awards - Honorary Lecturer at Oxford, Fellow of King's College, London, Honorary Doctor of Divinity, University of Aberdeen, first woman to give a retreat in Canterbury Cathedral. While all this would have been an attempt to give specificity, the straightforward query, who is Evelyn Underhill, forced me to face the question of the legitimacy of the biography I had spent seven years writing! In what sense could I say I knew and understood Evelyn Underhill?

It is, of course, easier to talk about her work and contribution, even though the person and her work are inextricably linked. I can remember when it first dawned on me what her contribution was. I was in the venerable Blackwell's bookstore in Oxford, England when across the room I saw the sign for the Used Book Section which was divided into subject areas. My eyes lighted on "second-hand theology." And I knew that that was the correct designation for much theology at least as I had experienced it - abstracted, remote, disconnected from life and hence used up and barren, second hand. The power of Underhill's writing was rather about first-hand theology, the raw experience of the personal encounter with the divine. It is her subject, first-hand theology if you will, that defines the importance of her contribution. Her genius was that she even sought out this subject at all, a subject which had been buried for at least three previous centuries. Certainly in the Protestant world, religious writers after the 17th century had focused on scripture, church history or theology, not on the human's relationship with the divine. Underhill's topic was marginal, as was the person who pursued it - a woman with no systematic university training or ecclesiastical appointment.

In 1907 when she was 32 years old Underhill took up with vocational zeal the writing of her first major book - a 500 page work on mysticism. The book has been in print continuously since 1911 and has served as the principal introduction to the topic in the English-language until about 1970. Writing it was a prodigious labor for which she consulted 1000 sources. The subtitle of this book, "A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness," is revealing because it establishes that her subject is humanity itself, especially humanity in its relationship to the divine. In some limited sense she gives evidence to Feuerbach's claim that all theology is really anthropology. In it she tries to define mysticism, separating it off from what it is not, theology or magic. She then defines the stages of mystic consciousness - awakening, purification, illumination, dark night of the soul, and union, and illustrates these stages through reference to mystic texts. For her the mystic speaks from the first-hand experience of what she calls the Absolute or Reality and seeks union with it. She wrote: "Mysticism is seen to be a highly specialized form of that search for reality, for heightened and completed life, which we have found to be a constant characteristic of human consciousness. . . . [The mystics] constitute one of the most amazing and profound variations of which the human race has yet been witness." The purpose of her big book was in fact to illustrate and preserve this specialized human capacity for a unique kind of consciousness.

One of the most important aspects of her book was the setting out and illustrating four characteristics of mysticism. Here she proceeded to search the mystical texts in order to determine the nature of the phenomenon. Mysticism, she claimed, is "active and practical, not passive and theoretical. It is an organic life-process, something which the whole self does." Second, mysticism is "entirely a spiritual activity." By this she meant that it is not done in order to gain or achieve anything, but only for its own end. Third, the "business and method of mysticism is love." It is an activity, a total dedication of the will toward its source. "It is at once an act of love, an act of surrender, and act of supreme perception." But the One is always a living and personal Object of Love, never an object of exploration. Fourth, mysticism entails a distinct psychological experience. It is "a definite and peculiar development of the whole self, conscious and unconscious, under the spur of such hunger: a remaking of the whole character on high levels in the interest of the transcendent life."



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Through the use of vigorous, eloquent, and compelling language, Underhill pulls the reader into the mystic process as it unfolds. While each person has the requisite "germ," "the little buried talent," "the capacity for God," the mystic has a genius for it, a passion for it. This passion is connected to a particular psychological makeup, a natural capability of extraordinary concentration, an intensity of love and will, and the capacity for self-discipline, steadfastness, and courage. Although mystics vary tremendously in their language, symbolic expression and lives, their psychological structure is similar.

Her book, *Mysticism*, was an exploration of this phenomenon. Once she finished it she began to explore Christian mysticism more fully. She wrote: "Mysticism has been defined as 'the science of the Love of God,' and certainly those words describe its essence. But, looking at it as it appears in the Christian Church in all its degrees and forms, I would prefer to call it 'the life which aims at union with God.'" "By Christian mysticism we mean a conscious growing life of a special kind: that growth in 'love, true Being, and creative spiritual Personality' which has been described as the essence of holiness. This life does not involve an existence withdrawn from common duties into some rapturous religious dreamland, which many people suppose to be mystical. The hard and devoted life of some of the greatest mystics of the Church contradicts this view. . . . Whatever form the experience of the mystics took . . . at bottom all comes down to this. They felt . . . an increasing and overwhelming certainty of first-hand contact with God, penetrating, and transfiguring them."

In 1911 mysticism was an iconoclastic and little-explored topic in the Christian community. Nonetheless, Evelyn Underhill became its authority. A torrent of writing spilled out of her for the next decade - a little book called *Practical Mysticism for Normal People*, editions of mystic texts, and biographies. My question has always been how did she even come to this subject? She was born into a nominally religious family of deists. Although baptized and confirmed in the Church of England, she had no interest in religion until she made the requisite trips of the young Victorian woman to the continent, especially to Italy. It was there that she was literally awakened through aesthetic experience - art, architecture and religious ritual. Those experiences lead her to what she believed was the reality beyond the

visible world. She returned to England and joined the Golden Dawn, a Rosicrucian Society, and began to write novels and poetry. Her first novel, *The Gray World*, is important not so much for its literary but its biographical value. Here she has her character state her own premise, that beauty is the only thing really worth having, that it was after all the visual side of goodness. By 1904 she moved toward Catholicism, but on the eve of "going over to Rome" the Modernist controversy broke and she felt she could not do so. Given her commitment to modern science and historical criticism, she considered herself a Modernist and could no longer walk what she called "the muddy path" to Rome. She chose to live on the borderland outside institutional religion. For the next 15 years she remained without institutional support except from her mystical texts and her own individual devotion. Emotionally her experience became thinner and thinner, and at the end of the Great War she claims to have "gone to pieces."

We know little of this next period - 1919-1921 - except these snippets. She reluctantly forced herself into the Anglican Church, the church of her baptism; she opened up a relationship with the Austrian Baron-Frederich von Hugel, the most prominent Roman Catholic theologian in England, and she began new writing and new work. This was the vocational moment for her, the moment on which the whole of the rest of her life hinged. As she wrote several years later "[N]ow the experience of God . . . is in the long run always a vocational experience. It always impels to

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some sort of service: always awakens an energetic love. It never leaves the self where it found it." Underhill the scholar was being forced to some other level of responsiveness.

It is this second half of her life, the time between 1921 until her death in 1941, which is least understood. This is her period of devotional writing, which is generally seen as disconnected from her previous work as a scholar of mysticism. Yet it was her 20 years spent in the company of the mystics that now made it possible for her to translate that knowledge to ordinary people. She could now enter the tangles of the human condition, knowing which ways were dangerous, which safe. Attuned to this environment, she was able to see the faint path, hear the sounds which alert, know the perils of the byways. She would become a guide to the inner terrain, a space accessible to all, but only lived in completely by the mystics.

Initially, Underhill took up work on mysticism because she believed the mystics had something to teach her contemporaries about a certain kind of human experience. The mystics were the great pioneers of a higher human consciousness. Having perceived transcendent reality (what she called the "vision splendid") they allowed it to transfigure their lives. It was the insight, that the mystic capacity for God was shared by all, that pushed Underhill at mid-life to a vocation as a spiritual guide. In this she was immensely successful. *The Times Literary Supplement* claimed that she "possessed an insight into the meaning both of the culture and individual groping of the soul that was unmatched by any professional teacher of her day." Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, claimed she did more than anyone else to keep the spiritual life alive in the Anglican Church in the period between the wars, and her friend T.S. Eliot said her work carried the "consciousness of the grievous need of the contemplative element in the modern world."

For 20 years Underhill spoke and wrote about this human capacity to respond to the love of God. The most important of her lectures came in 1921 when she gave a series at Oxford, later published as *Life of the Spirit* and *The Life of Today*. In this she subjected the classical experiences of the spiritual life to the insights of psychology. In these lectures she marks out the characteristics of the fully developed life - integration of personality, complimentary tendencies toward contemplation and action, and a new sense of power and vitality expressed in vocation, a giving without stint.

A more widely received lecture was her four-part BBC series called "The Spiritual Life" delivered in 1936. In accessible language she defined the spiritual life as that "life in which all that we do comes from a center where we are anchored in God." The spiritual life was not some narrow, disembodied life, but the apex of a full humanity which expressed itself in adoration, communion, and cooperation with God. Its marks were tranquility, gentleness, courage and service. It was a life which responded - "Here I am, send me."

Her spiritual guidance was also extended in retreats. Beginning in 1924, she gave about eight retreats a year at various houses throughout England. As such she became a pioneer in the incipient retreat movement within Anglicanism. She did not come to this new work with ease. In her diary she records her apprehensions:

"In my lucid moments, I see only too clearly that the possible end of this road is complete, unconditional self-consecration, and for this I have not the nerve, the character or the depth. There has been some sort of mistake. My soul is too small for it and yet it is at bottom, the only thing that I really want. It feels sometimes as if, whilst still a jumble of conflicting impulses and violent faults, I were being pushed from behind towards an edge I dare not jump over."

And yet it was here, as spiritual companion of her contemporaries, that she experienced her vocation, that place, Fredrick Bruechner says, "where our deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

This mid-life period was productive. The wisdom of the mystics had become so integrated into her that she could live out of it and impart its insights to the many who sought her counsel. In this sense she became a public explicator of the Christian life as it could be lived out by ordinary people.

In her retreat work and spiritual guidance she focused on the interlocking themes of prayer and vocation, purification and holiness. In all of this she worked from the basic premise that there is a personal holy presence and energy in which all things live and have their being. It prompts in those who recognize it not only acknowledgement but an awe-filled response. It is important to note here that Underhill sees the life of the spirit beginning not with a sense of one's sinfulness, but rather with an acknowledgement of this presence. Early on she captured this understanding in a line of poetry - "There is," she wrote, "a splendor burning in the heart of things." This personal holy



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presence, which for her had its first manifestation in the aesthetic, has its most profound revelation in Jesus, is witnessed to by the lives of the saints, and is available to each person. Participation in the holy presence is the spiritual life. This participation can suffuse and take over all of life, radically transforming it as it gains power.

It is prayer which does this work of transformation. Prayer is not so much an action or a duty, or even an experience, but a vital relationship between the whole individual and the being of God. Initiated by God, prayer is nonetheless a mutual act, dependent both on grace and the will of the individual. More than a specific act, prayer is a state, a condition of soul at the heart of which is not intercession but adoration, the "awe-struck" love which brings with it a sense of humility and gratitude, a communion with God, and a self-offering. In short, prayer is that life which has adoration at its root, communion as its flower, and loving action as its fruit.

The goal of prayer is to ignite that which is already present in each person, this "latent capacity for God." Once ignited, the individual becomes a "live wire," a "link between God's Grace and the world that needs healing," a "distributing center" for God's creative power. A person of prayer is one who has "a more wide-spreading, energetic, self-giving and redeeming type of love," one who senses oneself as a child of God, who is and knows an attachment to God. This attachment to God, the result of prayer, is the clearest mark of the spiritual life, a "life in which God has more and more sway." Conceived in another way, the spiritual life is principally the life of holiness. And this, frankly, sounds pretty Methodist to me.

Underhill stopped her retreat work for a year or so in the mid 1930s in order to take up the writing of her last major book, *Worship*, published in 1936. This book was borne out of a largeness of heart and ecumenical inclusivity. Both in its subject and its treatment it was well ahead of its time. At first, the study of worship might seem outside Underhill's competence or interest, but it followed from her long-standing exploration of the relationship between the human and the divine. As mysticism was the intense personal relationship between the individual and the Absolute, and the spiritual life the integration of all life through prayer and cooperation with God, worship was another human response to the divine, the outpouring of human awe and adoration. In her book she analyzes the elements of worship and then its forms. Casting her net broadly she brings in the entire spectrum of western religious

liturgical expression, including Judaism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and the variety of Protestant denominations, the Baptists, Anglicans, the Free Church and Methodism, eleven in all. *Worship* was a remarkably insightful exploration of the validity of each of these traditions. She saw each as a different expression of the impulse of adoration. Each was analogous to a "chapel in the Cathedral of the Spirit." For example, in her treatment of Methodism she locates it within the reform of Anglicanism and shows deep appreciation for the drive toward holiness which permeates the commitments of the Wesleys and is best expressed in their early hymns.

Like her big book on mysticism, *Worship* was a taxing undertaking. And now she was old and increasingly afflicted with asthma. Although her energy was clearly abating, she continued to give retreats until 1937 when she left active work. In that year with almost prophetic insight she claimed that in the days to come Christianity would have to become a complete philosophy of existence rather than some mere devotional expression. In 1939 she took up a new angle on the human relationship to the divine, the subject she had written on for 40 years. She became a pacifist, and wrote a number of short pieces on this topic and joined the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship. This was a particularly painful period of her life. There were few pacifists in Britain during the war. The Anglican Church denounced this position, and friends pulled away from her. For Underhill pacifism was a position rooted in the faith that love is the ultimate reality and it must prevail. This faith followed from the Christian understanding of the love of God for all creatures. To be a pacifist was a vocation given by God for God's ends. Although the church should be the rallying point for all those who believed in the creative and redeeming power of love, it was incapable, she thought, of seizing this opportunity because its supernatural life was so weak and ineffective. Thus the work of pacifism fell to those who had known "the vision splendid" and who as persons of prayer were able to proclaim peace in the midst of violence and hopelessness.

As the Blitz dragged on and London experienced great devastation the future seemed very dark and uncertain. Homelessness and misery surrounded Underhill like an Apocalypse. Until the end when she died in June 1941, she tried to steady believers.

Many have applauded Underhill's contribution. She was lauded by Henri Bergson, T.S. Eliot, Thomas Merton, Alan Watts and Charles Williams. Scholars of religion credit her with describing mysticism as a way of life, linking it to social concern. Her work

served as an early bridge between believers and unbelievers, and between religion and the behavioral sciences. After her death, however, there were critics who convicted her of a sentimentalized and cozy spirituality, calling her "the Agatha Christie of spirituality," claiming she appealed only to the well-heeled Kensington set. Others suspected she had only a second-hand knowledge of the spiritual life or that she was intellectually unsound, having drawn faulty conclusions from her research. Some said she represented the last gasp of the dying Oxford Movement or that she was merely a follower of deSales and the French school of spirituality, or a disciple of Von Hugel. In short, she was not an "original" thinker.

Although much of her work has been superseded, its uniqueness rests both in the kinds of questions she asked and the eloquence, power and authenticity with which she answered them. She was a pioneer, a foremother, if you will, of much of contemporary religious writing.

Her broadest contribution was in redefining religion and what it means to be a religious person. Although dogma, doctrine, and moral code are central to religion, she believed its essential element was the mystical, that is, the personal experience of the love of God that gives authenticity and authority. This love was a gift from God to which the human responded with awe and adoration. This mystical element of religion is paradigmatic; it provided the standard by which one relates to others. Having been loved by God, one is free to love others as one has been loved, even the unlovable and the enemy. It is as well the basis for the transformation of all of life; it causes what she called "divine fecundity," the birthing of new life in the world. While this is the work of the great mystics, it is also participated in by ordinary persons.

By reasserting the importance of mysticism as the personal encounter with the God of Love, Evelyn Underhill reclaimed the Christian tradition and found new ways to interpret it for her contemporaries and for us. Such was her so-called "unoriginal" contribution.

What is particularly unique in Underhill's restatement of the Christian message is the priority she gives to the potency of the transformed life. As she was fond of saying, the life of the spirit was not "taught" but "caught." "We most easily recognize spiritual reality when it is perceived transfiguring human character and most easily attain it by sympathetic contagion." Much like Wesley, Underhill called believers to lives of holiness, guid-

ing them one by one and holding up models for inspiration.

In the Anglican Communion Evelyn Underhill is remembered in the liturgy of June 15th, her death day. The reading for that day is from the Book of Wisdom; it is particularly apt. It first praises Wisdom as lucid, steadfast, subtle, a reflection of the eternal light, mirror of God's active power, image of God's goodness. The text goes on to promise "In each generation wisdom passes into holy souls making them friends of God and prophets." Evelyn Underhill was one of these friends of God who illuminated the Christian message. Such was her uncommon contribution, made from the margins.

### **CONTINUING INCARNATION: Evelyn Underhill's Double Thread of Spirituality**

by Grace Adolphsen Brame

Grace Adolphsen Brame is professor of theology at Villanova University in Villanova, Pennsylvania. She recently uncovered a number of Underhill writings, including the letter published at the end, and four retreats published by Crossroad as *The Ways of the Spirit*. This article appeared in the *Christian Century*, October 31, 1990 pp. 997-1000, copyright by the Christian Century Foundation and used by permission. Current articles and subscription information can be found at [www.christiancentury.org](http://www.christiancentury.org). This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Of all the themes in Evelyn Underhill's work, none is more important than "continuing incarnation": offering one's life as the channel for God's continuing work on earth by weaving together the inner and outer life of the spirit. For Underhill the spiritual life was a life "soaked" by a sense of God's reality and claim, where "all we do comes from the centre in which we are anchored in God."

Underhill not only wrote on prayer and growth in God, but she continually connected the spiritual with social concerns. For example, she addressed an early conference on politics, economics and Christianity in 1924, and she advocated pacifism in the face of World War II. Throughout her adult life, she spent part of every week in the slums of London.

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*"After her death...there were critics...calling her 'the Agatha Christie of spirituality...'"*



## News & Noteworthy Continued

### NEW BOOKS:

The complete text of both *The Spiritual Life* and *Mysticism* can be found on line at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org)

*Lent with Evelyn Underhill* has been reissued.

Used books on E. U: [www.alibris.com](http://www.alibris.com) lists 63 new and out-of-print books by Evelyn Underhill.

*The Soul's Delight: Selected Writings of Evelyn Underhill* edited by Keith Beasley-Topliffe has been published by The Upper Room.

*Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* and *Abba: Meditations based on the Lord's Prayer* have been republished together in paperback by Vintage in their spiritual classics series. The preface and chronology are the work of Carol Zaleski.

### ANNUAL DAY OF QUIET REFLECTION

The fifteenth annual day of Quiet Reflection in honor of Evelyn Underhill was held at the Washington national Cathedral on Saturday, June 19, 2004. Kathy Staudt and Milo Coerper gathered the group in the living room of Sayre House, and the first meditation was ably led by Christopher King. We were blessed with exceptionally beautiful weather for enjoying the Cathedral grounds. We attended together the noon Eucharist in the Great Choir of the Cathedral and then gathered for lunch in a room in the Cathedral tower, where Donna Osthaus alternated lunchtime readings from Evelyn's work with necessary periods of silence when we enjoyed the music of the cathedral carillon. Donna led our afternoon meditation, using slides of some of Evelyn Underhill's favorite paintings from the basilica in Assisi to take us into that sacred space in her life. After a time of silence to pray in the Cathedral and grounds, we gathered for closing worship as usual in Sayre House. The group was the typical mix of newcomers and old-timers, and together we formed a true community of prayer for the day. Next year's day of Quiet is scheduled for Saturday June 18, with leadership to be offered by Merrill Carrington and Cynthia Rogers. For more information contact Kathy Staudt at [kstaudt@umd.edu](mailto:kstaudt@umd.edu). Kathy Staudt.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

EU and Sorella Maria

Dear Editor: In 1975 while on a pilgrimage/holiday in Italy, I was invited by a delightfully eccentric Swiss deaconess to accompany her into the mountains between Assisi and Foligno to visit a primitive Franciscan community dedicated to prayer for Christian unity. Years later, in reading the letters of our dear Evelyn Underhill, I discovered that the community I visited was none other than the one founded by Sorella Maria di Campello. My life has been marked by that extraordinary visit to the "Rifugio," as it has been marked by the writings of Evelyn Underhill. I recently undertook to write something about Sorella Maria's unique vocation in the Church. I have been in contact with the Franciscan community in Rome where she was formed prior to beginning her adventure at the "Rifugio." Given the importance of Sorella Maria in the spiritual journey of Evelyn Underhill, I thought you might be interested in my endeavour. Sincerely, Mark D. Kirby ([MARCDAN@aol.com](mailto:MARCDAN@aol.com))

### NEWSLETTER BY MAIL

If you know of persons who do not have access to a computer and who might like to receive the annual newsletter, please have them send their name and address to EUA, 1205 Wesley St., Oxford, GA 30054.

### NEW EVELYN UNDERHILL BOOK

In April 2004, Paraclete Press will publish *Radiance: A Spiritual Memoir* by Evelyn Underhill and edited by Bernard Bangley. This a collection of Underhill's autobiographical writings.

### NEWSLETTER INFORMATION

This Newsletter is updated annually. Information to be included in the Newsletter should be sent to [greene@learnlink.emory.edu](mailto:greene@learnlink.emory.edu).

### PURPOSE & DONATIONS

The Evelyn Underhill Association exists to promote interest in the life and work of Evelyn Underhill. Each year it sponsors a Quiet Day at the Washington National Cathedral, maintains a website with a yearly Newsletter, supports the two existing archives of Underhill materials at King's College, London, and the Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia, and supplies information to interested parties. Donations to the work of the Association are appreciated and are tax deductible and may be sent to Mr. Milo Coerper, 7315 Brookville Rd., Chevy Chase, MD 20815.

**CONTINUING INCARNATION:**

Evelyn Underhill's Double Thread of Spirituality  
Continued from Page 6

"We exist for nothing else," she wrote, than to be "effective servants of God, of Christ." And she was convinced that only prayer could make such an outreach possible. She saw that the way to do God's work is for God to do it through us, and for that to happen we need to be conscious of and connected to God. Underhill called this "adhering" and referred to the Gospel of John where Christ speaks of "abiding": "Abide in me, and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me" (15:1)

Underhill's spirituality was not a withdrawal from the world, nor was it unremitting service. From the time she wrote *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today* (based on her 1921 lectures at Oxford's Manchester College) until she died in 1941, her most constant theme was that of bringing in the kingdom through a balanced life of prayer and action. In four recently discovered retreats published under the title *The Ways of the Spirit*, she writes: "What is sanctity? Just the perfection of our love, its growth toward God and others." Speaking of the truly creative person she says: "Real saints never know how much they are doing. . . . They are . . . continuing the work of incarnation through the perfect self-yielding of the soul to God, making themselves His tools, His channels of revelation to others." Writing on joy, she exults in the wonder of a God who would choose human beings for such a task, and she describes the facets of redeeming love: "Redemption does not mean you and me made safe and popped into heaven. It means that each soul, redeemed from self-interest by The revelation of Divine Love, is taken and used again for the spread of that redeeming work."

When Underhill became angry, it was against extremes, exaggeration and self-centered "commercial spirituality" that attempted to use God for its own good. She wrote repeatedly against a social gospel so exclusively concerned with the world that it considered prayer a selfish activity. She protested both extremes: "When a great truth becomes exaggerated to this extent, and is held to the exclusion of its compensating opposite, it is in a fair way to becoming a lie."

Self-centered spirituality and social service without prayer are perennial tendencies, and they seriously polarize the Christian community. As a re-

sult, the 20th century has seen numerous writings about "a new spirituality" that includes love of neighbor. In some quarters that is an important addition, but it is hardly new. Christ withdrew from the crowds not only for love of his father, but in order to serve better. There have always been Christians who saw that to deny either the world or heaven was fruitless. From Underhill's point of view, Christians were enjoined to abide, but they were also chosen to bear fruit.

People have always misunderstood the concept of detachment, and some ascetics have taken it to such extremes that it mocks what it is supposed to glorify. Underhill is quite clear about detachment. Serving God, she says, will always require outward and inward renunciations. Following Christ entails an element of the cross. But this letting go is not a denigration of God's world, nor should it be done for its own sake. It is appropriate and necessary, she says, to remove anything that hinders focusing everything on God and God's will. "But that [detachment] must be combined with such *attachment* as enables us, with God, to try to love and save the world." Perhaps what is new in spirituality today is that more people are beginning to understand this.

Underhill did not think it was easy to become a tool in the hand of God. Perhaps because of her own spiritual struggles, she fed on the lives of the saints who had struggled before her. A woman who wrote on "The Mastery of Time" because of her own over commitments, she was acutely aware of the problems of spiritual exhaustion. She too suffered through the changing weather of the spiritual life. And she well knew what it meant to face spiritual dryness. But she was doggedly faithful to her spiritual discipline.

Underhill was particularly sensitive to the clergy's need for spiritual refreshment and spiritual connectedness. Her respect for them was based on an assumption not that they were superior, but rather that they had made a complete commitment to God and had a unique opportunity. In her retreat *Inner Grace and Outward Sign*, she says to them: "You have offered yourselves for the most sacrificial, most exacting, most Christ-like of all lives -- to be the agents of God in His work with the souls of others." She demanded authenticity from herself and from them.

The clergy heard her. She was the first woman in the Church of England to give a series of addresses to priests. Her book *Concerning the*





*Inner Life* came out of that first experience at Water Millock clergy school in 1926. *Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill* contains two lectures on "The Parish Priest and the Life of Prayer" first given to the Worcester Diocesan Clergy Convention. We know from *Ways of the Spirit* that she gave retreats to clergy and other religious professionals in 1927 and 1928.

Sometime around 1929 or 1930 Underhill wrote a letter to the archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, about the inner life of the clergy. By this she meant "all that conditions the relation of the individual soul with God." She requested that the letter be read at the worldwide meeting of bishops gathered for the Lambeth Conference in 1930, the last such gathering before World War II. There is no way to know if the letter was sent or received. I found it, in handwritten form, along with previously unknown and unpublished retreats, in the Underhill archives in London. In 1988 Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie brought it to the attention of the Lambeth Conference.

Underhill's concern in this brief message was that some clergy had become so overwhelmed by the multiplicity of their duties that they had lost their grounding in prayer; They were trying to lead their congregations in worship without themselves worshipping. Underhill pointed out the problem and suggested a solution. One cannot help wondering what the archbishop's response would have been to her forthright words. Underhill no doubt was voicing the thoughts of many who were disenchanted with the church but felt powerless to change it. Her suggestion to give courses in devotional life at theological schools was unheard of at the time.

It has taken some time for seminaries to comprehend Underhill's ideas, and many have not yet done more than present a course on prayer, monasticism or spiritual discipline once every few years. But there are others that have fully understood Underhill's vision. Catholic institutions, of course, have never lost this focus, although emphases, in some cases, have greatly changed. Protestants are now beginning to realize what they have missed. The curriculum among the schools of the Boston Theological Institute proves an example of these new efforts. Together these schools provided 23 different courses in spirituality in the past academic year, the first one listed being "The Pastor's Personal Spiritual Life." General Theological Seminary in New York City supports a Center for Christian Spirituality and continually provides courses that relate justice and economics to the life of prayer, discernment and stewardship. Abingdon Press has recently published *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, based on lectures regarding Catholic and Protestant spiritual traditions under the aegis of Wesley Theological Seminary and the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. In Philadelphia, Chestnut Hill College is just beginning a master's program in holistic spirituality and spiritual direction.

There are other signs of double thread being lived out through organizations such as the Center for Action and Contemplation and Socially Concerned Contemplatives. In addition to these there has long been the prayerful outreach of the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army, efforts which Underhill never forgot.

In a recent book titled *The Spark of the Soul*, Terry Tastard, S.S.F., compares Evelyn Underhill, St. Francis, Meister Eckhart and Thomas Merton, using the theme that "today the test of a spirituality is its ability to help us deepen both our love of God and our commitment to change the face of the earth." Tastard's words echo those of Underhill in 1926: "Adoration is the prayer in which we turn toward . . . God Himself, *for* Himself, and for none of His gifts. . . . It is the prayer in which we obey the first and great commandment to love the Lord with *all* of the heart, soul, and mind -- with all our thought and strength -- with ALL, *all*, every bit. And the second commandment will only be really *well* done where the first has the central place."

## THE FUTURE WE SHAN'T SEE: Evelyn Underhill's Pacifism

by Robert Gail Woods

Dr. Woods serves as minister of two United Methodist Churches in Missouri. This article appeared in the *Christian Century* May 16, 1979, p. 553. Copyright by the Christian Century Foundation and used by permission. Current articles and subscription information can be found at [www.christiancentury.org](http://www.christiancentury.org). This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock.

Although most libraries have copies of some of her books -- the two celebrated ones are *Mysticism* and *Worship* -- Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) is but a name to many people, even among the theologically informed. Imagine my consternation a few years ago when, my dissertation on her concept of worship just completed, I talked with an Episcopal bishop who insisted that Evelyn Underhill, a fellow Anglican, was a man! He only tentatively accepted my explanation that in nonliterary circles she was known as Mrs. Hubert Stuart Moore, the wife of a London barrister. I myself had never heard of her until my seminary years. Yet she is definitely a "star" in her own right.

### I

How Underhill's life was shaped by World War I may be inferred from certain facts. The outbreak of the war on August 4, 1914, found her aboard her father's yacht, which was then detained without lights in the harbor. There were to be further anxieties. The house adjacent to her parents' residence in London was bombed, and a section of the law courts where her father's chambers were housed was reduced to rubble. Moreover, since she had toured the continent frequently during the 15 years before war broke out, the knowledge that familiar haunts both at home and abroad were being devastated must have weighed on her mind.

Hubert Stuart Moore aided the war effort as a civilian, serving on hospital boards; he invented a splint and, according to one account, artificial limbs as well. His wife translated

African guidebooks for Naval Intelligence. Perhaps to provide a little comic relief for herself and her colleagues there, she invented a country -- complete with flora and fauna. Her levity was halted just short of publication! It is conjectured that she also worked with the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association.

True, Underhill had her husband with her throughout the war. Nevertheless, the fact that two cousins were among the casualties probably deeply affected this sensitive woman who had neither children nor siblings.

Underhill, sobered by the hostilities, revealed her melancholy in a slender volume of poetry titled *Theophanies: A Book of Verses* (J. M. Dent, 1916). In "The Naval Reserve" she mused.

Strive for England, side by side,  
Those who live and those who died.

Written in a similar vein is "England and the Soldier":

Your wounds are England's  
wounds,  
Your labor and gain are hers,  
With you I thrust forth to battle,  
With you are my frontiers  
found.  
I am there in the horror and  
pain, the  
effort, the splendour, the joy;  
And, falling in the fight, Eng-  
land receives her child.

"Candlemas, 1915," seems nostalgic:

Dare we, in such a day,  
.....  
Carry the torch of faith upon its  
way,  
fulfil this ancient rite?

Her official biographer, Margaret Cropper, sensed that Underhill was "easing her heart" as she cried out in "Non-Combatants" on behalf of all. Englishwomen and others not at the front:





Never of us be it said  
 We had no war to wage,  
 Because our womanhood,  
 Because the weight of age,  
 Held us in servitude.

.....  
 Naught were we spared -- of us, this  
 word shall not be said.

## II

It was not enough just to be sentimental, however; probably Underhill's most significant rationale for warfare was her article "Problems of Conflict" in the *Hibbert Journal* for April 1955. Those who shudder at inscriptions on monuments or passages in history books which refer simply to "the Great War" or "the World War" -- written as though what we call World War I would indeed prove to be "the war to end war" -- will feel saddened to read her portentous observation that "we have no guarantee that it will not recur."

Far from being a warmonger, however, Underhill tried to shun the extremes of either pacifism or militarism. After declaring that the former had collapsed and the latter lacked integrity, she concluded that strife was nonetheless an integral part of the nature of things, as normal as the hunger for food or sex. Attempting a *reductio ad absurdum*, she announced that the pacifist position would decimate the race and its achievements.

Then the article turns to theology, with the argument that warfare resembles other social ills (e.g., "suffering, poverty, and disease") which have released forces both good and evil. Perceptively, Underhill wrote: "Christian theologians hold that the death of Christ was both inevitable and salutary for the race; but they do not on that account excuse Judas Iscariot." She feared that "the beautiful dreams of pacifism will no more eliminate armed conflict . . . than the dreams of Christian Science will eliminate sickness." For her there was further justification in the fact that, while civilization has retained carnivorous practices, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul was still widely held:

To Christians, even to theists, the particular form or moment in which death comes . . . surely cannot matter very much; except in so far as it gives . . . an opportunity to "die well."

She concluded the article by depicting war as a positive good, "opening up to us new fields of endeavour and new opportunities of service and love."

We can understand Christopher J. R. Armstrong's comment that Underhill's arguments in the *Hibbert Journal* really tend "to leave one justifying more than one had originally bargained for." Perhaps realizing this herself, when later she abandoned her old position, she did so very quietly.

One final note here: in her tribute to the fallen hero and celebrated French poet Charles Péguy, Underhill observed (in *The Essentials of Mysticism and Other Essays* [J. M. Dent, 1920]) that he had become a soldier because he felt his country "had lost its hold upon realities." Comparing him with the visionary Joan of Arc, she maintained that

side by side with Péguy's spiritual gospel, or rather entwined with it, goes his practical and patriotic gospel. Since for him the whole of life was crammed with spiritual significance, he saw in the patriotic passion a sacrament of heavenly love, and in earthly cities symbols of the City of God.

## III

Unfortunately, there is a lacuna in our story; we do not know how and why Underhill became a pacifist. One regrets that she did not disclose the dynamics of her change. Probably no single crisis moved her to renounce war; more likely she arrived at this decision as a result of her pilgrimage of faith, having mellowed and matured in her Christian experience. As she began to articulate a different philosophy, she did so with the same mystical temperament with which she had once condoned warfare.

We are the poorer because Underhill did not express her pacifist feelings in verse, but the strength of her viewpoint is Unmistakable in her prose. Her correspondence of this period (available in *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill* [Religious Book Club, 19451) reflects a firm commitment to the way of peace.

Two issues loom large in these letters. One is the cross as the answer to evil. In *The Life of Evelyn Underhill* (Longmans, 1958) Cropper noted that Underhill's pacifism was "linked to her deepest creed, and her interpretation of the meaning of the Cross." Writing in 1941, only a month before her death; she proclaimed: "Christianity and war are incompatible, and . . . *nothing* worth having can be achieved by 'casting out Satan by Satan.'" Never theatrical herself, she urged that people of her persuasion not be "controversial, or go in for propaganda." In that letter she characterized Hitler as a "scourge of God," who could be countered by two means:

war or the cross -- "And only a very small number are ready for the Cross, in the full sense of loving and unresisting abandonment to the worst that may come."

The other issue was Underhill's concern over how few people held to the tenets of pacifism tenaciously. Toward the close of 1939 she lamented that "most of my quasi-pacifist friends are becoming more warlike." Grieved to see the Anglican bishops on the side of warfare, she was somewhat consoled that numbers of clergy did oppose the hostilities. The following year she affirmed:

I am still entirely pacifist and more and more convinced that the idea that this or any other war is "righteous" or will achieve any creative result of a durable kind, is an illusion.

A wistful letter of New Year's Day, 1941, again noted that many pacifists had reneged, owing to the exigencies

of the conflict, but would return to the fold after the war. Underhill personally remained unable to justify committing sin to cure sin." She was not, of course, an ostrich with head in the sand, recognizing indeed (in a letter written in May 1940) that conditions in Norway, Belgium and Holland were enough to tempt one to forsake pacifism. But a month later she lamented: "The News Bulletins with their glorification of bombing are enough to destroy the moral integrity of any society." Perhaps discerning her own impending death, this undaunted woman had added in the May letter: "There is nothing pacifists can do but take their share of the agony and pray for the future we shan't live to see"

#### IV

Underhill expressed her convictions in more detail in two pamphlets, *The Church and War* and *Meditation of Peace*. Some excerpts are included in the Cropper biography. In one, written for the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, of which she was a member, she declared:

If she remains true to her supernatural call, the Church cannot acquiesce in War for War, however camouflaged or excused, must always mean the effort of a group of men to achieve their purpose. . . by inflicting destruction and death on another group of men.

She did admit, however, that "it is often difficult to define the boundary which divides legitimate police action from military action; nevertheless, Christians must try to find that boundary and to observe it."

The second pamphlet was written for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, another organization to which Underhill belonged. She stated: "The true pacifist is a redeemer, and must accept with joy the redeemer's lot. He, too, is self-offered, without conditions, for the peace of the world."



***"In that letter she characterized Hitler as a "scourge of God," who could be countered by two means: war or the cross..."***



Not content to be merely a proclaimer of pacifism, Underhill tried to live by its principles. In *The Spiritual Life* (Harper, n.d.) she pleaded: “We cannot begin the day by a real act of communion with the Author of peace and Lover of concord, and then go on to read a bloodthirsty newspaper at breakfast.” She declared in *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today* (E. P. Dutton, 1923) that society would be enhanced “if the civil wars of civilized man could cease and be replaced by that other mental fight, for the upbuilding of Jerusalem.” Not given to rancor, she implored divine mercy for both friend and foe, praying (in *The Fruits of the Spirit* [Lougmans, 1956]) “not only for the innocent people of Germany, but also for those who have brought this evil and misery on the world.” Her intercessions included “all children, in whom the hope of the future rests.”

The last years of Evelyn Underhill’s spiritual pilgrimage thus found her, a pacifist, although she never worked her ideas into a finely spun philosophy. Quite predictably, her stand has seldom won plaudits. Even Charles Williams, who edited her letters, had reservations, hinting that she was reverting to her slight tendency to dictate church dogma. One who shares her pacifist views, on the other hand, will regret her earlier stand in favor of war. Armstrong has conjectured that during World War I her views must have resounded, and her name been favorably mentioned, in “bellicose pulpit oratory.”

Patriotic even during her pacifist years, no doubt Underhill, had she lived, would have appreciated the window in Westminster Abbey commemorating the Battle of Britain or War Memorial Chapel in Washington Cathedral. One of her letters of 1940 is somewhat reminiscent of her tribute to Péguy: “Yet even war, it seems, isn’t spiritually sterile.

... Were you not thrilled by all the accounts of the patient endurance and unselfishness at Dunkirk?”

Underhill’s vision of peace was ahead

of its time. It is still not widely accepted. Yet it contains a power dynamism. Like Harry Emerson Fosdick in the United States -- himself an advocate of World War I but a pacifist during World War II -- she shows that mature people can reverse earlier positions and remain models of responsible citizenship and ethical sensitivity. Men and women whose hearts are set on a new social order will always embrace the prophetic hope that “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

## TWO NEW UNDERHILL ANTHOLOGIES

Many readers first came to Underhill through one of the anthologies of her work. One thinks of “Anthology of the Love of God, from the Writings of Evelyn Underhill” published in 1953 or Delroy Oberg’s more recent “Given to God: Daily Readings with Evelyn Underhill,” 1992. In the last year, two new anthologies were released in paperback. “Evelyn Underhill: Essential Writing,” selected and with an introduction by Emilie Griffin is part of the Orbis Press Modern Spiritual Masters Series. Griffin has written many books on the spiritual life, including “Doors into Prayer,” “Turning” and “Wilderness Time.” Her brief introduction presents Underhill as the “practical mystic.” The book is divided thematically and includes sections of excerpted selections on the spiritual life, the house of the soul, aspects of mysticism, the soul’s journey, worship, and practical advice. Unlike some earlier anthologies, her selections are ample enough to allow the reader to sink down into the topic, and her thoughtful introduction provides a good context for understanding her work.

“Radiance: A Spiritual Memoir of Evelyn Underhill,” was compiled and edited by Bernard Bangle. The title is somewhat misleading. Although Underhill has authored everything, the book is a compilation of selections of her most personal writings arranged chronologically. Only in that sense is it a spiritual memoir. Selections include her poetry, novels, addresses and articles and previously published archival materials. The book is organized in four chapters: early writings, 1892-1914; applied spirituality, 1915-1924; understanding mysticism, 1925-1931; and mature insight, 1932-1941. Bangle is a retired Presbyterian minister and an author of several books

including “Christian Classics in Modern English,” “Talks on the Song of Songs by Bernard Clairvaux,” and “Rooted in Faith: Meditations from the Reformers.” The book, published by Paraclete Press, includes a short introduction.

### THE DEDICATION OF THE WEST FRONT STATUES CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, GUILDFORD, ENGLAND

On Sunday May 30, 2004 seven statues on the Cathedral’s west front including one of Evelyn Underhill were dedicated. At least four members of the Evelyn Underhill Association were present: Mr. Harold Underhill, an Underhill relative, Revd A. M. Allchin, scholar of Underhill, Revd Sheila Coughtrey, Warden at the retreat house at Pleshey, and Revd Colin Lunt, Vicar of Coalpit Heath, Diocese of Bristol. Revd Lunt’s recollections follow:

Many English cathedrals are medieval, but Guildford cathedral is one of the modern ones. This is because the Guildford Diocese itself was only founded in 1927. The diocese occupies most of the county of Surrey, that is an area on the south-west side of London, and it contains just under a million people. It has 218 churches and 175 stipendiary clergy. At first, it was proposed to use a church in the town of Guildford itself as the cathedral, but no church was deemed suitable, and instead a bold decision was made to build a new cathedral on the top of a hill outside Guildford. Unusually, the building is constructed from red brick. It must have looked quite isolated to start with, alone on a hill, but now buildings have grown from the town to meet it. The new cathedral building was started in the 1930s and then work stopped during the Second World War, only resuming in the 1950s. The building was finally finished in 1963, and dedicated to the Holy Spirit, but without sculptures at the west end. Statues were commissioned for the west end only in the mid-1990s.

The York sculptor Charles Gurrey was commissioned to begin work and somehow eight figures were identified for the vacant niches at the west end, plus a central figure of Christ Transfigures. Four of the figures come from earlier centuries: Julian of Norwich, Bernard of Clairvaux, Benedict, and Columba; and there are also four figures from the twentieth-century; Evelyn Underhill, Michael Ramsey, Reginald Somerset Ward, and Bede Griffiths. (From north to south across the west front, in order, they are: Julian of Norwich, Evelyn Underhill, Michael Ramsey, Bernard of

Clairvaux, Christ of the Transfiguration, Benedict, Reginald Somerset Ward, Bede Griffiths, Columa.) The figures are quite stylized, with lines heavily incised in some places and, continuing with the theme of the Holy Spirit, the sculptor has used the images of cloud and fire in the depiction of the Transfiguration, and in two other places: between the figures of Evelyn Underhill and Michael Ramsey, a pillar of cloud, and between the figures of Reginald Somerset Ward and Bede Griffiths a pillar of fire. The position of the pillar of cloud seems to me quite suitable, as Evelyn Underhill ensured the (re)publication of the anonymous medieval English classic *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The figure of Michael Ramsey, 100<sup>th</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury, faces that of Evelyn Underhill, across the cloud. This also is appropriate, as he was an admirer of her work. Another of the figures, Reginald Somerset Ward, also has connections with her, for he was her spiritual director in the later part of her life. He was also a local man, and the cathedral had on display the four sets of vestments, which he regularly used, and which had been made especially for him, and which have now been bequeathed to Guildford Cathedral. (The sets of vestments have interesting designs and a leaflet is available about them from the cathedral.) The figure of Evelyn Underhill shows her kneeling at prayer with a hint of a lace cap and a shawl on her shoulders, as she used to wear at Pleshey when conducting retreats. She faces the cloud and opposite her, the figure of Michael Ramsey also kneeling and facing the cloud.

The Day of Pentecost in Guildford, 30 May 2004, was one of those days of very English weather, cloudy and sunny with scattered showers. As the special afternoon service would begin outside (where the statues were located) everyone was hoping for more sunshine and less rain, as we heard the dripping of water on the marquee pitched outside the cathedral for a special lunch. The Dedication Service itself was very uplifting and well done, and the sermon by the new dean, Victor Stock, very lively and witty, as well as interesting and thoughtful. The service started outside (without rain) and an attempt was made by the Dean Emeritus, the Very Revd Alex Weddersoon, to sprinkle the statues with holy water (they were quite high up), then the procession entered the cathedral for the remainder of the service. It was a great day of celebration for Guildford and a well-stated mark of the growing respect in which Evelyn Underhill is held in the present day.



*Evelyn Underhill (left) in prayer and facing Michael Ramsey with books stacked between them on the West Front of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Guildford, England.*



### PROJECTED EDITION OF EVELYN UNDERHILL LETTERS NEARING COMPLETION

Carol Poston has contracted with the University of Illinois Press to publish a new edition of the collected letters of Evelyn Underhill.

When Douglas Steere, the great Quaker leader and friend of Evelyn Underhill, was asked for a recommendation about where to start reading from amidst her many writings, Steere replied, ". . . I think the *Letters & The Golden Sequence* and those fine Pleshey retreat addresses show her at her best" (Douglas Steere to John Manola, 14 Dec. 1961). Steere was referring to the Charles Williams 1943 edition of the Letters, still the only volume in print. How much more enthusiastically he might have recommended them as an example had he in hand had a more complete edition.

I concur completely with Douglas Steere: It is in her letters, many written out of her profession of "the care of souls," that I think we see the whole person- theologian, friend, wife, daughter, writer, and woman. I have been working with the Underhill correspondence for eight years and not only have uncovered a large number of previously unpublished letters but in some cases have located the originals of those Williams printed.

Suffice it to say that it was wartime, money was short, and Williams had his own priorities: the £50 he was promised for the project was one of its chief attractions. We do not know what happened to all of the originals from which he worked, but the holdings at St. Andrews University of the correspondence between Underhill and Marjorie Robinson, as well as my own comparison of original manuscripts with printed versions, shows that Williams abridged Underhill's own words quite freely. Unfortunately not all of the originals in Williams have been discovered; however, many new letters have come to light.

The largest collection of Underhill correspondence is at Kings College London, which includes her juvenile letters to her mother, her letters to her husband Hubert both before their marriage and during her numerous trips abroad, as well letters to and

from acquaintances, including her close friend Agatha Norman. Other caches of letters include those to May Sinclair, the novelist; a correspondence with a friend named Darcie Otter located at Pleshey Retreat House; her correspondence with Rabindinath Tagore, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913; and the correspondence with J. M. Dent publishers regarding her work on *Jacopone de Todi*.

The letters are valuable for all kinds of reasons. Friends of Underhill and non-scholarly readers will be delighted at the humor, wisdom, and learning that they find. Feminists will find evidence of the growth and development of a learned woman at a time when formal education for women was not a priority. Theologians will be able to trace the development and growth of her faith in the spirit coupled with her faithful understanding of the incarnation. Literary readers will see how important her writing was to her, in what a studied way she researched and published, for it is eminently clear that publication was no mere "tea time chat" for her, but a serious professional enterprise that produced income.

Finally, it is revealing and poignant to see her suffering as a result of her illness (though she never exhibits complaint, only acceptance) and to document how primitive an understanding the medical profession had regarding asthma. The letters written at the end of her life show a body wracked with suffering and dislocation and a soul transformed by grace, yet always human and concerned and humbled at the events unfolding before her. Saint Xavier University Chicago, IL 60605

### CZECH TRANSLATION OF E.U. WORKS

"Two or three years ago, a small Czech publishing house asked me to translate Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* into Czech. At first, I hesitated: I didn't know then who Evelyn Underhill was and I knew that, similarly to E. Underhill's times, many things circulate under the label of "mysticism" which are hardly worthy of the translator's toil.

Once I perused the book, however, I decided to start translating. Gradually, getting deeper and deeper into the world of the author's thought, I admired still more - and finally was utterly fascinated by - her knowledge, her humility and, last but not least, her literary genius which enabled her to speak so simply and clearly (yet not superficially) about the most sublime mysteries of the mystic life: this makes her book a true delight for the reader - and indeed a challenge for the translator. At last, after more than two years of difficult but satisfying labour, the task is completed. What remains is a consciousness of a great thing being accomplished with the edition of this unique book in our language, and a feeling of pride and gratefulness for what I could contribute to."

Jan Frei, Prague [jan.frei@nm.cz](mailto:jan.frei@nm.cz)

### DON'T FORGET THE EUA WEBSITE & BOOK STORE

Our Website ([www.evelynunderhill.org](http://www.evelynunderhill.org)) holds all the back issues of this newsletter, many articles, essential information on Evelyn Underhill's life and work and our online book store. See all the major works currently in-print and make purchases through our arrangement with Amazon. Each sale provides a commission to the Association that helps defray the costs of mailings, our Website, and educational events.

