

Esther de Waal  
**Lost in Wonder**  
ISBN:1 85311 552 5  
*Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2003, £9.99*

It is twenty years since Esther de Waal's slim volume on Benedictine spirituality, 'Seeking God', was published. That book was about the Benedictine virtue of balance within one's life. This book is to do with correcting an imbalance, dissolving a perceived boundary between sacred and secular, with guarding our breathing spaces. Such times apart are needed, whether we are the victims of our relentless activity, or lacking purpose and drifting in lethargy.

The book is set out so as to be able to use one chapter a day, in the pattern of a week's retreat, though the reader is encouraged to use it in whatever way is appropriate. Each of seven main chapters concludes with a short section of prayers and reflections. The whole book is woven with quotations from many different sources, including the Bible and poets of every period. In two sections at the back of the book, virtually all these quotations are attributed, and short biographical notes of the writers given

The author wants us to regain a sense of awe in daily life, and celebrates the wider discovery of the monastic tradition of finding God in the ordinary, of cultivating 'a heart of stillness', and 'empty space in which we can become aware of the presence of God'. Silence is one of the most powerful tools for deepening and enriching life; also, we need to be committed to times of prayer, rather than reading about it. She differentiates between 'looking' and 'seeing' - looking is searching, seeing is being open to what comes to the eye, as part of living in the present moment, of being attentive, of being empty to be receptive. Taken together, silence, attentiveness and emptiness enrich one another.

In her conclusion, the author suggests that 'this task, this responsibility of seeing rather than looking, is all part of that fullness of life that a generous God would wish for all of us.' When we are fully alive, we experience all of life as gift.

Though the purpose of the book is to aid a DIY retreat, probably at home over about a week, there is so much excellent material here that taking a month or so to gradually soak it in would be an alternative way of using it. I think one would struggle to gain full benefit in a week.

***Sandra Hancock TSSF***