

# “FOR ALL WHO SEEK”

## A REVIEW

BY LARRY J. FISK

[Regina Coupar](#). *The Seeker's Heart: meditations inspired by the Book of Psalms*. [Blue Grama Publications Corp.](#), Lethbridge, AB. (forthcoming).

I first became aware of Nova Scotia artist, poet and writer Regina Coupar's work on the Psalms in the spring of 2003. I was studying Julian of Norwich, that strange but compassionate medieval mystic, whose life, it seemed to me, was being paralleled by a modern day spiritual quest in Chester Basin, Nova Scotia. Our Calgary study group welcomed access to an on-line "Julian's Mandala", a cross-section of a hazel nut, which Regina had painted to represent the world's unity just as Julian had been taught to appreciate it over six hundred years earlier. I remember thinking that Regina Coupar's artwork and poetry seemed so much in keeping with Julian's spirit. It fostered, as did Julian's so-called visions and theological reflections, a wholly new way of appreciating the divine, for Julian "God as mother", for Regina "God as unconditional lover". And both of these benevolent views were developed in an age of its opposites, a wrathful or punishing God and a time of great disease plague/HIV/AIDS and unprecedented violence.

You might imagine my delight and surprise when, during a visit that summer, Regina asked if I would like to have a look at the completed draft of her meditations on the Psalms. The parallels seemed now to be truly tangible, as I thought back on Julian's first attempt at reading which was one of only two Biblical books in her Abbey library, a beautifully illuminated Latin version of the Psalms. It struck me that Regina Coupar's patient pilgrimage, from the dark places in her life to this daily discipline and commitment to meditating on and rephrasing the Psalms in light of her own vision, was identical to Julian's daily struggle to learn to read and write in her English language (the first woman to write in English) by dealing with a LATIN text of the Psalms. Disciplined labours of great devotion were to be found in both of these early 21<sup>st</sup> century and mid-14<sup>th</sup> century activities.

I have now had the opportunity to read the soon to be published version of Regina Coupar's meditations where everything from the simplicity of explanatory comment to the directness and clarity of the meditations themselves strikes a chord of wonder and delight. I was instantly moved by Regina Coupar's brief comment that she had received sustenance from the Psalms in childhood. This immediately said to me that her meditations were no "flash in the pan". My own "seeker's heart" and mind were set at ease when she confessed to being later in life disturbed by those Psalms which reflected the desire for glory and revenge, including the "graphic detail of suggesting methods" to devour one's enemies. I now knew that, like other seekers who have struggled with the Psalms, (not just Julian, but contemporaries like Bede Griffiths and Thomas Merton), Regina Coupar was in very good company.

I will leave it to the exegetes: Biblical scholars and theologians, to take apart, as they must do, the hermeneutics, historicity, and cultural affinity of these meditations. For me as a single stroller on this beautiful planet (one of political and conflict training) I am quite simply inspired by these magnificent paraphrases of the psalms.

They are written all over again for our time. Their beauty prompted in me tears of acknowledgment and the joy of a Spiritual Presence. The meditations can, and I believe should, be used in worship services, but more importantly beyond that, in groups inside and outside of religious institutions, among friends, in families, in those quiet, intimate times of sharing friends, lovers and fellow searchers as we seek the deeper aspects of our lives.

I can certainly see myself employing these brief and inspiring reflections as part of my own daily meditative life. I can trust the author and, perhaps this may sound sac-religious, because of that trust, and for the time being at least, Regina Coupar's meditations will be my way of entering the world of the Psalmist.

I have heard telling explanations of how the original Psalmist expressed his anguished cry in exile and the hatred of those who made that exile a reality. Yes, it can be argued that the original Psalms contain the full spectrum of human emotions which includes the glory and revenge which Regina Coupar chooses to omit. But what we do have in these meditations are poetic, yet lucid, images of our inner life.

In Psalm 10 for example, the author speaks of her own propensity for soul-destroying practices: "I have cursed and lied and fallen victim to the charms of my own mediocrity". The imagery is exquisitely different from what we have come to expect: "I have covered your face with my hands/ do not forget me in my time of need/ peel my fingers from your eyes/ turn my head to your light/ help me to see you again."

I like Regina's intermix of "her" and "his" in Psalm 32. This is, as far as I can see, the only use of these pronouns, but in this one instant it allows us to appreciate that this modern-day Psalmist, unlike her earlier counterparts, is speaking to the entire human race.

Psalm 34 could just as easily have been written by a sage in Iraq or Rwanda. It is a Psalm written in the context of deep-rooted conflict and is, I am convinced, of such metal that it would stand up to the spiritual bludgeoning in those contexts: "You peeled the shame from my face and smiled into my eyes/ my troubles melted my fears dissolved/ You kissed my lips, I tasted your blood/ you turned my heart from evil and embraced me with your goodness/ you filled my heart with peace/ my spirit ignited with flames of passion/ I sought salvation and I was heard/ I will praise you from the highest hill."

There is, as one might well expect, a psychological shrewdness reflected throughout these contemporary words. This is particularly evidenced in the opening and closing phrase of Psalm 77: "Show me the patterns." All of us who have faced or are currently struggling with conflict know about the "work" of dealing with our patterns of hurt, loss, disappointment, failure, anxiety, fear and depression. Similarly, the author's spiritual insight is evidenced in cadences like "'I will not succumb to the conventions of fashion/ the disapproval of my peers is as hollow as their praise". (Psalm 75)

Regina Coupar, from her relatively reflective and sometimes quiet life in Chester Basin, Nova Scotia knows poetry and her home displays artful design. But she also discerns the Psalmist's cries. May I submit, she also comprehends, in the depths of her person, something of the "Living" God.

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