



The Evelyn Underhill

Association Newsletter 2012-13



Annual Day of Quiet Reflection

Saturday June 15, 2013

Sayre House

The Washington National Cathedral

"Becoming the Parent of New Life"

Directed by Merrill Ware Carrington

[Download Registration Form](#)

During her lifetime, Evelyn Underhill was admired and appreciated for her personality as well as for her ideas – for her groundedness and integrity, for her humor, for her transparency as a living icon. In this sense, her wisdom was “caught” as well as taught. Although Underhill never bore children of her own, her vocation as a Mother of Souls was central to her identity.

At this year’s Day of Quiet, we will explore Underhill’s friendships with those who sought her guidance in relation to the life of the Spirit. We will look particularly at her extensive correspondence, the letters that functioned as a “mysterious link between soul and soul,” seeking clues about how -- and where and when -- she approached the practice traditionally described as “spiritual direction.”

Merrill Ware Carrington, M. Div., is a retreat leader and, for twenty years, has been actively engaged in the ministry of spiritual direction. An Episcopal laywoman, she lived for several years in London, just around the corner from the house where Underhill, during the Blitz, spent the final months of her life. Merrill was a regular communicant at the parish church in whose churchyard Underhill is buried.

ROUNDUP OF THE 100th ANNIVERSARY OF MYSTICISM

The year 2011, the 100th anniversary of the publication of Underhill's ground-breaking work *Mysticism*, proved to be remarkably prolific with research and special events. Much of this scholarship is now included in this website either in the section on "Related Articles" or listed below. The remarkable staying power of *Mysticism* made Underhill a pioneer not only in the study of that subject but in the ancillary studies which were strengthened because of her research. These include spirituality and spiritual direction. Her early contribution was all the more remarkable because she was a lay Christian and a woman with no formal theological training. She continues to give inspiration not only to scholars but to all those who seek to grow in the life of the Spirit. A belated thanks to all those who wrote and spoke on Underhill during this anniversary year and to the institutions which hosted them.

2012 ANNUAL QUIET DAY

The Annual Quiet Day was held again at the Washington National Cathedral and was directed by Dr. Michael Stoeber, Professor of Spirituality at Regis College and the Graduate Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto. His presentation explored the inter-faith conversations of Evelyn Underhill on poetry and mystical theology. Special attention was given to her work on Kabir, Tagore and the Sufi mystic, Attar of Nishapur. Stoeber sees Underhill as a pioneer in interreligious and comparative theological issues. His comments appear under "Featured Article."

NOTEWORTHY NEWS THE RETREAT HOUSE AT PLESHEY

Evelyn Underhill's beloved retreat house in the village of Pleshey near Chelmsford has begun an ambitious project of refurbishment. This House of Prayer has been in continuous operation since its beginning in 1909, serving thousands of pilgrims who come for reflection, prayer, sanctuary and hospitality. The projected renovation is extensive and will cost in excess of 1.7 million pounds. However, the project is well on its way toward this target with half this amount in hand. This is a very exciting time for Pleshey and they welcome your support through prayer and donations. See <http://www.retreathousepleshey.com/>

EVELYN UNDERHILL ARCHIVES

VIRGINIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

An archive collection for research on Evelyn Underhill, established by Dana Greene, is housed in the Library of the Virginia Theological Seminary, 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria, VA 22304. 703-461-1731. A new finding aide has been developed which can be found in Part Three of this newsletter. For further information. For further information about the archive contact: Christopher Pote cpote@vts.edu

Wheaton College

Carol Poston, who authored the latest edition of Evelyn Underhill's letters (*New and Selected Letters of Evelyn Underhill*, University of Illinois Press, 2010), has given the papers used in the preparation of the letters to Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. The collection contains photocopies of all the Underhill letters held at Kings College London and all the Margaret Robinson letters at St. Andrews University in Scotland, as well as both copies and hand transcriptions of all the Darcy Otter letters held at Pleshey Retreat House in Sussex. The selection also includes all the letters from Hubert Stuart Moore to Underhill, the J.M. Dent collection at the University of North Carolina and the May Sinclair letters at the University of Pennsylvania.

"Wheaton College is an appropriate place for these letters," Carol says, "because Wheaton also holds the letters of Charles Williams, the editor of the first collection of letters." Wheaton's Rare Book Collection possesses many treasures of the Inklings, including the wardrobe from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* as well as C.S. Lewis's pipe. Carol hopes that having photocopies of the entire correspondence on this side of the Atlantic will help American scholars in their Underhill studies.

GRAVESITE OF EVELYN UNDERHILL

In the heart of Hampstead, North London is an historic and picturesque burial ground attached to Hampstead Parish Church. (The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead, Church Row, London NW 3 6UU). In June 2012 the graveyard's 200th anniversary was celebrated. In it can be found the graves of many famous persons, including Evelyn Underhill, who is buried in the additional burial ground Grave P 080 and is listed under "Literature on the following website: <http://tombwithaview.org.uk>

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Jonathan Sutton, University of Leeds, UK, wrote to *The Tablet* in regards Dana Greene's article in its July 2011 issue.

Warm thanks to Professor Dana Greene for her concise and illuminating appreciation of Evelyn Underhill's book 'Mysticism', published one hundred years ago (9 July). The scale of Underhill's achievement is further understood if we recall that it appeared in print six years before the first edition of Rudolf Otto's at least equally ground-breaking study 'Das Heilige' ('The Idea of the Holy' in the English translation of 1923) and stands up very well indeed alongside it. Then we can further judge its worth if we compare it with Aldous Huxley's compilation 'The Perennial Philosophy' (1946), which now comes across as relatively meagre fare in terms of scope, content and analysis.

SOME INTERESTING WEBSITES

Meet Evelyn Underhill

www.mrrena.com/2002/underhill

Evelyn Underhill/Inward/Outward

<http://www.inwardoutward.org/author/evelyn-underhill>

Evelyn Underhill: The Online Books Page

<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=underhill,evelyn,1875-1941>

Evelyn Underhill-The Orlando Project

http://orlando.cambridge.org/public/svPeople?person_id=undeev

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP ON EVELYN UNDERHILL

Kathleen Henderson Staudt, "Re-reading Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*." *Spiritus*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 2012, 113-28.

Kathleen Henderson Staudt, "Wondering About Angels, On A Retreat," *Spiritus*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 2012, 133.

Lawrence Cunningham, "Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*:" An Appreciation." *Spiritus*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 2012, 106-12.

John Frances's recent article "Evelyn Underhill's Developing Spiritual Theology: A Discovery of Authentic Spiritual Life and the Place of Contemplation," appeared in the Spring 2011 issue of the *Anglican Theological Review* and is reprinted with permission under "Articles from the Newsletter" on the opening page of this website.

Harvey Egan, professor emeritus at Boston College, published "Evelyn Underhill Revisited" in the January 2012 issue of *The Way*, pp. 23-39.

"Being and Becoming and the Immanence-Transcendence Relation of Evelyn Underhill's Mystical Philosophy." Peter Gan Chong Beng. *Sophia*, Sept. 2011, pp. 375-89.

"Mysticism and Social Commitment: Evelyn Underhill and Thomas Merton on Peace." Susan Rakoczy. *Magistra*, Winter 1996, 124.

Ann Loades, professor emerita at Durham University, published "Evelyn Underhill: Mysticism and Worship" in *The International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 10, 1, pp. 57-70. Its abstract reads: It is now over a century since [Evelyn Underhill] began work on the first version of *Mysticism* (1911). She was a pioneer not only in the study she undertook for this book, but in the specifically Christian theology she was bold enough to work out from it, with Christ in person the paradigm mystic. The Latin mass of her day she deemed both as recapitulating Christ's own experience, as well as re-presenting the stability and growth of the 'Body' present at the Eucharist. Once recommitted to the Church of England in 1921, at a time of liturgical revision and in a deeply troubled political era, her concentration on Christ's sacrifice led her to embrace pacifism as the world lurched toward World War II. Her theological work, summed up in her final major book *Worship* (1936), reveals her continuing preoccupation with the question of how Christology integrates with liturgy, and therefore with the living of distinctively Christian life."

Dr Loades has also written "Evelyn Underhill" in *Exploring Lost Dimensions in Christian Mysticism*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013 and is completing an essay on Underhill for *Anglican Women Novelists* to be published by Oxford University Press.

"Evelyn Underhill after 'Mysticism:.' An Assessment of Her Later Years." A. Elizabeth Dalgaard. McGill University Dissertation, 1984.

"Found: The Etiology of Character Realization, within Rhetorical Analyses of the Series 'Lost' Through the application of Underhill's and Turner's Classic Concepts of the Mystic Journey." Lacey L. Mitchell. Liberty University Dissertation, 2012.

My Journey with Evelyn Underhill

by Kathy Staudt

For many years now the annual day of Quiet Reflection in honor of Evelyn Underhill has been an important spiritual resting-point in my life. It is always held in June, near Evelyn's June 15 feast day. At that time of year the cathedral close is beautiful, the roses blooming in the Bishop's garden, with quiet green places to walk and pray, and a lovely sense of "home" in the living room of Sayre House, where we meet. Even though I usually have leadership responsibilities, that June quiet day has become for me an annual time of rerooting, reconnecting to my own deepening experience of God's presence in my life. It is a time to rest in what Evelyn Underhill somewhere calls "that deep place where the soul is at home with God."

I first heard of Evelyn Underhill when I saw an announcement in the church bulletin for an Adult Forum that I did not attend. I was intrigued that the publicity referred to Evelyn Underhill as a "Protestant mystic" -- somehow that wording (which Evelyn herself would have hated), made it seem more possible to me that a deep mystical experience of God could be integrated with something people would recognize as "normal" -- a Protestant mystic seemed closer to that than a Catholic mystic might, at least at that time in my life. Later I was delighted to find that one of Evelyn Underhill's books was called "Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People". One summer, visiting my parents in Denver, I was browsing in a bookstore called The Tattered Cover. Something moved me to see whether they had anything by Evelyn, this mysterious "Protestant mystic" of whom I'd heard a bit, and one book on the shelf leapt out at me: its title was *Life as Prayer*.

Life as Prayer. The book was a volume of occasional talks by Evelyn Underhill, and I read and reread two essays especially that spoke to my immediate questions. One was "The Spiritual Life of a Teacher," an address to church school teachers that seemed to me to speak equally to the vocations of teacher and parent, two callings that I was beginning to weave together in my own life. In all of her writing, Evelyn Underhill invites people to prayer as an immersion in God's love, an activity natural to human beings formed in God's image, and an exciting journey. The images of prayer she offered spoke to me: "The life of prayer," she writes, "is so great and various there is something in it for everyone. Or again, it is like that ocean of God in which St. Gregory said that elephants can swim and lambs can paddle. Even a baby can do something about it. No saint has exhausted its possibilities yet." (175) Speaking to teachers, and I thought, also potentially to mothers and fathers also, she goes on:

In one way or another, you are required to be pupil-teachers, working for love. You must learn all the time, and give all the time; freely you have received, freely give. That is your Charter. Only do see to it that you fulfil the condition in which you can receive. The most up-to-date and efficient tap is useless unless the Living Water can come through and does come through. Never let yourselves think for one minute that because God has given you many things to do for Him, a large number of restless lambs to watch over, a great many pressing routine jobs, a life that is full up with duties and demands of a very practical sort--that all this need separate you from communion with Him. God is always coming to you in the sacrament of the present moment. Meet and receive Him then with gratitude in that sacrament; however unexpected its outward form may be. (185)

"God is always coming to you in the sacrament of the present moment." Here and elsewhere in her writing, this voice of quiet, grounded spiritual authority was naming my experience. She was also naming the importance of staying spiritually centered as ministry in the world became more scattered and demanding. I had feared that perhaps I was odd or even a little crazy, in the intensity of my experience of God and especially in my yearning for some times of reflection and rest in the increasing busy-ness of life as full-time stay-at-home mom and part-time teacher, at church and, as opportunities grew, at the university and seminary level.

The other book on the shelf that I did not pick up – and indeed did not read until years later -- was her volume *Mysticism*, the work for which Evelyn Underhill is best known, a classic that has been continuously in print since its publication in 1911. . The word "mystic" frightened me; in many ways the experiences of the mystics, as Evelyn recorded them, did chime with some of my own experience at prayer. I was not sure what to make of this. She argued that the experience of the great mystics of all traditions is actually an experience available to all human beings in some way or another, that the greatest mystics' experience differs from that of the rest of us "in degree, not in kind." It has taken me many years to stop being fearful about the intensity of my own experience of God, but Evelyn has been an important companion on that journey, helping me to see that this experience participates in a long and rich human tradition, and that it is for something. It calls us to participate in some way in God's ongoing effort to heal and redeem all that is broken and hurting in the world.

Kathleen Henderson Staudt (Kathy) is Secretary-Treasurer of the EUA and been a convener of the Evelyn Underhill Quiet Day for many years. Her article on Underhill's *Mysticism* appears in the Spring 2012 volume of *Spiritus*.