

NEWSLETTER OF THE THE EVELYN UNDERHILL ASSOCIATION

NOVEMBER 1994

ADVENT SERVICE ON THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

**"By the tender mercy of our God,
The dawn will break upon us,
To give light to those who sit in
darkness and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of
peace." Luke 1: 78-79**

This gospel passage is the final part of the Benedictus. Our preacher, Evelyn Underhill, gave a retreat called **Light of Christ**. Let us ask God through her to shed light on this Gospel passage.

**"By the tender mercy of our God, the
dawn will break upon us."**

This text points to the Incarnation, which, as Evelyn describes "brings us at once to the mingled homeliness and mystery of the Christian revelation and of our own lives." She invites us to consider the mystery of God in our ordinary lives. Only in our daily struggles and growth can we discover the light of Christ. She wrote: "The light of the world is not the sanctuary lamp in our favorite church." Following Jesus is not about adding on extra practices of prayer and penance. Rather it is about celebrating God's tender mercy and compassion in our lives and leisure. We do not need to spend more time in church but we may need to dwell more carefully in what she loved to call "the house of the soul," that is, the practical level of our lives as well as the spiritual level.(p. 2)

DAY OF REFLECTION

The EUA held its annual Day of Reflection at the Washington National Cathedral in the beautiful College of Preachers. The theme was "Evelyn Underhill and Spiritual Direction". Leadership for the day was provided by Milo Coerper, Dana Greene, Lin Ludy, and Kathleen Staudt. Presentations, prayer, quiet, Eucharist and sharing gave form to this Day dedicated to the memory of Evelyn Underhill. The 1995 Day of Reflection will be held Saturday, **June 17**. Contact the Cathedral for further details.

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. John Casteel, a devoted reader of Evelyn Underhill, died in October 1993. He was ninety years old. Underhill was one of his principal spiritual guides over his long life and fruitful vocation as minister, teacher, author and spiritual friend of many. He will be greatly missed.

Genevieve Foster, Assistant Clinical Professor of Child Care at the University of Maryland, died September 1992 at age ninety. The discovery of the writings of Underhill in 1945 was a turning point in her life. In 1985 she published "The World Was Flooded With Light, A Mystical Experience Remembered" in which she credited the importance of Underhill in her life. Genevieve's serenity and clarity will be remembered by all who knew her.

(LIGHT OF CHRIST cont.)the basement, as well as the second floor. In one of her letters, she urged: "Knock down the partition between living-room and oratory, even if it does mean tobacco smoke and incense get a bit mixed up."

Underhill wrote: "There is no need for peculiar conditions in the spiritual life. Our environment itself, our home and job, are part of the moulding action of God." If we really believe that, we would not rush around at such a frenetic pace. She reminded us: "Many souls go on and on suffering in a dull way from chronic indigestion and wonder why they never feel right." She encouraged people to get the relaxation they need, to balance the spiritual with non-religious interests, and to reach beyond themselves in some simple form of volunteer work. Perhaps we can consider developing some interest in the arts or some simple form of volunteer work with the poor. Let us take a few moments to recall when we most recently experienced God's tender mercy. When was it? Was it through someone's forgiveness of us? through our forgiveness of someone? through self-acceptance or the ability to accept others? through our capacity for leisure? Have we shown mercy to ourselves, taking proper food and relaxation especially in times of stress?

"To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." Who are those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death? People who are blind, elderly, with AIDS, cancer, people starving in Somalia or Haiti. Is our darkness a resistance to grace, a lack of trust in God, or an inability to accept parts of ourselves? We sit in darkness and the shadow of death by feeling anxious, afraid, and frantic. One way of (cont.p.3)

THE LETTERS OF EVELYN UNDERHILL ed. Charles Williams, Christian Classics.

Readers who know Underhill's work are familiar with **Letters**, but those new to her should read this volume, edited and with a masterful introduction by Charles Williams. Underhill was born December 6, 1875 at Wolverhampton. Her father, a distinguished barrister and enthusiastic yachtsman, taught his only child to sail. Evelyn was educated mostly at home and later went to King's College for Women, London, where she read history and botany. From an early age she wrote short stories, poetry and novels. Her hobby was bookbinding. The Underhill family was "not religious", and Evelyn had little or no religious instruction. It was when she was in her twenties and traveling with her mother in Europe that she became interested in religious art and architecture. In 1907, Underhill wrote to a friend that she felt herself to be truly converted and ready to join the Roman Catholic church, but her engagement to a childhood friend, Hubert Stuart Moore, presented problems. He was only nominally interested in religion, and he urged her not to join. In July, 1907 they married. Her life continued much as before. She cared for her parents and sailed with her lawyer-husband much as she had done with her lawyer-father.

But her inner conflicts over church affiliation remained. Although she wanted to be a Roman Catholic, the "modernist" controversy in 1911 ensure she would not be one. For some years she did not belong to any church, although she continued to attend Roman Catholic services but did not participate in communion. This was heartbreaking to her. Eventually, in 1921 (cont. p. 3)

LETTERS (cont.)

she became a communicant member of the Church of England, the church in which she had been baptized and confirmed. She wrote: "Our Lord has put me here, keeps on giving me more and more jobs to do for souls here, and has never given me orders to move..." She began to serve that church in ways no other woman had up to that time, giving retreats for clergy as well as for lay persons.

After the publication of *Mysticism* and as a result of the retreats, Underhill often received letters of inquiry on religious themes. *Letters* is a compilation of her responses.

Always in fragile health, Underhill spent her days in prayer, worship and care of her husband and parents. She visited the poor, wrote, and gave and made retreats. Her letters include some written to Hubert while she traveled in Europe, many to friends, and others to strangers who asked for her wisdom. People wrote to ask for help with their spiritual lives and religious and theological problems. Her letters are full of concern, encouragement, practical advice and good humor. The result is that the reader can use this book as I have used it, for spiritual advice. Through it Underhill serves as one's spiritual director. When she died in 1941, Evelyn Underhill was one of the most important mystics of the church, and her *Letters* are invaluable for contemporary seekers after spiritual wisdom.

Lois Sibley is a freelance editor who recently edited *More Questions of Faith*, Trinity Press International.

(LIGHT OF CHRIST, cont.)

letting Christ heal us is to let Him come into our darkness. Underhill puts it this way: "Whenever He comes, He brings the life-giving mystery of God; but giving the mystery in and with the homeliness, weaving together both worlds... There is no overfeeding or straining of souls and, above all, no hurry to enlighten at all costs everyone He can reach."

The experience of the Incarnation, then, is always an experience of our humanity as well as of the divine. It is always concrete and down to earth. It is always organic, according to our rhythm of growth, not forced or frantic. When Christ gives light, it is patient and gentle, quiet and confident.

"To guide our feet into the way of peace." Underhill observed: "When the healing touch of Christ is laid on our souls, His real successes... are the ones whose faith and gratitude make them forget themselves and their poor little sins, who stand up and glorify God and go forward in the new energy of His power and love, dropping themselves and their unfortunate past."

How is Christ guiding our feet into the way of peace here and now, and what does that way of peace look like? What do we have to let go of or build so that we can let ourselves be guided to peace? We may need to let go of a negative attitude and cultivate a spirit of gratitude, trust, and compassion. We may need to let go of the anxiety that builds up around our reputation, and let Christ give us our sense of self-worth.

Annice Callahan, R. S. C. J. is author of *Spiritual Guides for Today*, Crossroad.

GIFTS TO EUA

Long-time student of Evelyn Underhill, John Manola, has given the Association several original letters by and about Underhill. These include a letter from Underhill to Margaret Cropper and letters from Cropper, Olive Wyon and Douglas Steere to Manola. Manola writes: "For the past forty years I have been a devotee of Evelyn Underhill. Long before interest in her reached the peak it has today, I had procured as many of her out-of-print books as I could get, and believe me, I soaked in her words which were Bread of Life to me. . . My life had been filled with dreadful fears and unceasing inner struggles until I found her urging me toward "the inward quiet of acceptance." . . . And Evelyn Underhill is so balanced. No extremes here, of either asceticism or hedonism. . . This simply hints at some of the spiritual loveliness that streams out toward us from this God-touched soul. She was able to reach and communicate tremendous truths from the mountain top. . . we are the grateful benefactors." Thank you, John for your testimony and your gift.

EUA

The Evelyn Underhill Association promotes the study of the works of Evelyn Underhill, and supports research and writing about her and her ideas. The association conducts Days of Reflection and serves as a resource through a newsletter and correspondence. Associate membership is open to all. Donations to help defray costs are greatly appreciated. Send all queries to: EUA, 7315 Brookville Rd., Chevy Chase, MD 20815.

"Then I, awakening, saw
A splendour burning in the heart of
things." EU, "Corpus Christi"

NOTES AND NEWS

Worship and Practical Mysticism are now available through Harold Shaw Publishers, Box 567, 388 Gundersen Dr., Wheaton, IL 60189.

Fr. Reginald Somerset Ward's (one of EU's directors) **To Jerusalem** has recently been reprinted.

"Evelyn Underhill and the Mystical Tradition" by Susan J. Smalley appeared in **Scripture, Tradition and Reason** ed. Richard Bauckham, 1988.

The Elizabeth Ann Bogert Memorial Fund supports the study and practice of Christian mysticism. Small grants up to \$500 are made to individuals. Contact: Friends (Quakers) World Committee for Consultation, Phila., PA.

The Archives of King's College, London has a new listing of **The Papers of Evelyn Underhill**.

A EUA member seeks the source for the following quotation: "Try and see your ordinary daily life as the medium through which God is teaching your soul, and respond as well as you can. Then you won't need, in order to receive God's lessons, to go outside your normal experience. So, too, the type of prayer best for you is that to which you feel drawn in your best and quietest times and in which it is easiest for you to remain with God. Whether you do or don't use words or books is not very important. But there should be confidence and self-surrender in it, and of course prayer and self-offering for those whom you love and who need you." Send info to EUA.

LENT WITH EVELYN UNDERHILL, ed. Belshaw
THE LETTERS OF EVELYN UNDERHILL
LIFE AS PRAYER
LIGHT OF CHRIST
MIXED PASTURE
THE MYSTERY OF SACRIFICE
THE MYSTIC WAY
MYSTICISM
THE MYSTICS OF THE CHURCH
PRACTICAL MYSTICISM
THE SCHOOL OF CHARITY
THE SPIRITUAL LIFE
WAYS OF THE SPIRIT
WORSHIP

BOOKS IN PRINT ABOUT EVELYN UNDERHILL

Callahan, Annice, *Spiritual Guides for Today*
Greene, Dana, *Evelyn Underhill: Artist of the Infinite Life*
Tastard, Terry, *The Spark of the Soul: Four Mystics on Justice*