

Canadian Christian Meditation Community

NEWSLETTER FALL 2009

VOL. 18 NO. 3

THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Biennial National Conference: *The Roots of Our Tradition*

Father Laurence began his session at the National Conference by inviting us to be open to Christ and to be aware of ourselves as a community – a community that reflects a three-fold consciousness: of ourselves, the Church and the world. Each aspect offers different degrees of experiencing the mystery of Christ. “How do we remain ‘a local’ in a global world?” he asked. “Does being rooted in the tradition and practice of our meditation lead to crisis?”

The recent global financial crisis has shattered illusions of security, stability and power. Many people have discovered that material growth and accumulation do not offer essential nourishing. In a crisis, individual or collective, people

experience fear due to the loss of control – loss of persons, health, plans or money. Yet this disintegration of expectation can lead to a new growth and knowledge. An opportunity for recovery and reintegration arises through wisdom, through a form of knowledge that leads to healing and evolution on a local and global level. How is “crisis” to be understood in the context of our meditation practice and tradition?

A crisis is a turning point. It calls for a decision. Our meditation is a controlled crisis. Through a process of loss we change from within, facing the unknown and letting go

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Finding your Christian Roots

Isabelle Glover co-presented with Fr. Laurence at the National Conference in Toronto. She shared a great deal of her personal history, reflecting on experiences in India, Russia and in the Middle East. In part, she complemented Fr. Laurence’s presentation on John Cassian’s teachings on the “prayer of the heart” by providing an eastern perspective, a non-dualistic context, for a deeper understanding of “the heart.”

Isabelle reflected upon the Judeo-Christian commandment to “love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5, Mk. 12:30). She emphasized that the original Hebrew notion of heart, soul and strength are inseparable components of mind. In the West, we tend to separate the notion of the head as the home of thoughts and

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The Roots of Our Tradition *continued from front*

of control. It is a process to peace. Wisdom develops as we begin to experience the words of Desert Father Abba Isaac, “One is very close to knowledge when one clearly recognizes the questions to be asked. One is not far from true awareness when one begins to understand one’s ignorance.” Although our experience in meditation feeds our hunger for depth and meaning, experience alone doesn’t enable us to grow. Experience requires faith in a context of love, community and tradition. Faith saves, heals and creates the capacity to transcend ourselves.

The meditator today understands that we are part of a tradition that comes to us and through us in faith. Faith is always connected to the way of love. Father John Main said, “To pray is to be open to the otherness of God. To love is to turn beyond self to another.” Tradition in the faith experience is articulate, expressive and adaptable to time and culture. It has to be handed down, passed on in a spirit of love. As John Main put it, “Meditation is caught not taught.”

The oral and silent traditions of prayer are like two lenses of a pair of glasses. Words and ideas have a place, but ultimately cannot convey the Logos, or wisdom itself. Father John, having been introduced to meditation using a Christian mantra in the East, sought a connection with our western Christian tradition. He found it in the writings of John Cassian (365-435). Cassian’s spiritual masterpiece, the *Conferences*, was the most widely read book after the Bible in early Christian times. It is a study of monastic experience in Egypt where men and women, known as the Desert Mothers and Fathers, sought a God-centered life in a time of extreme social upheaval. In *Conferences* 9 and 10, John Main found a deep tradition of the prayer that is rooted in the heart and repeated ceaselessly. “Give me a word by which I may live,” Cassian pleads.

The monk is called to seek God as the primary goal in life, to pray as a way of life and to seek a total conversion of heart. John Main felt that Cassian’s monastic vision had a more universal application. He felt that it was a calling for everyone, but specifically described the sincere meditator, through whose commitment, fidelity and perseverance a process and way of life are revealed. Cassian conceives of

the “journey of prayer” as a project. We need a foundation. Disorder and passion must be cleared away for simplicity and humility to flourish. The prayer of the heart brings us to wholeness of life in Jesus. The ‘word’ arises within a non-dualistic silence. The long term goal of prayer is to realize the Kingdom of God which, as St. Paul writes, is among us.

The more immediate purpose of prayer is process. The tending of virtues leads to the perfection of prayer, “*oratio pura*.” The Desert Teachers emphasized clarity of purpose, stable tranquility and perpetual purity of mind (consciousness) through continuous prayer. Cassian points out that “fleshly things” are substitutes for God, that moderation and necessity shape the moral life. If we have more than we need we experience “dis-ease” and anxiety. This excess can include thoughts, feelings and beliefs as well as material goods. He urges us to let go of our own thoughts and images of God.

Detachment and non-possessiveness develop through practice. The work of meditation changes our lives – provided that we are serious and actually do it. John Main said that the times of meditation are a preparation for the way we live and that meditation and the way we live are always in a silent dialogue. The real test of meditation lies far from ideas of perfection and freedom from distraction. The meditator’s question and measure are simple: Am I becoming a more loving person?

The prayer of the heart enlivens and brings fifth-century Christian tradition into the modern reality of our lives. Our language may be different, more psychological and less overtly reverent, but the reality of Jesus for each of us remains unchanging and constant. Each meditation period echoes a crisis – a decision-making, a loss, a letting go, a beginning – and a process of transformation deepens within us. Julian of Norwich cautioned that transformation of desire comes slowly. Perseverance is an answer to prayer. Or, in Fr. Laurence’s paraphrase, “Keep praying. Don’t give up! Eventually you’ll do God’s will.”

Colleen Donald
Vancouver, BC

CONFERENCE REFLECTION

I wish to extend my sincere thanks to you and the Christian Meditation Community for providing me with the opportunity to attend the National Conference. The conference was a feast for the spirit and it will be some time before I will fully appreciate all that was offered to me that weekend.

Understanding our tradition is important in order to be able to pass it on and, as a newer and younger meditator, attending this event and meeting other community members was invaluable in furthering the transmission process.

first time attending a meditation conference

I have reviewed my notes in the hope of sharing an excerpt of particular significance, but I’m afraid the richness of the presentations makes the choice difficult! Father Laurence’s statements, however, that “meditation is the most radical thing you can do for society”, and, “in silence and solitude we eventually hear only the essential,” particularly resonated with me.

Elise Skinner
Ottawa, ON

From the National Coordinator

Horizons

My wife Barbara and I went on our first cruise in July. It had been our dream to go through the inside passage to Alaska to see the glaciers. We enjoy camping so we made it an extended holiday, enjoying the beauty of our country across the prairies, through the Rockies and on to the coast.

The cruise was wonderful, the weather excellent, and the scenery spectacular. The glaciers were breathtaking. The ship stopped at the Margerie glacier in Glacier Bay and it was awe-inspiring to realize that we were looking at ice that had been there for thousands of years. Huge chunks of ice breaking away from the glacier face were evidence that the glaciers are receding – although, as one of the guides reminded us, they had been receding since the end of the last ice age.

Among the glaciers, and later in the Rockies, I had a heightened awareness of the extent of geological time. My mind cannot comprehend billions of years; even thousands are difficult to grasp. Jesus lived and died only two thousand years ago. Yet his life showed us that the One who created the earth, and to whom thousands of years are the blink of an eye, has a relationship with each one of us. We have also been given the gift of living into that relationship through our practice of meditation. Meditation opens our hearts and minds to a deeper awareness of God's presence and love. Somehow, through meditation, we are able to bridge the seemingly incomprehensible vastness of time and live fully in the present moment.

On our journey home we camped at Cypress Hills in the southwestern corner of Saskatchewan. It's a beautiful place with remarkable views across the prairie, and magnificent sunsets. One evening the park staff set up telescopes for star-gazing. Seeing stars and galaxies that are hundreds of light years away is very humbling. Once again my mind struggles to comprehend the extent of the universe and the One who is the Creator of it all. One of my favourite Eucharistic prayers says: "At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home; by your will they were created and have their being." And our response to this is: "Glory to you for ever and ever." Through our practice of meditation we are able to make such a response with an ever deepening sense of wonder and gratitude.

We made three trips to alpine meadows and saw the delicate beauty of small flowers. This is the opposite end of the time and distance scale. The flowers bloom for a few short weeks and their size is measured in inches. They too are part of the creation in which God delights. One of the fruits of our meditation is that we can delight in these things. Vast or timeless, small or short-lived, they are God's gift to us to marvel at and enjoy. And, in our wonder and pleasure, we come closer to the Giver and source of life.

**Phil Barnett, National Coordinator
Winnipeg, MB**

..... SUPPORT YOUR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION COMMUNITY

Each time that I read the Newsletter I am struck by the vitality of the Christian Meditation community that we have in Canada. There are so many events happening across the country to promote Christian Meditation and to nurture people in their journey. This doesn't just happen by accident. It takes energy, commitment, creativity, and planning. These initiatives flow from the work of the Regional and Area Coordinators across the country. The National Council provides support and resources for these activities, and enables you to read about them through this newsletter. The Council also ensures that resources are available to groups and individual meditators through the School teaching weekends and the Resource Centre.

The other essential ingredient in this is money. Each year we rely on your financial contributions in order to provide the services that are necessary to spread the good news about Christian Meditation and to encourage people in their daily practice. Please take the time to read the enclosed Annual Appeal brochure and to make a donation. There are many worthwhile charities to support, but meditators are the only people who will support this particular life-giving mission.

Thank you for your participation in and support for your Canadian Christian Meditation Community.

Phil Barnett, National Coordinator

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Sedbergh Lake Picnic St Benedict's Day 2009

With some reservation, I packed my bathing suit and my raingear. I thought I must be the eternal optimist! The weather called for showers and thunderstorms all day. I mused, "Just maybe it'll clear up for the St. Benedict's Day picnic on this Saturday, July 11."



And what a wonderful time we had – all nine of us including our host, M. Vincent Lavoix of the International School near Montebello, Quebec. This has been an annual event for many years now, and here we were

despite storm clouds and thunder. Usually there are 40 or 50 picnickers from the Montreal and Ottawa meditation groups. We come to enjoy the sun and beach with fun and fellowship, swimming, boating (and meditating, of course). This year, the nine of us huddled under the front porch of the lone building on site. We meditated with the sound of thunder rolling across the sky like some kind of symphony.

Strangely enough, it did not seem a distraction at all. I am reminded of the words from Psalm 29: "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters, the God of glory thundereth... The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty." I would never have guessed that in some mysterious way the voice of God in the thunder would share the same spiritual quality as the silence that reaches deep into the human heart. All creation comes from the same 'Word of Silence'.



After the rain slowed to a misty shower, we donned bathing suits and jumped into the lake. The water was beautiful. Then we spread a table under the porch to enjoy the potluck meal we brought and some wonderful conversation. Mark Schofield told stories of John Main when the community was established in Montreal over 30 years ago. God bless those meditators who were there at the beginning and can pass on this history for our benefit. Hopefully next year's picnic will be under sunnier skies. We few undaunted ones who came out this year kept up the tradition of the St. Benedict's Day picnic!

Darrell Tessier
Ottawa, ON

Retreat at a Cistercian Abbey in Rougemont, Quebec

Peace is palpable at the Cistercian Abbey in Rougemont, Quebec. Surrounded by the apple orchards that have made Rougemont famous is a quiet place where twelve Benedictine monks live in silence. They worship from 4:20 a.m. to 8 p.m. in a rhythm of prayer that includes six daily offices. Their peace echoes throughout the building which is warm and welcoming despite its austerity. I was reminded, as I set foot in the foyer, of the title of Hemingway's short story, "A Clean, Well-lighted Place". In this place, the pervasive light is spiritual.

Polly Schofield shared some unpublished writings of Father John. Until this year, she was the archivist for these precious writings, a duty now transferred to Georgetown University. Her reverence for Father John, reflected in her face and her voice, was contagious. She spoke about two retreat talks he gave at the Sacred Heart Convent in Montreal, as well as shorter writings. She brought to life his simplicity and insight. I came away with three messages etched in my consciousness: that, as the Gospel of John says, "God is love"; that we must love ourselves as a step to loving others; that meditation is a simple path to God. How often I had heard Father John's words over the years, "Simply return to the mantra", meant for those many moments when distracted during meditations. Yet, at this retreat, it was as though I heard them for the first time.

For me, the gift of these few days was a centering of my soul, a healing retreat from the fragmentation of daily life. It was a blessing to be immersed in the teachings of Father John, amid the gentle order of the monks' lives and the living glory of the gardens and orchards. I am pleased to hear that the retreat will be held again next year. I highly recommend the experience.

Marguerite Alexander
Ottawa, Ontario

PEI Christian Meditation Tapestry Weavings

On Tuesday, June 16, Christian Meditators from across PEI met at Mount St. Mary's, home of the Sisters of St. Martha, for the closing evening of meditation and socializing before the beginning of summer holidays.

After meditators were welcomed, we learned they covered the Island, like the dew, as they came from six different locales. The usual format of listening to a tape by John Main, followed by music and meditation brought us the silence and stillness for which we longed after a day filled with various activities.

Since the Atlantic Area had the privilege of having three

FAR AND NEAR



youth attend the National Conference, emails were read from Julie Assaf, St. John, NB and Geoff McCarney, Halifax, NS, and a personal presentation was made by Rachel Leslie from PEI. The conference for them was a healing, affirming and eye-opening experience. To listen to the silence while praying with 150 other people was mind-boggling. The Mass and teachings by the presenters were both new and challenging. As we listened to Rachel we too received a

breath of fresh air from her input, enthusiasm and gratitude.

The evening ended with many fun loving memories and congratulatory moments, as we honored Fr. Andrew MacDonald's 50 years as priest by a musical skit (see photo of us wearing great big hats) and social fellowship.

**Lynda Fitzgerald
Charlottetown, PEI**

CONFERENCE REFLECTION

I hadn't planned on participating in the Canadian Christian Meditation Community's biennial conference in Toronto in June. It just sort of happened. It started with a phone call, out of the blue, from someone I'd met only once before. Next thing I knew, I was registered as a youth delegate, thanks to a generous young meditator's scholarship. As I had only begun to practice Christian meditation the year before, I considered myself a novice and not a very good meditator. Looking for a quiet activity that would bring some peace to my hectic life, I'd started attending a Monday night, downtown Ottawa group, but not as regularly as I would have liked – with work and life always busy and getting in the way. I knew some of the background around John Main and the practice of Christian meditation, but my knowledge wasn't very deep. I had no idea what to expect from the conference.

I started the weekend an unsure novice, but left a self-confident meditator, with new and interesting friendships. The

first time attending a meditation conference

theme, "Roots of our Tradition," couldn't have been better - I got a full and meaningful education. Keynote speakers Fr. Laurence Freeman and Isabelle Glover brought a richness and depth to the overall experience in their reflections, teachings and stories. I was fortunate enough to have two lengthy conversations with Fr. Laurence, and his genuine connection was both refreshing and uplifting. I was also fortunate to meet fellow "younger" meditators. The chance to become friends and speak of our own journeys down the path of meditation was very exciting.

Since returning to Ottawa I've become much more disciplined, and I try to follow the teachings of John Main in keeping to a twice daily meditation practice.

I've also begun to talk to friends and family about Christian meditation. Life is still hectic, and work continues as busy as ever, but through it all, the peace and tranquility that Christian meditation is bringing to me is priceless.

**Krister Partel
Ottawa, ON**

Life is still hectic, but through
it all, the peace and tranquility
that Christian meditation is
bringing me is priceless.

The Roots of Our Tradition *continued from front*

the heart as the home of our emotions. Isabelle explained that these concepts need to be understood in a non-dualistic way; otherwise, we lose the original concept by taking Christianity out of its Jewish context. God made humanity in God's own image; thus, our image of ourselves should be of ourselves as image of God. This would preclude the alienated, dualistic notion of separated heart, soul and mind.

The fundamental questions "who am I?" and "where am I going?" are part of the common quest for meaning that has always come from the human heart. This question lies at the heart of religious texts such as the Judeo-Christian Bible, the Hindu Vedas and the Zoroastrian Avesta.

John Main tells us that "all of humanity is unified via the One who is united with the Father." Isabelle explains that it is only in this union that we know who we are. This way of union is a way that is beyond dualism, beyond the alienation that separates us from God, from ourselves, and from each other. She advised her audience that we need to deal with false dichotomies within ourselves, dichotomies that impede our transformation into the people we are called to become.

The apostles tried to lay down a highway for us, a path for us to follow, so that we could follow Christ; but, the apostles had to put their ideas into language. Often, language can be a barrier to the communication of difficult concepts; and, importantly, when translating an ancient language into modern languages, the original concepts can be altered. The Semitic mind tends to circle around an idea, penetrating it ever more deeply in the process of explanation whereas the Western approach might favour trying to go straight to the truth of a matter. The Semitic or Hebrew way of thinking is much like the Hindu way, the way of the Vedas, where mind and heart are not separated. In the East, the mind is the essence or ground of our being, it reflects the image of God.

Using a personal anecdote, Isabelle reflected that her own understanding of Christianity was, at one time, very "pot bound." Like the plant whose growth can become constrained by too small a pot, our language and concepts

can restrict the growth of our understanding of the rich tapestry of Christianity. Like the plant, so too with us, our roots need space and time to expand and grow into fullness. We need the experience of meditation to become transformed and to experience our real identity, our real unity.

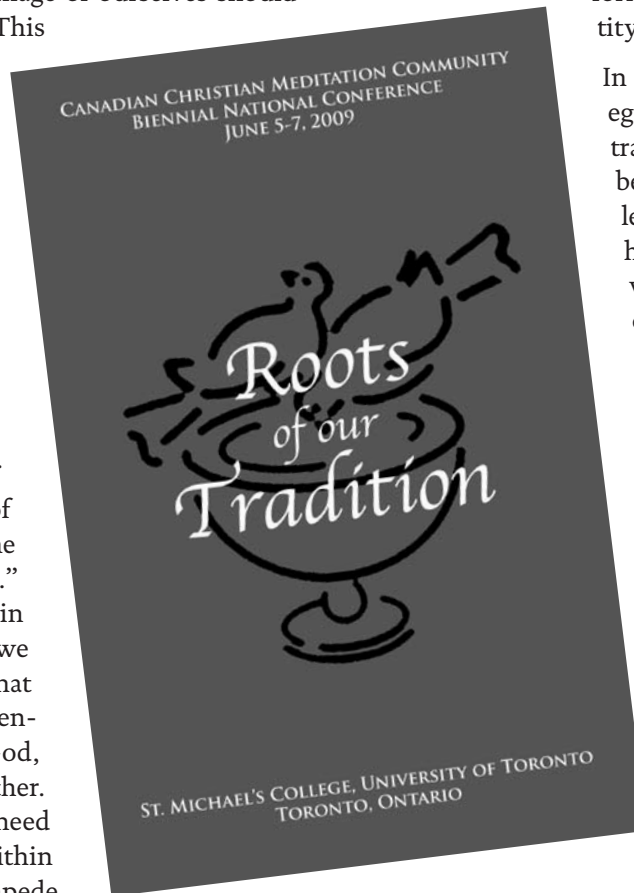
In meditation, when the discursive ego-centered mind becomes more tranquil, the deeper levels of mind become available. At the discursive level the mind is open to little of the heart and to lots of chatter, a level where there is little of substance. At our deepest levels, there is numinous silence. Every thought at the ego level of the mind tends to be about I, me or mine, but as the discursive mind becomes quieter, as the ego becomes weaker, we can experience the heart. It is at this level that Isabelle suggests we can experience the resonance of the "universal I am." At the ego level, we personalize and particularize. At deeper levels, we can experience a more universal sense of existence. This deeper level is something that the ego cannot bear.

As a thinking subject it is confirmed or affirmed by a dualistic existence and it is deeply fearful of the void and of silence.

Isabelle explained that her knowledge of Sanskrit has shown her another way to express experience. In the modern West, our language stresses the active voice. We would say, "I throw the ball" rather than "the ball is thrown by me." We experience ourselves as the doer: as the important actor in every activity. In contrast, many ancient languages use the passive voice much more frequently. Unfortunately, in translation, the passive can often change to active voice, reinforcing our concepts and diluting the original meaning of the ancient, sacred text.

Isabelle explains that the "I am" sense of universal existence is written in our hearts, resonating within us, awaiting our openness. She encouraged us to become aware of the dichotomies that limit our growth and to move forward into silence, simplicity and stillness to embrace the transformation that we are being called to experience.

Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

For regular updates go to www.meditatio.ca/News/updates.html

October

5 October–9 November, Monday evenings, Kanata, ON *Coming Home: An Introduction to Christian Meditation*. This is the first week of a 6-week introduction to meditation which will continue through Nov. 9/09. Venue: St. Paul's Anglican Church, Kanata. Time: 7–9 p.m. Cost \$30.00 for series. For more information contact Reta at 613-838-2401.

17 October, Morrisburg, ON *Meditating With Mystics*, Speaker Anne Kathleen McLaughlin. Venue: Lakeshore United Church. When: Saturday, October 17, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Anne Kathleen will present two talks and present a one-woman play on the life of Julian of Norwich. We will also have a time of silent meditation, walking labyrinth, and a catered lunch. Deadline for pre registration is Oct. 10. Donation only. For more information, contact Robin Lane at 613-543-3412

17 October, Dartmouth, NS *Christian Meditation: A Way to a Listening Heart* Presented by Sr. Kathleen Bolger, SSM at St. Alban's Anglican Church, 343 Pleasant St. Dartmouth. Time: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (registration from 8:30 a.m.). Cost: \$20 with refreshments and lunch included. Contact Mary at 902-434-7194

17 October, Winnipeg, MB *Compass Points – how meditation helps us get and keep our bearings in a turbulent world*. Autumn afternoon retreat presented by Rev. Glenda Meakin at St. Peter's Anglican Church. For more details, please contact Karen Fraser at 204-831-0706

29 October, Toronto, ON *Doorways to the Present Moment* led by Carolyn Murray, CMCT Member. Regular monthly teaching meeting at Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 St. George St. Time: 7 p.m.–9 p.m. For more information contact Joy Gordon at 416-485-9718.

31 October, Kitchener, ON *Listening to the daily news with a contemplative heart* led by Rev. Glenda Meakin and Rev. Julia Gill. Join us for a day of reflection on the ways Christian Meditation/Contemplative Prayer enables us to listen to the daily news and respond to the needs of the world from a place of compassion, justice and love. Venue: Church of the Holy Trinity, 237 Wilson Avenue, Kitchener. Time: 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Cost: \$15 (which includes a light lunch). Registration: The Rev. Julia Gill, 237 Wilson Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2C 1G9, 519-893-5241 or email gilljrj@sympatico.ca. Please register by Oct. 15.

November

6–8 November, Kingston, ON *Fully Alive: a Christian Meditation and Yoga Retreat* This retreat is an annual event, sponsored by the Canadian Meditation Community. Now in its

fifth year, it is led by meditators and certified yoga teachers, and is open to newcomers and seasoned practitioners. Venue: Providence Spirituality Centre, Kingston, ON. Time: 6 p.m. Friday to 1 p.m. Sunday. For more information, contact Casey Rock at 416-463-7110

26 November, Toronto, ON *Image and Silence* led by Erika Baempfer-Deery, CMCT Member. Regular monthly teaching meeting at Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 St. George St. Topic Time: 7 p.m.–9 p.m. For more information contact Joy Gordon at 416-485-9718.

27–29 November, Kingston ON *The School: Workshop on Essential Teaching* This workshop will help you gain experience in sharing the gift of meditation with others. For more information or for a registration form, contact Ron Dicks at 613-739-1046

28 November, Ottawa, ON *Advent: Celebrating the Coming One – Christian Meditation Retreat* led by the Rev. Professor Kevin Flynn, Director of Anglican Studies, St. Paul University. Place: St. Paul University, 223 Main St – Main Chapel, 2nd floor Laframboise Pavilion. Time: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Call Jeanette Deyell at 613-733-6755 or email jeanettemeditation@rogers.com

December

10 December, Toronto, ON *Emptying ourselves before God: A journey towards wholeness and unity* led by Marilyn Metcalfe, Ontario Regional Coordinator. Regular monthly teaching meeting at Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 St. George St. Time: 7 p.m.–9 p.m. For more information contact Joy Gordon at 416-485-9718.

January 2010

28 January, Toronto, ON *The Mind Creates the Abyss and the Heart Crosses Over* led by John Callaghan, CMCT Member. Regular monthly teaching meeting at Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 St. George St. Time: 7 p.m.–9 p.m. For more information contact Joy Gordon at 416-485-9718.

Regularly Scheduled Events

First Thursday of each month, Calgary, AB *Meditation Booster – Monthly Drop-in* led by Engeline Piet at FCJ Christian Life Centre, 219-19th Avenue. Time: 12 noon to 12:45 p.m. and 7 to 8 p.m. Contact: FCJ Christian Life Centre at 403-228-4215.

Last Thursday of each month, Toronto, ON CMCT monthly teaching meeting. Location: Knox College, University of Toronto, 59 George St. Not held in July and August. Individual events are described above. For more information contact Joy Gordon at 416-485-9718.

Want to list an event? You will find a user-friendly form to submit additions at www.meditatio.ca/Forms/events.html.



Conference

Sacred language *what have we lost?*

At a workshop at the Biennial Conference, Rev. Dr. Schuyler Brown spoke of the sacred scriptures of Christianity and Islam, suggesting that the Muslim approach towards scripture has much to teach Christians. His analysis drew from his previous research included in his 2003 publication *Text and Psyche: Experiencing Scripture Today*.

Christians and Muslims share a common reliance on sacred scripture as the basis of their faith and religious practice. Within Islam, only the Arabic version of the Qur'an is considered to be authentic; therefore, Arabic is the language of their scripture and their daily worship/prayer. In fact, only a minority of 1.3 billion Muslims speak Arabic. Although they do not speak or read Arabic, that is not to say that they do not understand the Qur'an. Muslims are not concerned with coming up with a scriptural text that is translated into clear everyday language. They can, of course, read it in their own language but **translations** are identified as **interpretations**.

Rev. Brown argues that the sacred sound of the Qur'an speaks directly to the human heart in a way that modern translation of the Bible does not. He notes that the Qur'an speaks to the heart in the sound of the call to prayer from minarets in Muslim cities. Even non-Muslims are moved by that sound. Rev. Brown argues that Catholics lost something precious when they abandoned the use of Latin in the liturgy in the 1960s, as did the Anglicans when they adopted a new Book of Common Prayer which no longer used the King James version of the Bible. He is pained by the loss of what T. S. Eliot calls the musicality and harmony of the King James version.

Religious language has a tendency towards the archaic. Archaic has tended to be used in a derogatory manner; however, it means "marked by the characteristics of an earlier period" or "commonly used in an earlier time but rare in present-day usage except to suggest the older time." Rev. Brown suggested that archaic language is appropriate when communication is with the unknowable God. Brown adds that the clarity of everyday language will not neces-

sarily bring a person into the presence of God. Dr. Brown values archaic language and feels that it is the most appropriate language to use in prayer and liturgy, indeed in any deep encounter with God. He notes that there are an increasing number of people who wish to get away from the pedestrian language of current liturgy and worship services and he sees support for this in the rising movement of Catholics returning to the Latin rite mass

Returning to the topic of scripture and language and citing Spinoza, Rev. Brown argued that "scripture's job is not to convince reason but to attract and hold the imagination." Marshalling arguments from linguistic and literary theory and citing a psychological understanding of language and its affect on the psyche, his argument is that; ultimately, "it is the impact of scripture on the human heart that has changed lives." Too much of the change in modern Christian use of scripture and liturgy emphasizes only the rational aspects of the mind without taking into account the overall human psyche. Religious language and texts can bring people together, can affect people positively, even if they do not completely understand the language. Modern texts have a very short "shelf life" whereas the classics, in spite of archaic language, are never out of date. Rev. Brown argues that the phrase "familiarity brings contempt" can contribute to our understanding of modern liturgy and language. Brown argues that Christians need more than rationality and clarity in their scripture and in their worship. Religious language must uplift us and worship services must have a sense of mystery which touches the heart and the mind through the conscious and the unconscious. He regrets that many Christians have largely lost the acoustic sensitivity to sacred language.

Rev Brown links his presentation to meditation when he reminds us that this type of prayer involves listening to the sound of the mantra, to the broad "a" of *Ma-ra-na-tha*. He argues that meditators do not think about the meaning of the word, although, he explains, this Aramaic word is rich in theological meaning. In concluding, Rev. Brown left his audience with the question "What is the way forward in our approach towards language in sacred scripture and in our worship?"

Carolyn Murray, Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON

Workshops

El Camino *with Michel Legault*

One of the workshops at the Canadian Christian Meditation conference in Toronto in June was a pilgrimage with Michel Legault, whose reputation for leading us “on the path” is well established. His Powerpoint presentation took us on a virtual pilgrimage which rang very true. With Michel and Lucie, his wife, we explored the roots of our meditation tradition as we followed them on the ancient path to Santiago de Compostela which they walked for 39 days last summer. As the lovely images unfolded, Michel’s engaging comments illuminated our present contemplative path.

A bit of history regarding the pilgrimage sent us back to around 950 when people started going from France and, eventually, from all over Europe. The site was considered a holy place. Legends about St. James, whose bones might have been discovered in northern Spain, attracted people seeking everything from indulgences and healing to a reprieve from going to jail! By comparison, our meditation tradition goes back to the early desert Fathers and Mothers of the 4th and 5th centuries, and our pilgrimage is a spiritual quest.

Many parallels were drawn between the two paths: day after day walking on the trail, come rain or shine, no matter

how we feel, no decision to make, smooth path or rocky and hilly. Do these sound familiar? Signs along the way to reassure the pilgrim are not the goal, but simply tools. Similarly, signs of growth which appear with meditation are good, but are not the goal.

That doing is less than being (a concept dear to John Main), and the irrelevant question “Am I there yet?” were compared to the Compostela pilgrim caught up in counting kilometres. The sole importance is being on the way. Traveling light for both journeys is essential: one pack, one word. It is not always a journey in solitude; other pilgrims are walking too. We find this in the solitude and community inherent in meditation. It can be a journey also not without humour, or frustration, as when a herd of sheep blocked Michel’s path! And, he reminded us, we have no ownership – the contemplative way is a calling for all humanity. At journey’s end, Michel recited several pithy sayings. Does this one by the mystic poet Kabir not resonate?

*I felt in need of a great pilgrimage
So I sat still for three days
And God came to me.*

Madelaine Mageau
Deep River, ON

CONFERENCE REFLECTION

first time attending a meditation conference

I had no idea of how much my soul was in need of this weekend. The group that I meditate with here on Prince Edward Island always have open hearts and a spare chair for anyone who has a longing for a place to share silence. I thought perhaps that this group was unique in their openness to non-denominational people like myself. So I journeyed to Toronto for this gathering with an open heart, although I had deeply rooted ideas of what Christianity taught. Having grown up in a predominantly Christian fundamentalist community, God was taught as something to be feared. Shame, sin, and non peace seemed to be the general mantras of my home town.

Words cannot describe how quickly my negative judgments of Christianity were uprooted as I listened to Dom Laurence Freeman and Isabelle Glover so eloquently relay the teachings of Jesus. Their insight was deeply healing. I no longer feel as though I don’t belong in the Christian world, instead I feel as though I am filled with love, light and a new perspective.

During the weekend I had the chance to chat with many of the organizers, presenters, and guests. All were welcoming and sparkled like the diamonds that they are.

I had the chance to meet the other younger meditators who were also given scholarships. We had the chance to share our stories. We all fell in love with the teachings of John Main and the experiences of the weekend deeply resonated in each of us.

Lastly, I would also like to add that my meditation practice is filled with new potential. I returned home excited to share meditation in the yoga classes that I teach as well as with my husband and my seven-year-old son Gabriel. All have been open to it and are craving more, especially Gabriel. Every night since I returned he asks me “when can we meditate, Mom?” I think it’s the form of prayer that our next generation so desperately desires. My son is waiting; it’s time to go “home” now.

Rachel Leslie
Souris, PEI

SCHOOL FOR



THE SCHOOL IN CANADA CELEBRATING TEN YEARS

It is with joy and gratitude that the meditation community celebrates ten years of the School in Canada. In November 1999, former National Coordinator Millie McDougall-Allen gathered meditators and resource teachers from across the country for the first Essential Teaching weekend. Its purpose then, as now, was to empower and support meditators to pass on the simple way of Christian meditation as taught by John Main.

Over the ten years, Essential Teaching workshops have been held all across Canada. The many participants of those workshops continue to strengthen the meditation community through their able teaching and leadership. As well, two School retreats have nourished numerous teachers of meditation and deepened their perspective. In this edition of the Canadian Christian Meditation Community Newsletter you can read about some of their experiences of the School. I hope their reflections will encourage you to attend a School weekend or to make a return visit.

Rev. Glenda Meakin
meakin@cyg.net

GIFT OF THE SCHOOL

In late March 2003, Norma Hannouch and I found ourselves motoring to Moncton and boarding the train for Kingston, Ontario. We were joyfully on our way to our first Christian Meditation School at the Sisters of Providence Renewal Centre. Even though we were required to do homework we weren't sure what to expect. Since for me "school" has always meant new learning and vibrant teachings, my only expectation was to enjoy the weekend and not get stressed over the simple presentation I had to make. Yet I was glad when it was over!

The School concept was to experience the simplicity of the gift of meditation and open our minds to new possibilities in sharing Christian meditation. Rather than teaching in the traditional sense, the three facilitators, Rev. Glenda Meakin, Michel Legault, and George Zanette, encouraged group learning through our active participation – a true adult model. Collette Chartrand set the tone for "heart" listening as she led us in prayer and reflection.

As each hour passed I was surprised at how much I was learning about Christian meditation. I remember the quiz

and how little I knew about the "roots." Scripture came alive with new insights and yearnings. The idea of having School weekends was a challenging thought, which I was open to, but never thought would become part of my curriculum. The whole atmosphere had some kind of spark in it that left me desiring more interior quiet and more certitude to spread Christian meditation.

When I received my certificate from George he mentioned that I was a "teacher to spread the word." On returning home I was amazed at the courage I felt, which bore fruit in Norma and me organizing two Schools for the Atlantic Region, as well as several retreat weekends and evenings. I can honestly say this outreach all happened because of my School experience.

The inspired dream of having a School has spread over the world, and we can truly celebrate ten years with the number of life-long meditators who have embraced this particular experience of Christian meditation.

**Sister Kathleen Bolger is a Sister of St. Martha,
Charlottetown, PEI**

MEDITATORS

A MOMENT DOWN MEMORY LANE

Eight years ago, I attended the second School for meditators in Winnipeg. I had been meditating for three years at the time, and when the opportunity presented itself I did not hesitate to register. For the participants, from across western and central Canada on that weekend in February, was it a worthwhile experience? Yes, without a doubt. Why? The School gave us a solid foundation: the Essential Teaching, History of Christian Meditation, and Stages of the Journey.

At the end, through the encouragement and expertise of the resource team, each of us had received a firm base in the teachings, and a resource package. We came away with tools to assist us in confidently communicating the richness of our spiritual tradition to colleagues in the workplace, our social network and our community. We had laughed together, studied together and shared our love of meditation and what it meant to our lives.

Louise Menard
White Rock, BC

A NOTE OF DEEP APPRECIATION

It is said that there is no time in God. How is it possible that the School for meditators is now celebrating its tenth anniversary? Wow! Congratulations! Well done, good and faithful people!

As I look back, I remember feeling quite intimidated about the prospect of attending such a school. The concept seemed to be contrary to the very notion of meditation. I certainly did not feel that I could ever be in a position to teach. Then I recalled the words of John Main: "Meditation cannot be taught, it must be caught." Somehow that made me feel better.

As with any other missed opportunity for growth in life, I found I had misconceptions about what the School is really like. I spent an amazing weekend learning more about God

in a new way. I was in the hands of very capable leaders who took my psychological hand and walked with me through meadows of kindness, encouragement and risk-taking.

Another great part of this experience was being with like-minded people, all seemingly feeling the same inadequacy. However, as God would have it, He prepared the way and dispelled the lie of "not being good enough." How could God make anything that was not good enough? Through love and laughter I came to appreciate that this weekend was not about me, but about sharing the gift of life. If anyone out there is thinking about attending the school and finds themselves smothered with reasons not to, I humbly suggest: choose life, and risk being transformed!

Joyce Mary Rogers
Ottawa, ON

Practicalities of Practice

Q. What is the relationship between Lectio Divina and Christian Meditation?

A. The Latin phrase *Lectio Divina* is translated as "divine reading." Originally this was a Benedictine monastic spiritual practice of slow, prayerful, and loving reading of Scripture. It is a spiritual practice of reflecting on the Bible, giving it our attention and using our faculties to give deep consideration to the text. With this approach to scripture, some authors say that "we chew on the word of God" or "mull over the word of God."

The practice of *Lectio*, in which one ponders the "heart" of the text, frequently leads to a state of consciousness where we simply remain silent in the presence of God, beyond words, thoughts and reading. This state would be called "resting in God." It has also been called listening with the heart. So *Lectio* can be an ideal contemplative preparation for the silence and stillness of Christian Meditation. The two go hand in hand.

The early monks felt *Lectio* was the door that opened a monk to the contemplative experience. That is why John Main felt that a return to the prayerful reading of scripture was a necessary complement to the mantra in preparation for bringing one to the interior silence of meditation.

The late priest and writer Henri Nouwen expanded the definition of *Lectio Divina* to include scripture as well as any spiritual reading that is read with a desire to let God come closer to us. The purpose of this kind of spiritual reading, says Nouwen, is not to master knowledge or information, but to let God's spirit master us. Strange as it may sound, he says, this kind of spiritual reading means to let ourselves be read by God. This is Nouwen's updated interpretation of *Lectio Divina*.

From the book *Frequently asked Questions about Christian Meditation: The Path of Contemplative Prayer* (Novalis Publishers). Paul can be reached at paalturnerharris@aol.com.

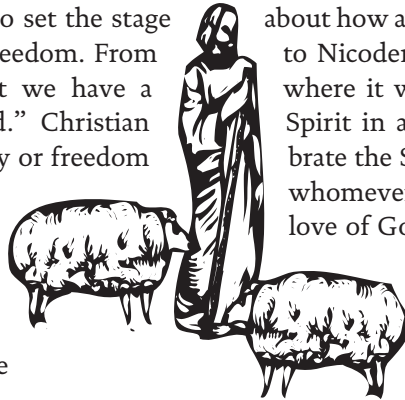
Conference Workshops

Rooted in Freedom

Reverend Glenda Meakin led a very popular workshop “Rooted in Freedom” at the National Conference at St. Michael’s College in Toronto on June 6. It was attended by approximately 40 people on each of the two occasions it was offered.

Glenda used several scripture references to set the stage for us to explore how we are rooted in freedom. From Romans 8 she highlighted the fact that we have a “glorious liberty as the children of God.” Christian Meditation is a path to that liberty. Liberty or freedom is not just personal but also communal. She pointed out that although Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead he gave members of the community the responsibility of releasing him from what bound him. We are therefore called to release one another.

We were asked to consider in what ways we hold one another in captivity and indeed ourselves as well. Perhaps one way is in not being willing to forgive or be forgiven. She reminded us that John Main taught that our greatest



need is to allow ourselves to be loved by God and to love one another. Often the need to free people is experienced in relationship to those closest to us, those we meet on our daily path.

Finally, meditation frees us from having to have answers about how and where the Spirit moves. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus, the Spirit is like the wind which blows where it will. It is clear then that we cannot place the Spirit in a box but be prepared to recognize and celebrate the Spirit’s presence and activity wherever, and in whomever, it might be manifested. As Jesus taught, the love of God is like the rain which “falls on the just and unjust alike.”

Following Glenda’s presentation we broke into small groups to explore how we might offer freedom to people of other faiths or of no faith and concrete ways in which we can free other people. Humility, openness, and deep listening are qualities we need to bring on our journey.

Ron Dicks
Ottawa, ON

CONFERENCE REFLECTION

I attended the CCMC Conference with the primary objective of listening to keynote speaker Fr. Laurence Freeman. My impressions of Fr. Laurence are best expressed in Matthew 13: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path... other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!” Isabelle Glover, the second keynote speaker and an early follower of John Main, added depth to the three-day event, while four workshop leaders investigated additional topics. Isabelle and Fr. Laurence provided a profile of Christian meditation over the long history of our faith. They reminded us to take possession of that rich tradition and take pride in its resting on sound foundations.

Fr. Laurence encouraged us to test the progress of our meditation on the testing block of Christian traditions: a deepening of faith, growth in love and charity; and to remember St. Paul’s exhortation to “pray without ceasing.” We seek God as our primary motivator and goal in life, integrating our personality with our meditation as witnessed in leading an angelic life. We realize this by practicing vigilance, mindfulness and a wise and humble way of life.

Isabelle Glover also emphasized a reconnection of our life to John Cassian’s teachings. She urged us to understand

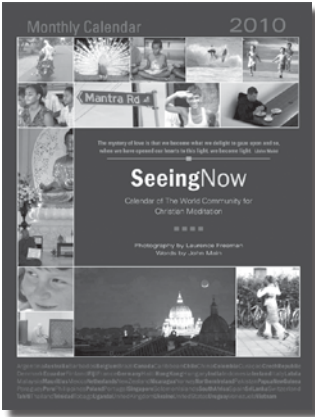
first time attending a meditation conference

our meditation as continuous prayer to be connected and integrated with a productive and moral life (*ora et labora*). That is what the kingdom of God is all about. The practitioner of meditation should be guided by Cassian in ridding ourselves of “vice and passion” by avoiding “fleshly” things like gossip, idle thought, anger, sadness, the desire for money – to name a few. During meditation we surrender these forces to the soul. Part of that is learning to love ourselves as God loves us. Meditation leads to “transcendent form of prayer.” Pray for the gift of tears and joy. Be simple and cultivate innocence. Emphasize the universality of meditation as Father John Main did.

I attended two workshops, “On Hitting the Wall” with Paul Harris, and “The Bible and The Qur’an as Scripture” with Rev. Dr. Schuyler Brown. I pass on one lasting thought from each: Paul’s striking image of Thomas More, who considered his imprisonment prior to execution in 1535 his happiest time and a time of his greatest blessings; Fr. Brown’s statement that the Qur’an is almost void of any “theology” and does not accept the concept of the Trinity of God, which hinders a relationship between the two Books.

Hans-Ulf Schellhase
Delta, BC

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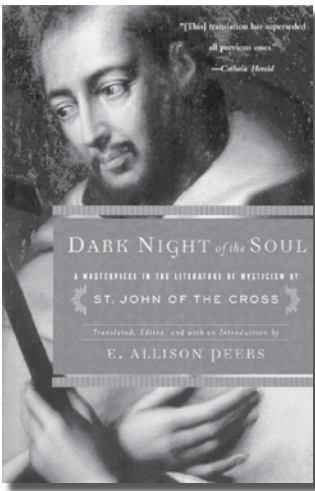
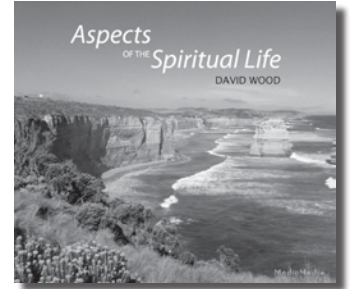
WCCM 2010 Calendar #5090 \$14.50

Photographs by Laurence Freeman during his visits within The World Community for Christian Meditation with accompanying words excerpted from John Main's teachings.

This wall calendar is 8x10 inches and has an easy to hang spiral binding. The calendar features the major Christian holy dates and feasts as well as WCCM event dates.

Aspects of the Spiritual Life David Wood 2-CDs #6136 \$13.00

David Wood is a retired Anglican priest. Most of his life he lived and worked amongst declining industrial communities in Northern England. When he discovered John Main's teaching in 1988, after searching wilderness years, he just knew he was 'home'. With his wife Sheila, he then started and developed the Christian Meditation Community in Cumbria.



Dark Night of the Soul St John of the Cross Trans E. Allison Peers 210p #5091 \$17.00

Dark Night of the Soul follows the soul's journey from a state of abandonment and darkness to a loving union with God. In a voice at once grandiose and melodious, and a style that combines the systematic theology of St. Thomas Aquinas with rapturous poetry, St. John describes the process of moving away from routine religious rituals and embracing a Being who can be known only through love.

Meister Eckhart Ed. Bernard McGinn 420p #5092 \$27.50

Here are the texts that illustrate the diversity of one of the most enigmatic and influential mystics of Western Christian tradition. Eckhart the teacher is represented by *Commentary on Exodus* and by selections from six other commentaries, including *Wisdom 7:14*, *Ecclesiasticus 24:29*, and *John 14:8*. Eckhart's ministry as a preacher was an equally important part of the man, and thus his sermons, from both the Latin and the Middle High German manuscripts, are included.



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Conference Workshops

Hitting the Wall

Paul Harris, former Canadian Christian Meditation coordinator (1991-1998) presented two workshops entitled “On Hitting the Wall: the Dark Night of the Soul on our Meditative Journey.” Paul’s workshop was based on John Main’s comments regarding the path of Christian Meditation as a way at times of purification, pain and suffering, and a predictable part of our spiritual journey.

In his talk, Paul referred to the contemporary term marathon runners call *hitting the wall*, a physiological stage during a race when runners feel they have hit a wall and are treading water so to speak. Often these runners describe this point in the race as if an elephant seems to have jumped on their back or an anchor seems to be weighing them down. They often feel at this point like giving up the race and dropping out. Paul suggested this description of hitting the wall came close to what spiritual writers describe as the dark night of the soul. He pointed out that on our meditative journey there can be a time where we face aridity and dryness, intense distractions, the feeling of boredom and even a sense of being abandoned by God, with no sense of God’s loving presence. Paul suggested that at this point of our meditative journey we can also be tempted to drop out of our daily practice.

While it might seem like we are retreating rather than advancing, John Main continually says that we are all beginners each time we come back to our daily practice. Fr. John

stresses the futility of trying to analyze or measure our spiritual progress.

Paul emphasized John Main’s advice for meditators at this point of the dark night of the soul to become even more faithful to the mantra as we hang on by our fingertips and to keep our hand to the plough. Patience, perseverance and fidelity are the keys to breaking through the wall.



Paul included quotes from the American Cistercian monk Thomas Merton as well as the Jesuit William Johnston. Merton once wrote: “meditation can achieve its purpose when indeed it brings one to a point of bafflement and darkness where we are consequently forced to reach out to God by blind faith, hope and love.” Johnston, a prolific author on the way of meditation, wrote about the dark night experience in the same vein. Said Johnston: “God is more present in darkness than light, he is nearer in times of desolation than consolation. So the concrete advice is: stay with the darkness and go through it. Don’t run away.”

In the second half of the workshop, Paul opened the discussion to a variety of speakers who recounted their own dark night experiences, the strength and courage that came from the daily practice of meditation, and their eventual breaking through the wall.

Paul Harris
Ottawa, Ontario

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