

# The Evelyn Underhill Association Newsletter

2020-2021

[www.evelynunderhill.org](http://www.evelynunderhill.org)

“The spiritual consciousness is more often caught than taught....We most easily recognize spiritual reality when it is perceived transfiguring human character, and most easily attain it by sympathetic contagion.”

~ [Sources of Power in Human Life.](#)



*Evelyn Underhill circa 1933. Courtesy of the archives of the Retreat Center at Pleshey*

## ANNUAL QUIET DAY OF REFLECTION, 2021 Where Do We Go From Here?

We've read her books, we've attended quiet days, we've studied her life...so what on earth happens next? What do we do with the great wisdom and spiritual counsel of Evelyn Underhill? This quiet day we will hear The Rev. Susan Dean's story of Underhill House, a quiet place to pause for prayer in Seattle, something done in the tradition of Evelyn Underhill. Come listen, reflect, sit quietly in the silence, and see where the Spirit might be leading you.

The Rev. Susan Dean, Founder and Executive Director of Underhill House and spiritual director, is an Associate Priest at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Renton, WA. Evelyn Underhill inspired, and continues to inspire, her ministry.



Rev. Susan Dean

Saturday, June 12, 2021, 9:30am-3:30pm

Nourse Hall, St. Albans Parish\*  
Next door to the Washington National Cathedral  
3001 Wisconsin Ave NW  
Washington DC 20016

*\*Please note change of venue*  
Please bring a sack lunch

Registration opens: May 1, 2021

[Download Registration Form](#)

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# Evelyn Underhill and a Decade of Student Research

By Carla Arnell

For the last decade, I have collaborated with undergraduate students in doing research about Evelyn Underhill and the Edwardian literary movements of which she was a part. At Lake Forest College, the small Illinois liberal arts college where I teach, each summer, students who have finished their first year with distinction have the opportunity to participate in what we call the Richter Honors Program. This program permits students to spend the summer working with a faculty member on his/her research, contributing to the professor's ongoing projects and in turn receiving mentoring to learn the moves professional scholars make.



*Carla Arnell, Prof. of English,  
Lake Forest College*

In 2007, I was looking for a new scholarly project to begin. I'd always been interested in the nexus between literature and spirituality, and I happened to recollect a course on "Mystics and Visionaries" that I'd taken years ago as an undergraduate at Augustana College. Oddly, even after so many years away from college, I still remembered the list of possible research topics my professor had given us – among which was the name of Evelyn Underhill. Having chosen a different mystic for my undergraduate project, almost twenty years later I didn't know much about Underhill and thought the summer Richter program might be a great way to learn more in the company of eager apprentice scholars.

What began as a vague hunch that my students and I might enjoy researching Underhill became a decade-long fascination with Underhill, her work, and the literary movement of which she was a part. The two young men who worked with me during that initial summer would not initially strike one as predisposed to explore topics of either religion or spirituality, so I was heartened to discover that her fiction engaged and excited them. We read her three novels. We scouted out all of her short fiction and read it. We read the biographies of Cropper, Armstrong, and Greene and some of Underhill's letters. And we worked that first summer mainly to get the lay of the land, putting together a comprehensive bibliography and trying to get a sense of some of the central scholarly issues animating discussions of Underhill's work.

Working on Underhill that summer had been such a pleasure for both me and my first students (one of whom now has a Ph.D. in Philosophy), that I decided to repeat the project two summers later, and then again, and again, summer after summer, with each new set of Richter scholars focusing on a slightly different dimension of Underhill's work. One summer, several students and I worked to understand the genre of fiction in which Underhill was writing. Should we regard it as "spiritual gothic," for instance? We took that genre as our first working hypothesis by reading her work against the fictions of several other writers whose work we might classify thus (M.R. James, Algernon Blackwood, and Dion Fortune), trying to discern whether Underhill fit within this movement or was doing something distinctively different. During another summer, my students and I catalogued all the epigraphs

that introduce her novels' chapters, tracking down the sources of the epigraphs, learning more about the writers and texts behind the epigraphs, and using that catalogue to better understand the influences that shaped Underhill's mind and heart. That work, which is still being shaped into an article, led to a subsequent summer's research into the impact of the Arts and Crafts movement on Underhill's thinking, a topic that has already issued in a scholarly article (published now in *Studies in Medievalism*).

As my research evolved, so did our understanding of how to classify Underhill's fiction, an understanding that ultimately morphed into a book project (currently underway) on "Evelyn Underhill and the Rise of the Mystical Novel in the Edwardian Era." Some of my most recent students have directly contributed to this book project, working to help me contextualize Underhill's work within the Edwardian era's fascination with mysticism and the occult and to situate her in relationship to like-minded writers of other "mystical novels," including A.E. Waite, Arthur Machen, R. H. Benson, and Charles Williams.

That Underhill has engaged and delighted students working with me on this scholarly project for over a decade is a testament to her intellectual and spiritual richness, especially because my students were not all English or religion majors; indeed, during my summer projects, I worked with a math and economics major, a political science major, a neuroscience/physics double major, and a psychology major (who just went to law school!), to name only a few of the disciplinary fields represented among my Richter scholars. Although these diversely interested and talented students delved into many other writers of Underhill's era, I found that students were often drawn back to Underhill herself, noting that she felt very "modern" to them, for they appreciated her aesthetic experimentation and found that her adventuresome and pioneering spirit resonated with them. She continues to be a writer for, if not of, our time.

# Evelyn Underhill Association's International Correspondents



## **Ron Dart - Canada**

Ron Dart has taught in the department of political science/philosophy/religious studies at the University of the Fraser Valley, BC, since 1990. He has published forty books and was on staff of Amnesty International in the 1980s. Ron has been reading Evelyn Underhill for many a decade and has been on the national board of the Thomas Merton Society of Canada for more than twenty years.

[rdart@shaw.ca](mailto:rdart@shaw.ca)

## **Robyn Wrigley-Carr - Oceania**

Dr. Robyn Wrigley-Carr is Senior Lecturer in Theology & Spirituality at Alphacrucis College, Sydney, Australia. Her PhD at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, examined Friedrich von Hügel as a spiritual director. Robyn edited *Evelyn Underhill's Prayer Book* and recently published *The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill*. Robyn is currently working on an anthology of Evelyn Underhill's writings for publication in 2021.

[Robyn.Wrigley-Carr@ac.edu.au](mailto:Robyn.Wrigley-Carr@ac.edu.au)



## **Louise Nelstrop - United Kingdom**

Louise Nelstrop is Director of Studies at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology and a Lecturer in Theology at St. Benet's Hall. She is also an Associate of the Ruusbroec Institute in Antwerp. She works on English mysticism, and has recently published a monograph with Routledge: *On Deification and Sacred Eloquence: Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich*. She is also one of the convenors of the Mystical Theology Network - a large international society that promotes the study of mysticism.

[louise.nelstrop@theology.ox.ac.uk](mailto:louise.nelstrop@theology.ox.ac.uk)

## New and Noteworthy

For those seeking information about the Evelyn Underhill Literary estate, please contact Mr. Dick Wilkinson, R. D. Wilkinson, 75 Eastgate Street, Winchester, Hants SO23 8DZ England  
[dwlksn@hotmail.com](mailto:dwlksn@hotmail.com)

Peter Friedlander, “Tagore, Kabir, Underhill.” [www.india-seminar.com](http://www.india-seminar.com)

### **Introducing Evelyn Underhill’s Practical Mysticism—Study Day with Dr. Louise Nelstrop**

Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology is a Catholic Institute in Cambridge, UK

This online course will introduce students to Underhill’s short accessible book *Practical Mysticism*. The course consists of four prerecorded sessions and a synchronous Zoom session. The Zoom session is not compulsory, but students are invited to come together to share their experiences and questions and to discuss Underhill further in person.

**Course Leader:** Dr. Louise Nelstrop

**Date:** 12th June 2021, 10.30am–5.00pm (lectures available from 8th June).

Timing includes lunch and coffee breaks. The Zoom session will take place at 4.00pm BST on 12th June.

Online distance learning plus optional synchronous Zoom.

**Contact:** [ln348@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ln348@cam.ac.uk) to register

Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Cambridge, UK

Dean of Canterbury Cathedral on Evelyn Underhill. Morning Prayer on June 15, 2019. Go to 10:56.  
<https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/#morning>

“Evelyn Underhill on Lady Poverty.” <http://embracingaesthetics.weebly.com/underhill-blog/lady-poverty>

Ron Dart’s review of *The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill* by Robyn Wrigley-Carr.

**Radix Magazine.** <http://www.radixmagazine.com/2020/09/12/book-review-the-spiritual-formation-of-evelyn-underhill-by-robyn-wrigley-carr>

# Evelyn Underhill, Baron Friedrich von Hügel, and the Journey of Spiritual Formation

By Carl McColman  
[www.carlmccolman.com](http://www.carlmccolman.com)

Today (June 15) is a day for remembering the passing of Evelyn Underhill, who died on this day in 1941.

If you are new to Evelyn Underhill, she was probably the most important writer in the English language for celebrating Christian contemplative and mystical spirituality in her lifetime. From the publication of her magisterial book *Mysticism* in 1911, until her death three decades later, she (in the words of Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey) “did more than anyone else... to keep the spiritual life alive.”

Her influence was just as remarkable; as biographer Dana Greene points out in her book *Evelyn Underhill: Artist of the Infinite Life*, she influenced a wide variety of Christian and other spiritual writers starting in the mid-20th century, figures such as T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis, Thomas Merton, Richard Rohr, Alan Watts, and Charles Williams (not to mention yours truly) were nurtured by Underhill’s contemplative writing, which sought to make the mystical dimension of spirituality available to ordinary people of all walks of life.

With this in mind, I’d like to observe the anniversary of her passing by highlighting a remarkable new book recently published by S.P.C.K. in England. *The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill* offers insight on her backstory — particularly her relationship with her first spiritual director, Baron Friedrich von Hügel, who was himself an authority on mysticism and the author of *The Mystical Element of Religion*, which explored Christian mysticism by focusing on the spirituality of St. Catherine of Genoa.

The author of this book, Robyn Wrigley-Carr, is the editor of *Evelyn Underhill’s Prayer Book*, which came out in 2018. With her new book, she offers insight into not only Underhill’s formation (shaped by her reading as well as the mentoring of von Hügel and several other luminaries of British Christianity, most notably Abbot John Chapman and Reginald S. Ward), but also offers insight into how Underhill herself ministered to others, both as a spiritual director and as a retreat leader. Among her many directees was Lucy Menzies, author of *Mirrors of the Holy* as well as an unpublished biography of Underhill.

What emerges is an insightful glimpse into the inner life of an important 20th century contemplative — but *The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill* has an even larger function — it offers insight into how spirituality is passed from generation to generation, beginning with those who formed Underhill but then going on to examine how important she became in the formative spirituality of others.

Still, if Underhill is the star of this book, the Baron practically deserves second billing. Indeed, in the book's forward (written by Eugene Peterson, and published here posthumously) it is apparent that Peterson himself was primarily interested in how this book examines the spirituality of Baron von Hügel. That's not surprising, for Wrigley-Carr (who studied under Peterson) tells of how important the Baron's writing was to Peterson.

So, I think this book serves really a triple purpose:

- Obviously, it's a celebration of Evelyn Underhill and will delight Underhill's confirmed fans (like me) and could also serve to introduce new readers to her.
- It introduces readers to Baron Friedrich von Hügel, who like Underhill was a scholar of mysticism but who emphasized the importance of spirituality within a social, communal, and ecclesiastical setting; and
- It offers a longitudinal look at how spirituality is passed down from generation to generation, beginning with von Hügel directing Underhill, but then reflecting on how Underhill directed others.

Anyone interested in Evelyn Underhill, twentieth century Christian mysticism, and the ministry of spiritual direction will be delighted by this book. I should also mention that both von Hügel and Underhill corresponded with many of the directees, and so fortunately we have many of their letters preserved, giving us invaluable primary source insight into their work as spiritual guides. So, if you enjoy *The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill*, these collections of letters are well worth checking out:

- Baron Friedrich von Hügel, [\*Spiritual Counsel and Letters\*](#) (edited by Douglas V. Steere);
- Baron Friedrich von Hügel, [\*Selected Letters 1896 – 1924\*](#) (edited by Bernard Holland);
- Baron Friedrich von Hügel, [\*Letters to a Niece\*](#) (edited by Gwendolen Greene);
- Evelyn Underhill, [\*The Letters of Evelyn Underhill\*](#) (edited by Charles Williams);
- Evelyn Underhill, [\*The Making of a Mystic: New and Selected Letters\*](#) (edited by Carol Poston)



# Review of *The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill* by Robyn Wrigley-Carr

(SPCK: London, 2020)

Review by Ron Dart

There has been much significant work done on the life and prolific writing of Evelyn Underhill (certainly one of the most significant writers on the mystical life in the first half of the 20th century), but the research done on the impact of Baron von Hügel on Underhill has tended to be leaner, thinner and less developed. The sheer beauty and brilliance of this recent book by Robyn on Underhill is the way the close and symbiotic relationship between von Hügel and Underhill is carefully and thoughtfully traced and traced. The fact that Eugene Peterson wrote a rather lengthy “Foreward” to the book, carefully noting his significant indebtedness to von Hügel, should alert the curious and interested in learning more about von Hügel: both Underhill and Peterson (and many others mentored into greater depths of the faith journey by this multilayered director of sorts).

Robyn, to her well researched credit (her PHD done on von Hügel), does a chapter by chapter round dance between von Hügel and Underhill, photos of both of them, like welcoming portals, inviting us to see and hear them. This compact and rewarding read of a book is divided into six enticing sections (I read the bounty in two days—hard to turn away from it). As mentioned above, Eugene Peterson did the incisive “Foreward”. Once done, the plane leaves the tarmac. 1) “Introducing the Baron” makes for a pleasant overview of his engaged and careful life, a life that modelled a broad and truly catholic vision and vocation. 2) “Introducing Evelyn Underhill” answers chapter one handsomely, von Hügel having footed it well in the previous chapter. Those with some background in Underhill’s pilgrimage through time will find this a lovely refresher chapter and those new to Underhill a fine primer. 3) “The Baron’s spiritual formation of Evelyn Underhill” brings the two dancers together, the nature of the eternal dance and steps to be learned and revealed well and wisely. 4) “Motherhood of souls: Evelyn the spiritual director” ponders how Underhill picked up the torch offered her by von Hügel and rethought and restated much of his insights in a more accessible way and manner, Underhill no uncritical devotee of von Hügel, the best of him internalized by Underhill as a mother of souls. 5) “Motherhood of souls: Evelyn the retreat director” moves the discussion from Underhill as a prolific writer on mysticism and directee of von Hügel to the practical and regular giving of retreats by Underhill (something von Hügel never did). The finale or “Afterword” to *The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill* brings together (dance steps learned well and wisely) the way Von Hügel, Underhill and Peterson have formed, in many ways, Robyn’s emerging vocation and charism, a variety of passages from Peterson’s books and emails to Robyn from Peterson included to end the book, Robyn being a student of Peterson when she studied at Regent College in the days when Peterson was there. I might also add the copious “Notes” and “References” make this a book worth many a meditative read and inward digesting.

It might have been interesting to ponder, given the years that von Hügel (1852-1925) and Underhill (1875-1941) were alive and active in the English context, how they understood the catholic relationship between contemplation, church, ecclesial ecumenism and substantive public and political issues that Anglican Divines such as F.D. Maurice, Charles Gore, Percy Dearmer and Conrad Noel embodied. I might add that there is a brief but touching correspondence between Underhill and C.S. Lewis, initiated by Underhill in her waning years before Lewis had waxed.

I have been fond of Evelyn Underhill for many decades and read Baron von Hügel also, but this is the best book to date that threads together, in a well woven tapestry, the impact of von Hügel on Underhill and the way Underhill internalized the best of von Hügel and passed the gift and torch on to others, including C.S. Lewis, Eugene Peterson and Robyn Wrigley-Carr—many thanks Robyn for such a charmer of a book.

Perhaps a fitting adieu to the review might best be summed by Bob Cratchit's response to the fine feast his wife prepared for the family Christmas dinner: "A triumph, my dear, another triumph."

## Evelyn Underhill's Prayer Book

By Carl McColman

Anyone who is at all familiar with my work knows that I simply adore Evelyn Underhill. She introduced me to Christian mysticism, and her work as a lay retreat director has been a direct inspiration for my own ministry.

So you can imagine my delight when it was announced recently that Evelyn Underhill's two notebooks filled with her personal collection of prayers — including prayers she wrote, but also many collected from other authors throughout Christian history — had been discovered in the library of one of the retreat houses she frequented. These two handwritten notebooks were thought to be lost, much to the chagrin of Underhill scholars, for she often made reference to her prayer books in her retreat notes.

Thanks to a doctoral student, Robyn Wrigley-Carr, doing research at the Pleshey Retreat house, the notebooks finally came to light, and now for the first time they have been published, so we all can a glimpse into the kinds of prayers that Evelyn Underhill loved to share with her retreatants — and, we may assume, the kinds of prayers that shaped her own rich interior life.

And what a treasury it is! Many of the greatest lights in Christian spirituality are included in this collection: saints

like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Teresa of Ávila, Francis of Assisi, along with other luminaries like Eriugena, deCaussade, and John Henry Newman. But a few surprising figures show up as well, like Christina Rossetti or the Sufi poet Rabiya; and even a few prayers by friends of Evelyn Underhill's like Margaret Cropper (not to mention many unattributed prayers, which the editor suggests are probably Underhill's own work).

Here is just one gem, from the 19th century French Jesuit mystic, Jean Nicolas Grou:

*Teach us, O God, that silent language which says all things. Teach our souls to remain silent in Your presence; that we may adore You in the depths of our being, and await all things from You, while asking of You nothing but the accomplishment of Your will. Teach us to remain quiet under Your action and produce in our souls that deep and simple prayer which says nothing and experiences everything, which specifies nothing and includes everything. Do pray in us, that our prayer may ever tend to Your glory, and our desires and intentions may not be fixed on ourselves, but wholly directed to You.*

There's much more where that came from.

I'm finding that when I read a few pages of Evelyn Underhill's Prayer Book that it has the same effect on me that reciting the daily office has — in other words, it invites me to rest in that vast silent place within, even as I am praying the words of love and devotion that Underhill so carefully curated almost a century ago. It is a superb collection of prayers, and since it is only about 120 pages long, it's perfectly suited for a Lenten devotional — read a page or two each morning and evening, and you'll pray your way through Lent.

# Our “Spiritual War-Work” in the Age of COVID-19

By Robyn Wrigley-Carr – May 10, 2020

During World War 2, the British, Anglican, mystical theologian and spiritual director, Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), encouraged a small “Prayer Group” to pray for world leaders, calling it their “spiritual war-work.” [1]

Our current pandemic has often been referred to as a “war,” yet a battle against an invisible enemy that is somehow uniting us all in our common humanity—regardless of nationality, race, gender or sexuality. The language of “war” when referring to COVID-19, has caused me to reflect upon Underhill’s insights—written during our last world war—as a challenge to our Christian response to this current global health crisis.

During World War 1, Underhill contributed to the war effort through writing and translating guide-books for Naval Intelligence. But towards the end of that war, Underhill (in her words) “went to pieces.” [2] The reality of war with the death of two close cousins on the front was too much for her abstracted mysticism. By 1919, Underhill sought the spiritual nurture of Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925). Underhill tells us that “somehow by his [von Hügel’s] prayers or something,” he “compelled” her to “experience Christ ... it was like watching the sun rise very slowly – and then suddenly one knew what it was.” [3] Thereafter, Underhill’s writings became Christocentric and Trinitarian, focusing upon the “spiritual life” and our response to the triune God as the Church.

In the 1930s, Underhill became a pacifist and by 1939 in World War 2, she joined the Peace Pledge Union and the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship. Alongside Underhill’s writing about pacifism during this time, she also wrote letters to her “Prayer Group”—around twelve women who had asked her to teach them about prayer in the spring of 1939. Underhill taught them face-to-face in London on a couple of occasions, then with the onset of World War 2, the group was geographically scattered, so she sent each member a letter, linked to the Church’s liturgical calendar. One aspect of her encouragement of this group was that they pray for world leaders—their “spiritual war-work”.

For Underhill, prayer is “Christian love in action.” [4] Maintaining a “spirit of prayer” through “waiting on God” was viewed by Underhill as the greatest means by which these women could “help the world” during World War 2. [5] So her Prayer Group was encouraged to pray for their enemies at noon daily, asking God to have compassion on them. [6] They prayed for Hitler and Mussolini—asking the Holy Spirit to come upon both leaders “with power” and “change their hearts.” [7] And as these women prayed for their “enemies,” they were “reach[ing] out in love” to those for whom they interceded. [8] Thus, the act of praying for world leaders not only impacted the world, but was formational—changing the women. Their intercessions not only impacted decisions made on the world stage during the war, but also enlarging their hearts towards those leaders.

In this COVID-19 world crisis, Underhill reminds us that it’s not enough to simply intercede when we “feel” like

it. Rather, it's our "duty" as the worldwide Christian Church—no matter what "flavour" or "tribe" we inhabit—to continue Jesus' work on earth, and one of the "chief ways" this happens is through the "life of prayer" of the universal Church.[9] So though Underhill emphasises the Church's role in glorifying God through worshipful adoration, she also reminds us that we "become channels" of Jesus' "saving love" as we intercede.[10] As we place ourselves at "God's disposal, His Holy Spirit prays in us," inviting us into intercession, as we lift to God the "world's suffering, need and sin." [11] This is one of the greatest things we can do for humanity.[12]

During this health crisis that unites the planet, all of our world leaders need our prayers now, more than ever. We see some nations closing in on themselves and a lack of cooperation with global solutions to the pandemic. For example, some are withdrawing WHO funding, withholding authentic coronavirus death statistics, or engaging in missile testing while hundreds of thousands die and economies falter. All of our world leaders need our prayers for wisdom, generosity, kindness, compassion, and in some cases, protection from themselves—their myopia and their pride. This is no time for self-interest and self-preservation, but for enlarged, compassionate hearts and clear heads.

Underhill calls us all to generosity and sacrifice. She encourages us to give up any "comforts," making our lives "more simple and plain" as an "act of love to God." [13] The COVID-19 crisis means we all inhabit greater financial uncertainty—particularly those who are unemployed, unable to pay their rent, mortgages, or loans. Perhaps this is a time when we are called to prayerfully consider how we might be more generous with our money and our time, as we care for others.[14] COVID-19 has brought forth some creative forms of generosity and sacrifice. For example, the British, 99-year-old veteran, Captain Tom Moore, walking laps of his back garden with his walker while raising funds for the NHS; voluntary pay-cuts for senior politicians in New Zealand, Singapore, and Ecuador—in the NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's words—"showing solidarity" in her nation's "time of need" and acknowledging the "hit" to many Kiwis.[15] Such acts of creative empathy and generosity are inspiring. How might we show compassion, love and generosity, in our own unique ways, in our shattered, fragile world?

And for those of us who still have employment, but work from home instead of travelling to the workplace, how might we most effectively use that gift of extra time? Perhaps this is a season not just for sleeping in, but also using that time for new morning rituals of prayer, or adopting the habit of praying for world leaders and peace each noon. [16] Perhaps our daily lunch break could be our reminder to pray for world unity—the sharing of ventilators and vaccine research break-throughs and protection of medics on the front line. It might also be a time to pray for the inequalities in our societies—knowing the poverty of some nations and communities with unequal access to quality healthcare makes them more vulnerable to death from the virus. And prayers of protection of first nations' people, who tend to have worse health outcomes. We can also pray for structural change to enable better health care for all who are homeless, poor, or oppressed in our world and in our communities.

Von Hügel's final words from his death bed were, "Caring is the greatest thing. Caring matters most ..." [17] These words remind us that caring love needs to be at the core of our response to this pandemic as followers of Jesus: Caring enough to pray for our neighbour, for justice, for the disabled or those who are vulnerable with underlying health conditions. Caring enough to pray for those with mental health conditions, for women trapped in abusive

relationships, for children being abused. In fact, caring enough to pray for the children of the world—who are the future. And caring enough to engage in “spiritual war-work”—praying for our world leaders—a spiritual practice I believe all Christians are called to participate in. It’s easy to read the daily news, feel dismay and simply critique our world leaders. It’s much less automatic to pray for them.

Andrea Bocelli’s “Music for Hope” in the Milan Duomo was a highlight of my Easter. In his introduction, Bocelli said, “I believe in the strength of praying together.” I similarly believe strongly that the current pandemic is an opportunity for Church unity—“spiritual ecumenism.” [18] Indeed, Bocelli’s rendition of “Amazing Grace” with footage of empty Italian cities, plus Paris, London and New York, reminds us all of our unity as Christians. Newton’s lyrics are all the more striking, knowing they were written by a former slave trader who came to faith after surviving a storm: “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.” [19] In this pandemic, may we all more fully experience that grace which draws us to the appropriate response of “Yirah Yahweh” (“fear of the LORD”—authentic awe and adoration), and that grace that also relieves our fears—for this is not our home. We’re all just passing through. May we all come to embody and truly live—not just talk about, not just write about—the reality of this Grace. And may our experiencing of this reality prompt us to pray that our broken world will know the peace that passes understanding and the hope and lived reality of eternity. And may we all, like Underhill, become utterly convinced of the power of prayer, so that we, as the Christian Church, can participate in what God is doing in the world, through our prayers for global leaders and global unity—our “spiritual war-work.”

**Robyn Wrigley-Carr is a Senior Lecturer in Theology and Spirituality at Alphacrucis College, Australia. She also a Senior Research Fellow for 2020 at Anglican Deaconess Ministries, Sydney, Australia.**

*This article is courtesy of Laidlaw College, NZ where it was first published.*

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## ***Footnotes***

[1] Evelyn Underhill. *The Fruits of the Spirit Light of Christ Abba* (London: Longmans, 1960), 56.

[2] MS 5552, Letter from Underhill to Friedrich von Hügel, St Andrews University Library Special Collections.

[3] Margaret Cropper, *The Life of Evelyn Underhill* (Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2003), 102, italics added.

[4] Evelyn Underhill. “Postscript,” In *Evelyn Underhill Modern Guide to the Ancient Quest for the Holy*, ed. Dana Green (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 208.

[5] Underhill, *The Fruits*, 50.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid, 56.

[8] Ibid, italics added.

[9] Ibid, 52.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid, 48.

[14] Ibid.

[15] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/15/jacinda-ardern-and-ministers-take-20-pay-cut-in-solidarity-with-those-hit-by-covid-19>.

[16] Ibid, 50.

[17] Gwendolen Greene, ed., *Baron Friedrich von Hügel's Letters to a Niece* (London: Dent & Sons 1929), xliii.

[18] See: <https://www.etrernitynews.com.au/good-news/church-unity-one-of-many-pandemic-opportunities/>

[19] Italics added.

# Church of the Ascension and Saint Agnes

Monday, June 15, 2020  
EVELYN UNDERHILL  
Frederick Erickson

Today our Kalendar commemorates Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), an English writer and lecturer who was widely recognized as an authority on Christian mysticism and contemplative prayer—an authority based on her religious experience as well as on formal study. She was the first woman to be asked to address an officially convened audience of clergy in the Church of England. Later she held an academic appointment at King's College, London. Her writing, spanning the first half of the 20th Century and still reprinted today, has been read with appreciation by scholars, parish clergy, and lay persons throughout the Anglican Communion and beyond it, reaching a broadly ecumenical audience.

Underhill wrote and spoke with great clarity in what I like to call “plain English.” Undergirded in deep sentiment, what she said was not at all sentimental. She saw the life of prayer, and of Christian life in its entirety, not as an escape from everyday reality but as honest and direct encounter with it. Since she was so eminently quotable perhaps the best course here is to let her words speak for themselves. The wisdom and counsel shown in the following quotes provide guidance and hope for us in the present time. Let us give thanks today for her words and for her example of life.

Religion, like beauty, cannot be experienced in cold blood.

The heart outstrips the clumsy sense and sees—perhaps for an instant, perhaps for longer periods of bliss, an undistorted and more veritable world.

God is always coming to you in the Sacrament of the Present Moment. Meet and receive Him there with gratitude in that sacrament.

The spiritual life of individuals has to be extended both vertically to God and horizontally to other souls; and the more it grows in both directions, the less merely individual and more truly personal it will become.

Christian history looks glorious in retrospect; but it is made up of constant hard choices and unattractive tasks, accepted under the pressure of the Will of God.