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## Music of Eternity: Meditations for Advent with Evelyn Underhill: the Archbishop of York's Advent Book 2021

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*Receiving means to keep ourselves carefully tuned in, sensitive to the music of Eternity.  
We can never adore enough.*

These words from Evelyn Underhill (Anglican writer and spiritual guide) are the unifying thread to this tapestry of her reflections woven together with skill and sensitive insight by Australian author and theologian, Robyn Wrigley-Carr. After a brief prologue, the book has four stages and an epilogue, each followed by discussion questions and a closing prayer – all designed for daily use over a month. In Part 1, we welcome God's coming, eyes set on the mystery of God. For Evelyn, our reflections (and the spiritual life) begin, not with our search for God, but rather with the God who continually seeks us out. We are called to ponder the 'mighty symphony' of God, of eternal love overflowing into creation, inviting us to share the divine life. We must listen attentively to the music 'of Eternity' so as to respond to its quiet promptings. This section ends with praising God in worship, drawing on the Lord's Prayer.

Part 2's focus is Advent: we await God's coming, now in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. For us, as for Mary, Advent (and life itself) reflects how we are amphibians, straddling two worlds. The busy, visible arena of everyday activities overlaps with the unseen, inner world of the Spirit's tranquil workings. We must be attuned to detecting the signs of God at work. As we wait for the Christ-child, Evelyn reminds us about waiting, expectancy, hope, silence, meditation and prayer.

Part 3 illuminates God's coming in Christ as 'Emmanuel' (God with us) - the longest section, since time and space are needed to 'gaze upon' God's human face in Christ. With Evelyn, we accompany Jesus from His birth through his temptations, public ministry, to his transfiguration, the Emmaus encounter and, finally, His glorification.

Part 4 deals with 'holy living', how we respond to all God has done - His coming in Christ and 'in every moment' (4). Highlighted are key responses to our Triune God suggested by Evelyn - adoration, the Eucharist, sacrifice, virtuous dispositions such as humility, love, forgiveness and peace.

In her Epilogue, Wrigley-Carr returns to the opening metaphor of Eternity and the mighty symphony of the Trinitarian God. Standing between the already and the not yet, our 'ears' need to be 'awake'. By straining to hear Eternity's music and let ourselves participate in God's Eternal song, we may echo John Donne's words (used in Evelyn's retreats): 'I shall be made Your music – as I come' (5).

The text, while enhanced by Dr. Wrigley-Carr's judicious commentaries, reflects Evelyn's voice, one that is engaging, enlightening and encouraging. Her writings and retreats, firmly anchored in the Scriptures, reflect her own spiritual journey and offer glimpses into her relationship with God. Evident, too, is Evelyn's practical wisdom in

understanding and helping people together with a down-to-earth quality in her thoughts and prayers. Consistent with her artistic sensibility, they are sprinkled with images from nature or rural or domestic life and, often, couched in the immediacy (and cadences) of the spoken rather than the written word.

The Advent framework enables us to accompany Evelyn in reflecting on the mystery of God's loving plan of salvation and redemption - highlighting the richness of the season in the process. Running unobtrusively beneath Evelyn's spiritual teaching is the water-course of seventeenth century French spirituality and Cardinal Bérulle's influence: the triadic pattern of adoration/communion/cooperation as grounded in the 'pure capacity for God'; the centrality of the human Jesus; the Gospels as access points to share in the attitudes and dispositions of Jesus and Mary; the role of worship and of the Church; the need of virtues and, importantly, of moral responsibility for others and the world.

This book reflects Underhill's persistent appeal to God as Creative Spirit (or to the Holy Spirit) for the divine nudges and whispered harmonies to catch our attention. Such a perspective might suggest a more inclusive approach to the divine/human relationship - in terms of gender, other religious traditions and secular approaches to spirituality. These latter considerations align with Underhill's long-held view that wonder prompting adoration is the first and greatest of life's responses to the spiritual realm, to an unseen reality beyond us.

As this book intimates, Evelyn's underlying scholarship as retreat giver and spiritual guide (as in *Mysticism* and *Worship*) is worn lightly. So too with Dr Wrigley-Carr in her editing and guiding observations; they are in harmony with Evelyn's 'music' and the alluring metaphor that pervades and unifies the book.

We are indebted to this Australian scholar for this collation from the later writings and retreats of Evelyn Underhill-a significant influence in the twentieth century Anglican tradition. We have been offered a thoughtful (and congenial) companion leading into Christmas and, it could be suggested, a gift for all seasons.