

Meditatio

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for Christian Meditation



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A new kind of interiority for a mad world

Laurence Freeman reflects on how spirituality is a force for sanity and healing (p. 2-5)



Left: Meditation during Seminar in Prague. Right: Vigil for victims of the recent shooting in Orlando, USA. (Photos WCCM and Prachatai / CC BY-NC-ND)

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Jeaver friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

A desert monk once said: 'the day will come when the world will go mad. When they meet someone who is sane, they will point at him and say 'he is mad: he is not like us.' Between starting this letter and revising it, several new events have occurred testifying to the madness of our time – the most recent being the Orlando massacre. It seems we do not have time to draw breath and digest a tragedy - or an affront to our political intelligence - before another succeeds it. This is not merely due to the hunger of the media-makers for sensational stories, for making the news ever spicier. It is a sadly real part of our world today in its escalation into the unreal.

I would like to invite you who are taking a few minutes to read this letter to reflect, as contemplatives in community, about what our spiritual life can contribute to making our world a saner, healthier and more charitable place to inhabit.

You may say 'nothing - my meditation helps me to deal with the effects of this situation but it can't touch the problem directly. Anyway, there is a clear line between religion and politics and contemplation is about my personal relationship with my God.' Even so, it's important to question where this line is and whether it can be drawn once and for all. Some years ago, after Pope John Paul had come out against the US invasion of Iraq, I was speaking at a Catholic church in Houston, Texas and referred to this as a conflict of interest in the lives of those who might see themselves both as obedient Catholics and as patriotic Americans. Some people walked out. Others came to me afterwards and whispered their thanks, saying they did not feel they could express their real view about the military action, either in their parishes

or at dinner with friends, for fear of being cast out as social and religious pariahs. Similarly, a politician friend of mine in Britain asked some of his Jewish colleagues why they didn't come out publicly against the worst of Israeli government policies towards Palestinians. They replied that if they did they would be ostracised at the synagogue and their families shunned at the golf club.

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This issue about the relationship between politics and religion, contemplation and action, calls into question the meaning and purpose of religion; but it also points to the direct influence of contemplation on religion. Is religion a way of making ourselves feel secure, barricaded with people of like mind and background against those who believe and look different? Is contemplation just an individual escape from the stressful anxiety of social demands and political conscience into a 'peaceful' other world?

In this kind of view, politics is public sphere and religion – and even more 'spirituality' – private sphere. In the ancient civic religion of Rome religion was unquestionably a state affair. The clergy were civil servants and public religious services maintained the political status quo as English village churches also did in their day. Christianity challenged this arrangement however. It looked like a religion but perhaps was more or less than what

people expected religion to be. In particular, it demanded poverty of spirit and purity of heart, interiority and also new social values. But slowly the Christian institutional model adapted to the old model of religion. Even today, in a secularised Denmark, most young people are confirmed at the hands of clergy as a coming of age ritual, financially supported by the state, but with little or no spiritual significance.

Maybe this has some social benefits, though whether they can be said to involve Christian values is doubtful. But what happens even to this kind of secularised religiosity when the 'world goes mad'? When, for example, we see religion absorbed into politics to justify the unjustifiable in the name of God? Maybe when he visited Mount Athos earlier this year Mr Putin may have had time to reflect on this. As will many of the Polish hierarchy, who support their civil government's blanket rejection of accepting even a small number of Syrian refugees, when Pope Francis comes to visit and will no doubt invoke the words of Jesus: 'I was homeless and you gave me shelter'. How can we politicise away that call to direct compassion? If we have understood the parable of the Good Samaritan, how can we even categorise 'who is our neighbour' and who is not?

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What has sent us mad? Maybe our dizzying rate of technological change and our inability to control it. Our failure to enforce standards of decency in economic capitalism. Our intoxication with entertainment, external stimulus, addiction and the systemic failures of national education. Is there no connection, for example, between the madness of US gun laws and presidential campaign debates with the fact of 42% of Americans holding creationist

beliefs (the world was created literally as the Bible describes 10,000 years ago). Or do EU constitutional leaders refusing to acknowledge the Christian influence on European civilisation not



Thomas Halik and Charles Taylor

affect the disorientation and meaninglessness of their culture?

Maybe part of our madness is the confusion and conflict between religion and spirituality and the public sphere - and the fallout from this extreme polarisation. This was the theme of a Meditatio Seminar organised recently in Prague by our national community. Two Templeton prize winners, Charles Taylor and Tomas Halik, reflected over a number of days and meetings on 'spirituality in a secular age'. It was an enlightening and mind-expanding time: but also heart-opening because for so many participants the questions being explored were not only intellectual but deeply touched their personal lives and experience of meaning.

Religion (institutionally) is increasingly suspected and rejected for many reasons: because of its apparent lack of authentic spirituality, its self-fixation and narrowness of focus in moral judgements. Parents who still go to church often mourn the death of religious practice in the lives of their children. The loss of the symbolic and sacramental dimensions of life and their embodying of profound values has impoverished, even shipwrecked us on

islands of negativity and superficiality. Yet we are talking of a certain kind of religion. No sane person would mourn the passing of theocracy, the medieval papacy, or prefer to live under the IS. But the loss of the baby with the bathwater in our secularised culture has surely accelerated our drift into madness. We are left looking for what we have lost but not sure how to name it. We often rummage in the dark. The downgrading of religion does not mean that the sacred itself has been abandoned. The holy does not disappear. It migrates. We have to find it again with a new kind of interiority

This is why spirituality is important today as a force for sanity and for healing the damage inflicted on ourselves by our madness. We seem at times like the Gerasene demoniac whom Jesus met and healed:

He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him anymore, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones.

(Mk 5: 2-5)

His name was 'Legion' because, like us, his condition was complex. It would be easier, at least more comfortable, to try to use our meditation to numb the pain of the modern world, to shut down our confused conscience and contradictory values. Some forms of market-driven spirituality do exactly this by identifying spiritual experience as a consumer product enhancing only individual well-being. This is a shadow projection of spirituality, as dangerous and dark as the shadow of the anti-

christ shed by an institutional religion that closes itself against the Spirit. 'The corruption of the best is the worst.'

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I spoke recently at a conference in Los Angeles on spirituality and mental health and was encouraged to see that, even at the administrative and professional levels, there were strong insights about the healing connection between meditation and mental health.

Perhaps the most prevalent and disturbing symptom of our cultural sickness of soul is loneliness and the sense of alienation from meaning. Meaning means connection. When we have lost the experience of being truly connected meaning dissolves. The phenomenon of loneliness and its relation to the terror of meaninglessness confronts every part of our developed world and all sections of our affluent societies, the haves and the have-nots, the celebrities and the nameless, the powerful and the dependent. No one is immune from this virus of disconnection. Today our culture distances us from others even as it seems to bring us closer. An overwhelming characteristic of our modern culture is a loneliness that purports to bring us closer together through social media and entertainment and the great 'false friend' of brand loyalty. As our attention span shrinks and approaches that of a goldfish, the degree of existential alienation intensifies; and the point at which we will not even be aware of what we have lost in terms of basic human interaction rushes monstrously towards us.

Loneliness exacerbates the experience of hunger. When we are not quite sure what we are hungry for, we attempt to satisfy it more and more

desperately. Loneliness itself is an insatiable hunger. It gnaws at our entrails, obsesses us, tyrannises us and eventually drives us out of our minds. The mass killings our society are committed by individuals who have descended into extreme isolation and inflict their unbearable pain on others. Loneliness leads to an ever-more crazy chaos of activity and distraction. We invent miraculous resources like the internet and immediately spawn their bastardised, shadow versions – ‘second life’, pornography, addictive gambling and shopping, racist and hate-mongering sites – all intensifying the pain and confusion of loneliness. We develop television that has the power to bring socially unifying influences and ideas into our private spaces and then use it for commercial profit, dumbing down the intelligence, replacing public discourse, for which it has such potential, with propaganda and branding. We inherit huge collective wealth that make our lives easier to live and longer and that set us free from the dangers and hardships of our forebears – our public services, like roads, clean water supply, educational opportunities, travel and cultural exchange, communications – and we squander them like spoiled children who never had to work for a living and we create an economy of debt on the shaky foundations of shameful inequalities.

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We get the politicians we want and if we're not careful we can't get rid of them when we wake up to what we have done. Religion has a responsibility to be part of this debate whenever it touches these unreal and dangerous zones. But the deeper causes and the long-term source of recovery are to be found not in the religious but in the spiritual realm.

Spirituality, however, that is not grounded in a simple practice quickly

evaporates into complex abstractions. Our community has always been focused on emphasising the simplicity of the practice. When we were launching Meditatio, our outreach programme, some years ago our national coordinators were consulted and agreed overwhelmingly with the proposal and also highlighted ‘keeping it simple’ as being our first priority. This is what we mean by the ‘essential teaching’. Although it might be seen as a narrowing of our focus it has proved itself spiritually in the great broadening of our range of outreach – bringing this simple teach-

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ing and practice to refugees and the homeless, to MBA students and political leaders, to children and the dying, to environmentalists and social workers, to academics and carpenters.

There have been tensions in this – as there are in any attempt to apply the gospel way of life to life as we live it when the world is going mad. This has been our story throughout the 25 years of our community that we celebrate this year. At our gathering of National Coordinators, which will have taken place by the time you read this, I feel we will see these tensions in the perspective of our growth, of the peace that Christ gives and in the unity that he is. Our plans for the new WCCM international retreat centre have already been subject of consultation with the national communities and found a positive and supportive consensus.

I have pondered this for years, since I first joined John Main and committed myself to this work and path. Despite many near misses and offers we have never found a true home such as we

are looking for now. Perhaps this has forced us focus on the global sharing of the teaching in the monastery without walls that has evolved ever since the beginning. Personally, I admit, it has given me a kind of loneliness for a more settled life but this has been more than compensated for by the deep friendships and the experience of communion I share with you within our amazing community.

It seems to me, now, even more so since consulting the community, that the time has now come to find and make a settled home, so that the work of our community can have a foundation of stability from which to continue to evolve. Personally, this will mean that I will travel much less and, with the blessing of my monastic superiors, remain in this new centre. (I imagine this will make my life simpler not easier). But – to connect with the theme of this letter – I don't see this project as an evasion of the challenges of our mad time. Quite the reverse, it is a commitment to promoting a deep and simple spirituality as a way of addressing our complex mental and social instabilities. The communicative medium of this promotion will be, above all, a lived silence.

It will indeed be a home for all our meditators worldwide, a place to teach our teachers, to form new leaders, to welcome groups of young seekers, to hold dialogue with other faiths as also with scientists, artists and thinkers, to help those called to deeper interiority through periods of solitude. I believe this will be of immense benefit for our community in the next 25 years.

But if it were only for our own benefit, the contemplative spirituality of the community would be false. The new centre will challenge and enable us to live even more a Christian witness of compassion and inclusivity in a divided world. It will be a centre of peace run ‘in the spirit of serving the unity of

all' as the WCCM Constitution states. It will be a centre of spirituality, lived from and rooted in a specific teaching and tradition but open to all ways in which the spirit manifests its essential nature of unity and peace.

When the world was going mad in the fourth century many went to the desert but not only to escape the world. In the twenty-first century we need places where people can also step aside even briefly from the whirling madness of the world to re-centre, reconnect to themselves and sustain their spiritual practice. One of the key



Potential new WCCM International Centre in France

criteria in our search for a new home has been that it should be peaceful and easily accessible. And – as Jean Vanier added when I discussed it with him and he encouraged us in this direction – ‘make sure it is beautiful’. The simplicity, peace and beauty of the spirit needs to be seen. It is seen in our meditation groups, in the growing numbers of children meditating in classrooms. It will also be seen in our new centre.

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The contemplative experience, like Christ, is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. This is why we are able to draw on the richness of tradition to help regain our sanity now by drinking deeply from the wells opened in the past but flowing still from the ever-fresh springs of wisdom. The study and pondering of our mystical tradition is

not a substitute for the essential teaching or the simple practice. But without this connection to the communion of fellow-pilgrims that is deeper than time itself we risk our solitude becoming another form of loneliness, the inner journey becoming too much for us. We always need each other for encouragement and support. But true community is also a contemporary manifestation of this spiritual communion stretching back beyond the horizons of history.

Language, culture, even belief systems all change their form over time. Meaning, however, simply deepens. There is a risk in trying to make meaning only by creating ‘diagrams of the invisible’, as Evelyn Underhill said of Meister Eckhart. But we avoid this danger of abstraction – and we make ourselves more embodied and more real – when we balance our thinking and doing with the interior work of unknowing. The language of our personal lives and the public language of politics then become more sane and more honest for the work of silence in our lives.

We usually speak of mad behaviour as a characteristic of ‘unbalanced’ people. Our contemplative life in community reminds our culture of what balance means and in what it consists. Above all, it is the personal balance between our inner and outer life, between stillness and movement, contemplation and action. At the heart of this daily practice, of keeping and deepening our balance, is another kind of hunger, a ceaseless craving for God, for the wholeness and health, the holiness and compassion that we know we are capable of and that we need to remain human. We are not meditating for very long (less than 25 years) before we realise that it will not let us rest until we find it.

Many today who practice a secularised kind of spirituality, motivated

by the short-term benefits associated with meditation, discover that it enhances not only their calmness under stress but also their creativity and their relationships. Whatever induces us to start the journey, this is an essential benefit of meditation for us to release if we are to regain our collective sanity.

The Christian contemplative tradition has always emphasised the creative altruism of meditation. The desert fathers, for all their flight from the world, knew that those caring for the poor and sick in the towns might well be on a higher level of faith. St Bernard, who shaped the mystical tradition of the middle ages, was a man of tireless action and pilgrimage who understood that ‘souls like holy mothers bring forth souls by their labours’, that the goal of contemplative life was to make us better at caring for each other and even that the ‘embrace of contemplation must often be interrupted in order to give nourishment to the little ones and none may live for himself alone but for others.’

The spirit of love reminds us on a daily basis that to be healthy we must be whole and that as we grow through healing into wholeness we begin to touch the edge of holiness. Our tradition teaches that contemplation is the work of love – the threefold work of receiving, releasing and returning. Our daily meditation and the community it creates reminds us love is the universal foundation of a human being, the essence of all personal and civilised values. Without the spiritual we cannot be sane.

With much love

Laurence Freeman OSB

News

Meditatio Seminar in Sydney: Meditation and the Environment

By Linda Chapman



Several of the 350 attendees to the Environment Meditatio event held in Sydney 22-24 April described it as 'transformative.' The first Meditatio on the Environment for The WCCM, it brought together speakers from the disciplines of theology, philosophy, science and spirituality. It was both a sobering reminder of the ecological crisis we currently face and an inspiring call to action.

Fr Laurence opened the event by suggesting that on our current trajectory the human species could well be engaging in an act of suicide. He maintained that whilst the earth will endure human beings are putting both ourselves and countless other species at risk of extinction. The speakers discussed the

ecological tipping point of the planet and the necessity of a global tipping point of consciousness. Bishop George Browning gave a vigorous address and encouraged the need to live out the human vocation to 'keep the space' of creation by taking decisive action for the common good. Meditation was affirmed as a form of action and an interior work to support environmental advocacy.

Saturday began with the powerful sound of the didgeridoo played by a Walbunga man from the south coast. This sound resonates deeply in the human body and psyche, and suggests that 'deep calling on deep' that Miriam Rose Ungunmerr speaks of in her talk of 'Dadirri' (contemplation).

Later, Aboriginal philosopher Vicki Grieves reminded us of the 'gift' of aboriginal people and culture to the white people of our land. The 'pattern thinking' of these people, as seen in much of their art, offers us a consciousness of the connections of all life and a view of the land as sacred.

Susan Murphy spoke of the need for something to be 'roused' in us such that we would act towards others with compassion. She reflected on our tendency to quickly move away from the uncomfortable. A visual 'lectio' later in the morning offered images of profound human wounding of the non-human environment. We were invited to stay present to those images and notice our own responses. Later we used words from *Laudate Si* for further lectio.

The afternoon Q&A session brought deeper reflection on the church's role in shaping environmental attitudes. Speakers proposed a common view of the culpability of Christianity in the social, political and technological world view of western civilization that contributes to the disregard and 'de-sacralization' of nature. David Tacey spoke of the necessity of facing this 'shadow' in Christianity. We were reminded however that human beings are a part of nature. The contemplative consciousness that meditation fosters sees this non-dual reality. And further conversation recognised that human destructiveness is not ▶

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located solely within any one sector of society but is a universal.

Sunday included a variety of workshops. A panel facilitated by Donna Mulhearn included some young inspiring activists.

Meditation lay at the heart of the conference. Led by Fr Laurence we embodied the practice of stillness and silence. Ultimately this Meditatio clarified the role of meditation in contributing to the healing of earth-human relations through a new consciousness. Meditation fosters a contemplative consciousness for the good of the whole earth community. As a practice that bears the fruit of simplicity it reveals to us both the need of, and our capacity to live within, limits that secure space for future generations. Meditation restores a world-view of life as a web in which we recognize that harm to one part is harm to the whole. In meditation, we discover that we are connected with every centre, the centre that is everywhere, and we learn to live in harmony with all creation.

As a speaker and participant I left the event with a sense of the significance of meditation in a world that is increasingly challenged by climate change with consequent biological and social disruption. We must grow more fully human; more consciously loving and life-giving, making space for others on this small, magnificent garden planet that is held in being within the vastness of the cosmos. This earth who shelters us, feeds us, inspires us is precious beyond words. We are her inhabitants. May we also keep her and love her.

Meditatio Seminar in Prague: Spirituality for a Secular Society

By *Vladimir Volrab*



The Meditatio seminar "Spirituality for a Secular Society" was held in Prague, the Czech Republic, 11th - 12th May. This is an important topic for the whole of western culture today and the Czech Republic's historical context made it an ideal location for exploring this theme. 250 participants and four speakers developed this through a number of events, workshops and conferences. Prof Ivana Noble, Czech ecumenical theologian, spoke about loneliness and the struggle with emptiness and the lack of meaning in contemporary society. Fr. Laurence Freeman, Director of the WCCM spoke about "Mystery in a Technological Age". He offered an insight that meditation could re-enchant the world through the contemplative experience of mystery. The first

speaker on the next evening was one of the major philosophers of our time, Prof Charles Taylor, for whom the theme of secularism led to his great work 'A Secular Age'. He spoke about the new forms of spiritual life which are springing up through religious pluralism and its encounter with secularism in the modern West. The last speaker was Prof Tomas Halik, a theologian, sociologist, philosopher and Catholic priest. Both he and Charles Taylor are recipients of the Templeton Prize for Religion. Halik explained that God's 'hiddenness' does not necessarily imply His non-existence. In his view a sense of God's remoteness could lead many people to a faith that encapsulated the experience of God's absence. Both evenings concluded with a panel discussion.

After the Seminar a meditation retreat for about seventy participants continued exploring the theme of secularization. Fr. Laurence spoke about finding communion through compassion in a divided world - which for him is the meaning of spirituality today. We all felt honoured that Charles Taylor also spent the retreat with us, during which he gave a profound commentary on the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

It was a great week of both intellectual reflection and contemplative experience which together deepened our understanding of contemplative spirituality in our time.

If the world is going to be renewed, it must be renewed in sanity. If the Church is going to be renewed, it must be renewed in sanctity, based on sanity. (John Main)

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Mental Health Conference in Los Angeles

By James Bishop



(Photo LACDMH PIO)

On May 26th, the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health held their 15th Annual Mental Health and Spirituality Conference "Looking Over The Horizon" at the Los Angeles Convention Center. The three keynote speakers were His Holiness Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang from India; Fr. Laurence Freeman; and Dr. Marvin J. Southard, Professor of Practice at the University of Southern California School of Social Work.

Fr. Laurence opened his talk by stating that "The connection between [mental health and spirituality] is not only relevant to our contemporary experience of diminishing mental health. It is unavoidable."

After explaining that our understandings of these two aspects are culturally conditioned, Laurence stated that "cultures can go wrong and become sick themselves." He outlined some of the symptoms of our cultural sickness, including loneliness, a sense of meaninglessness, and their byproducts: things we do to fill our gaps of loneliness that are ultimately self-destructive.

Laurence explained that our "balance of attention" has shifted to our models of reality, rather than reality itself. But it is our attention to reality that allows us to be functional in this world. We regain our sense of meaning in the world through connection, and Laurence said that

our meaning is also part of the healing of loneliness. Our connections can be made stronger through contemplative practice. "Contemplative practice has, as one of its first effects, the gift of making us feel and think in a more embodied way. It brings body and mind together in a harmony which is healthy and promotes healthy, balanced living." Laurence offered meditation as "the most simple, universal and accessible form of contemplative practice."

Laurence concluded by discussing the connections between meditation and medicine. "This connection and the integration of spirituality with mental healthcare offers a powerful resource for the provision of mental healthcare in a society as psychologically damaged and spiritually under-nourished culture."

ONLINE: Read the transcription of Fr. Laurence's talk in Los Angeles here: <http://tiny.cc/LFBlog>

The Index to John Main's Books

By Geraldene Ford

The index to John Main's books was produced very much with the user in mind. Any user, from any background, should be able to use the index to locate in John Main's 11 books, ideas, themes & thoughts that interest them. Not every instance of every significant word is recorded in the index (that would be of statistical interest only). If every single mention of every keyword had been recorded, then the user may go to the required text & find many words mentioned only in passing. Obviously the words "meditation", "mantra", "Maranatha", "stillness", "silence", "simplicity", "Je-

sus", "Christ", "love", "God" etc. are mentioned frequently. In the choice of keywords, the selection was made when Father John dwells on, or expands on, the idea that the words signify.

Under Father Laurence's direction, the index became simple & clear; therefore there are no "see" or "see also" references directing the user to another part of the index to find a preferred term. The keywords are the natural language of the texts.

Each entry in the index consists of three parts: the keyword or phrase; the title of the book; the page or pag-

es on which the keyword or phrase occurs in those texts. Non-english words or phrases have been italicised.

Father John's writings are profound records of his journey into the heart of God. No attempt to capture his meaning is adequate but it is hoped, however, that this index may help the user to find & locate passages that aid in the user's comprehension of what Father John devoted his life to: the teaching of Christian Meditation.

ONLINE: the Index to John Main's books is available here: <http://tiny.cc/indexJM>

News

WCCM Hong Kong 10th Anniversary

By Lina Lee



2016 is a special and grace-filled year for us.

To our big joy, from 29 April to 1 May, we returned to the blessed place of our beginning ten years ago at Salesian House at Cheung Chau. There we celebrated our 10th Anniversary with a Silent Retreat led by Fr. Laurence with the intriguing theme of "Beatitudes: Jesus's Teaching on Happiness." Conveying our deep gratitude to the Lord, we pledged that we were most willing to continue to be "blown" by the breezes of the Spirit as we move forward on our pilgrimage to the heart. Liz King, who brought Fr Laurence to us and to whom we are most indebted, also joined us with Albert King, our Honorary Advisor, from Michigan, USA.

What also brought us great delight was that, in addition to over 100 local retreatants, we were joined by 50 retreatants (including clergy, seminarians and lay persons) from Catholic and Protestant Churches in Mainland China. Thanks to the great work of Augustine Xiao from Shanghai, these medi-

tators represented at least 12 Chinese Mainland cities: Taiyuan, Wuhan, Yueyang, Guizhou, Guangzhou, Yichang, Shanghai, Heilongjiang, Henan, Hebei, Beijing and Shenzhen. How amazing is the gift of the Spirit! Comments from participants:

Fr. Laurence teaches us that meditation can help us transcend our ego, and discover the deepest corner of our heart where God exists.

Grace Lam, Hong Kong

Fr. Laurence enlightened us that the Beatitudes are not just for the intellect but are more akin to the heart.

Jean Li, Hong Kong

I bless and thank all of you who are instrumental in promoting and nurturing this prayer of the heart, in particular Fr. Laurence Freeman.

John Cardinal Tong, Bishop of HK

May this milestone for the Hong Kong community continue to be a sign of how meditation creates community, a "community of love".

Laurence Freeman OSB.

We are most grateful to Fr Laurence

for his unfailing nurture and love for us over the past decade. He encouraged us to grow in the love of the Spirit and build on the dozen plus local meditation groups. Hence, to mark the start of our 10th Anniversary Year, we organized in March our first Essential Teaching Weekend and a public talk to Catholic schools, hosted by Penny Sturrock. We look forward to our August pilgrimage to Singapore and Malaysia, treading the footsteps of Fr John Main and meeting up with our fellow meditators there. Deo Gratias!

France



From 20 to 22 May was held the national meeting of the French Community near Besançon. Nearly 120 meditators were present. The talks were given by Laurence Freeman OSB and Philippe MacLeod (above), poet, writer, musician and columnist. The theme of the weekend was *To be and remain beings of presence*, to answer two questions: *How do I find every day the way of interiority in confusion and agitation of the world?* and *How to bring about the Presence, so that our insight becomes that insight of blessing that can only give thanks for all creation?*

News

Updates from WCCM India

The WCCM community in Mumbai has been in existence since 2004 when, after a visit by Fr. Laurence Freeman at the invitation of Fr. Joe Pereira, efforts were made to teach the practice and form meditation groups in the diocese. The target were members of the Christian Community searching for a contemplative practice that resonated with their faith. At the same time, Fr. Joe led the effort to integrate the practice into his work with recovering alcoholics and the rehabilitation of the chemically dependent, through his Kripa Foundation. There have, therefore, been two strands at work in the diocese. There is the teaching of meditation within the context of the Christian Tradition which now has six functioning groups in the diocese of Bombay. There is also an "outreach" aspect aimed at making the benefits of the teaching available to a wider audience – schools, prisons, rehabilitation centres.

Since Fr. Joe Pereira has a network of centres all over the country, he has made the practice of meditation an integral part of his recovery program. Through this work, meditation has been offered as a means of achieving wholeness of mind and body through sixty-nine varied facilities addressing chemical dependency and HIV/ AIDS in the twelve States in India where Kripa has an influential presence. It is part of an essentially spiritual program of recovery. In March, Fr. Joe organized a week-long meditation program on the banks of the Ganges River in North India at the Divya Jyoti Ashram, a Catholic Ashram run by Sr. Ma Thureea, RSCJ. He also organized

a WCCM Essential Teaching Workshop at Kochi.

Fr. Joe is working on a translation of "Your Daily Practice" into Malayalam, the language of the State of Kerala in Southern India, and has recently released a translation of the same booklet into Marathi, the local language of Maharashtra, where our archdiocese is situated. Thanks to his personal initiatives, we are delighted to see how the practice of Christian Meditation is taking root in India.

Bernadette Pimenta, our National Contact, has her own NGO, Seva Dham, that works with the underprivileged and marginalized in mental hospitals and prisons in Maharashtra. As a member of the Board of Governors and later as Vice President of the Indo Global Social Service Society, she recently initiated a meditation program for staff members of the Head Office in New Delhi. She has received invitations to do the same in the N. E. States, Tamil Nadu and at Nagpur and Hazaribagh. Meditation sessions are routinely held in prisons in Thane, Kalyan and Byculla, as part of her outreach program. She also runs a Value Education program in her own school at which both children and their parents have been initiated into the practice of meditation. While these programs cannot always be specifically focused on "Christian" meditation, she has recently held an introductory Christian Meditation Program in her own parish in Thane and in another parish church in Mumbai, at the invitation of the parish priest.

Having been more widely dis-

seminated in India in the past, the teaching of meditation as a Christian contemplative practice is now largely restricted to the diocese of Mumbai. We have six functioning groups that meet regularly each week, and there are regular monthly half-day programs open to all, designed to deepen our understanding of the practice. Christopher Mendonca also leads regular retreats and special days of silence during Lent and Advent, which are well attended and much appreciated.

Changes in Meditatio House London



Andrew McAlister, from Australia, has concluded his stay as an oblate at Meditatio House: "The last two years have been, for me, a transforming exploration and a deepening in the experience of meditation and community". Read Andrew's blog here:

<http://tiny.cc/amcblog>

In Focus

Karen and Tim Pedigo, from USA



“The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to those of us who are being saved it is the power of God”.

1 Cor 1: 18

As psychologists, we serve Christ by working with people in psychotherapy. Unlike many of our secular colleagues, the lenses from which we see our clients and how we experience our therapy relationships are primarily informed by the teachings of John Main and Christian meditation. Whatever the nature of the concern a person brings to psychotherapy, we look for how the Spirit of Christ is at work in the person, whether or not that individual is Christian. The journey of healing and wholeness in psychotherapy is about the decision

to leave self/ego behind with the faith that we will rise into new life. Inevitably, each client faces the dilemma of letting go of ego and letting change occur, or hanging onto ego and staying “stuck”. Often, the fear and “hanging on” only increase the suffering of the individual. When our clients try to desperately preserve the ego plan, we pray to gently help them to learn how to “let go” in faith.

Tim:

I began my journey with Christian meditation 20 years. At that time, I was working at the Cancer Support Center, where people were facing death in a very direct way. During that time I had the opportunity to be with people whose faith allowed them to die graciously and let go into death with light and love. Other cases were not so peaceful. Sometimes, patients fought to the end with anger, leaving their loved ones behind to deal with painful and complicated grief. Interestingly, years ago as a teenager I had to witness my mother and father die in despair. It seemed the Spirit of Christ was at work in me to “see” the difference faith can make in how one enters the mystery of death. My daily meditation guided me as I learned to

let go and reside in the trusting mystery of God working in and around me.

Many of the clients with whom I have worked, have evoked my issues of desperation and despair. Meditation has helped me to endure these experiences in my clients and in myself. Meditation helped me learn how to not need to fix or save but remain in faith in how God was working in the my clients’ lives. As a result, I was able to be with them in a more profound way which often led to healing connection and change.

Karen:

I began my journey with Christian meditation about 10 years ago and it has helped me journey with others through painful situations. My meditation practice has kept me grounded in the wisdom of God and open to the mysteries of life that often confound human logic and reason. As I sit with my clients, I am able to let the Spirit of Christ be present in me and join in the experience of the other in a compassionate and caring manner. This helps my clients let go of ego, courageously face their challenges, and take difficult steps to make necessary changes. I could not be as open and faithful without my meditation practice.



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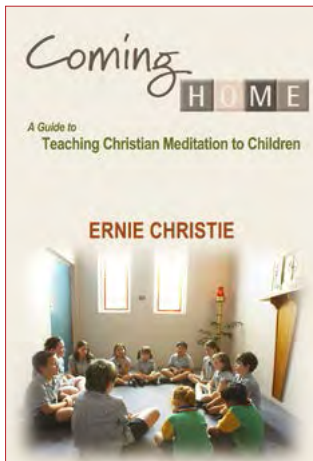
Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is **September 10th**.

Resources

Books

Coming Home:

A guide to Teaching Christian Meditation to Children
Ernie Christie



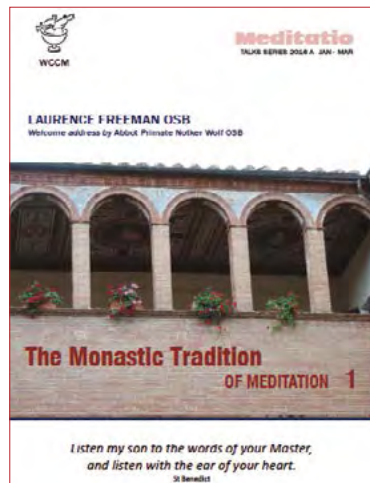
This revised and updated edition contains new articles on the challenge of attention today and its relationship to spirituality. Ernie Christie writes on the need to 'stop' for progress to happen. It also provides new templates and guidelines for teachers. This book shows how meditation can help children find balance and a sense of their own personal wholeness.

Ernie Christie's practical and detailed guidelines for introducing meditation to children in the classroom and in daily life will inspire and encourage anyone serious about helping children to grow to their full potential.

CDs

The Monastic Tradition of Meditation 1

Laurence Freeman OSB



Excerpts from talks at the conference on Meditation and the Monastic Tradition at San Anselmo, Rome, 2015
ONLINE: the audio files are available here: <http://tiny.cc/CDMonastic01>

Videos

Meditation, compassion and joy for the corporate world

A conversation with Chade-Meng Tan and Laurence Freeman

Meng, one of Google's earliest engineers and author, met online with the WCCM director. Watch the video here: http://tiny.cc/meng_LF

Retreats & Events

John Main Seminar

Where the Light Comes in...

Led by Jean Vanier

31 Aug - 4 Sep / Trosly, France



Pre-Seminar Retreat with Jean Vanier and Laurence Freeman Retreat and Seminar are **fully booked**. Register for online participation here:

<http://tiny.cc/jms2016online>

Bere Island Retreat Health & Meditation

September 09-16, 2016

Bere Island, Ireland

More information:

<http://tiny.cc/BIHealth2016>

Bere Island Festival of Music & Silence

September 16-18, 2016

Bere Island, Ireland

More information:

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THE GOSPEL OF MERCY: A REFRESHER IN BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Fr. James Alison Challenges Us to Grow



MARILYN METCALFE

Fr James Alison, Elaine Mills: “One of the most important living Catholic theologians”

Fr. James Alison passionately facilitated the biennial WCCM Toronto retreat, over the weekend of June 3-5, 2016. Fr. James challenged our notions of the gift of faith, our ideas about atonement and sacrifice, and inspired us with his insights into Jesus’ self-understanding of his own death on the cross.

This was a bold, revelatory undertaking, and undoubtedly the most stirring series of talks that the Toronto contemplative community has enjoyed since the early days, when Fr. John Main first travelled from Montreal to Toronto to teach us to grow into God’s generous vision for us.

We in Toronto were certainly not the first to be astonished by James Alison. “Fr. James belongs on a short list of the most important living Catholic theologians,” declared the U.S. publication *America: The National Catholic Review* (May 19, 2014). In addition, he has

long been a friend to our international community, having led the John Main Seminar “The Shape of God’s Affection,” in Canterbury, England in August 2010. With all this in mind, the present writer is challenged to summarize the teaching Fr. James offered us at our retreat – except to say that, at the end of it, I assess him to be “the” most important living Catholic theologian.

The first talk argued against the fundamental Christian concept of faith – namely that faith is the chief factor in our relationship with God, and that it is about a great straining towards an insurmountable height. For some, faith means that we must believe, or we will go to hell – it amounts to emotional blackmail. For others, straining desperately towards God, faith means that we must believe... argh... *must* believe...

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Making Our Journey Together

This issue of your newsletter reports on some powerful learning experiences, which some of your fellow meditators gratefully encountered on their spiritual journey, and on some efforts to enrich and extend our community experience, for our own and for others' spiritual benefit.

Joseph Clarkson's description of the Toronto community's retreat – on the theme of the Gospel of Mercy – is a passionate attempt to communicate a living revelation that refuses to be confined within mere words. He invites us instead to enter into the experience itself.

Robin Lane's all-too-brief report on a talk by Polly Schofield helps to recall us again to the man who bore, for many of us, the original charisma that first awakened us to our own call to contemplative prayer.

And a new article from Paul Harris provides that welcome encouragement, which we all need from time to time, to just keep going, to stop trying to control or judge our practice, to have faith that God is in charge.

We also have two reports on organizational conferences – one a Winnipeg meeting of the National Council of the Canadian Christian Meditation Community (CCMC), and the other a UK meeting of National Coordinators of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), coming together from many different countries.

Meditation can be such a private, personal practice – yet we have all experienced the deeper silence we often enter when we meditate in a group. Obviously, then, there is a way in which your practice enriches me, and mine enriches you. The CCMC and the WCCM are ways in which we try to act upon this insight, seeking the best ways to share our practice with others, across the country and around the world, for the spiritual benefit of all.

And finally, we want to share the happy news of the honour given by the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians to one of their members, the Hon. Jack Murta, for his active contributions to so many areas of public service – including as our very own National Coordinator.

**Love & Peace,
Jeff Ewener**

Memories of John Main

On Friday, May 27, Polly Schofield shared her memories of John Main with 45 members of the Seaway Valley Area Christian meditation community, at St. James Anglican Church in Morrisburg.

John Main was born Douglas Main, and Polly described him as a spiritual master with a great sense of humour. He was always joyful, and possessed the wisdom of humility. She called him a “man of love” – everything he did flowed from this love.

It was abundantly clear that Polly loved John Main very much.

One of her dearest memories of the Priory was a frayed old rug on the floor. Polly asked Fr John if she could repair it. Every day she would come to the Priory and sit in the middle of the floor sewing, happily binding and patching it. She still has that rug to this day.

Polly remembers so many of John Main's teachings. Here are a few she shared with the group:

- If you meditate long enough your questions will be answered.
- Meditation is uncomplicated and simple.
- Don't worry if no one comes to meditate – as long as you are there.
- The spirit that enfolds the whole universe is in silence, loving to all.
- Everything is possible – when you have a problem, go to the top!
- To pray is to love.

His greatest gift to her was when he was dying. He made his death the biggest adventure of his life. Polly sat with him, and read to him. She would feed him. But they rarely spoke.

The slideshow that she and her husband Mark shared with the group seemed to bring all her memories vividly to life for us.

**Robin Lane
Morrisburg**

FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

National Coordinator Jack Murta honoured by ex-parliamentarians

On May 30, Jack Murta, WCCM-Canada's National Coordinator, and a former Member of Parliament and cabinet minister, was presented with the Distinguished Service Award by the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians (CAFP).

The CAFP was founded in 1987 as a way of conserving and utilizing the valuable public service experience of former MPs and senators. The Association is non-partisan and voluntary, and includes members from all political parties.

In 1999, the CAFP established its Distinguished Service Award to recognize contributions to the promotion and understanding of our parliamentary system of government. CAFP members propose names, and a selection is made by special committee.

In the announcement of the award, attention was drawn to the numerous contributions Jack has made



The Honourable Jack Murta



L-R: Hon. Andy Mitchell, President, CAFP; Hon. Jack Murta with Distinguished Service Award plaque; Hon. Geoff Regan, Speaker of the House of Commons; Hon. George Furey, Speaker of the Senate

in so many areas of public service. Among these are the National Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast, which Jack has coordinated since 2003; the Ottawa Mission, where Jack is a board member and past-president; and the Korean War Veterans of Canada Foundation, of which Jack was recently appointed president.

Specific attention was also drawn to Jack's meditation practice, the two groups he leads, at Ottawa's St Patrick's Basilica and the Ottawa Mission, and his current role as our National Coordinator.

The award was presented to Jack by the CAFP President, together with the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons. The plaque states that it is in recognition "of your continued interest and activity in the promotion of human welfare, human rights and parliamentary democracy in Canada and abroad."

Congratulations, Jack!

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MARILYN METCALFE

Allowing ourselves to be persuaded by God

arghhhh!... in mysteries beyond our comprehension, and in spite of so much daily experience that contradicts our concept of a loving and all-powerful Ruler of the Universe. Indeed, faith is so tough for most of us that it is the cause of enormous stress in our relationship with God.

Fr. James explained that we have everything reversed – and that is why we find it so difficult. Faith is not a “straining towards belief in God”. It is allowing ourselves to be persuaded by God to “relax” into a loving relationship, where we do not have to prove how good we are, or how much we believe. The gift of faith, says Fr James, is our acceptance that the hard work is all on God’s shoulders – not on ours. Faith is about accepting that we are loved. We do not have to prove ourselves to God. Fr. James assures us that if we can allow ourselves to relax into this supportive, loving embrace, then we can be drawn into following Jesus, and walking the road He walked.

In faith, we trust in the goodness of things – the goodness of creation – in spite of human behaviour and history. But little by little, through the gift of faith, we can relax into God’s love for us. Faith contradicts so many of the life experiences that tell us that God does not love us. Faith tells us that God knows us exactly as we are. He holds us, keeps us, cares for us. It is a supportive and encouraging relationship, not a contest we’re struggling to win.

Fr. James’s next talk was more critical to an understanding of his writings and teaching. He calls on us to use a contemplative approach to the death of Jesus in

order to enter into the reality that this was something “done outside of us, for us.” This is different from our normal human experience, whereby we think that we have to do the “doing”. Fr. James opened our eyes to a number of passages of Scripture, including the parable of the vine dressers and the cleansing of the Temple. These passages show how Jesus respected and fulfilled all of the Jewish expectations of the Messiah. Jesus even went to his death in such a way that he fulfilled previously revealed Jewish concepts regarding atonement and sacrifice. And even more importantly, he expanded and redefined those concepts.

A frequently heard explanation for the death of Jesus is that God the Father was angry at humankind, and required a sacrifice, and Jesus paid the price for human sin. Fr. James does not accept this interpretation. He reasons that Jesus understood all of the messianic expectations, and he fulfilled the scriptural requirements of the coming Messiah – but in addition, by showing forgiveness on the cross, as an innocent victim, he showed us a new way of being human. This is the key to Fr. James’s interpretation of the crucifixion. For in accepting his crucifixion, Jesus accepted the normal human strategy, inflicted upon him by the Romans and the Jewish hierarchy – identify a victim, then blame and punish. Jesus, however, taught us that the divine response to violence against an innocent victim is forgiveness, not retaliation. Jesus revealed the Gospel of Mercy when he prayed “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)



NINA HONORIDEZ

Fr James Alison: “We do not have to prove ourselves to God.”

At first Jesus’s disciples did not understand his teaching on forgiveness. They were confused and struggling, until they received the full blessing of Pentecost. The first apostle to witness to this teaching was the first martyr, St. Stephen, whose own last words were “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60), forgiving his persecutors just as Jesus had done. Jesus came to put an end to violence as an acceptable option in human relationships, and to show us that the divine way is the way of forgiveness. According to Fr. James, God teaches us through the witness of Jesus, an innocent victim of powerful worldly systems, that to forgive is divine, and that it can now be the new and fully human way that we relate to one another. Previous rules for human interaction, such as “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”, were not acceptable for the followers

of Jesus. We do not need to find and kill a victim in order to move forward in our relationship with God. Jesus frees us from the old model of violence and vengeance. Fr. James countered the notion that God demands that we make certain sacrifices in order to become acceptable. Rather, God has the freedom and loving inclination to accept us as we are, to draw us into a new model of humanity and towards a whole new creation.

At the end of the retreat, we were dizzy with new ideas – with new understandings of faith, of Scripture, of Jesus’s death on the cross, of atonement – and alive to a new and more intimate relationship with God the Father and with Jesus. All in three days! Praise God and bless Fr. James Alison.

**Joseph Clarkson
Toronto, ON**

Note: Perhaps the gentlest introduction to Fr. James Alison’s ideas is his book *Knowing Jesus*, an examination of the life of Jesus as it relates to us today.



MARILYN METCALFE

We trust in the goodness of things

Spreading the Word and the Practice



RÉAL SABOURIN

WCCM Meeting Winnipeg: National Council members and Winnipeg meditators exchange ideas.

The weekend of May 13-15 saw nine members of the CCMC National Council descend on Winnipeg for a first-of-its-kind meeting.

The National Council consists of representatives from across Canada who have the responsibility to support and encourage the development of Christian meditation throughout Canada and to sustain the Community's life and growth. They meet by conference call every two months and have a face-to-face meeting every two years at the end of the National Conference.

We have found that meeting in person is a far more effective way to discuss and plan for the life of the Canadian Christian meditation community. So we decided to try to meet together again, before next year's Conference. We wanted to meet somewhere that was as central as possible for all members, so we ended up in Canada's most central city – Winnipeg!

The delighted Winnipeg meditation community extended their warmest hospitality, meeting their visitors at the airport and providing accommodation in their homes. The Council first met on Friday evening at St Peter's Anglican Church, starting with a delicious

lasagne dinner and home-made pie for dessert. A great start to the weekend! Following meditation, we discussed business arising from our previous meeting. Thanks to the wonders of technology, our treasurer Mark Schofield joined us by video.

The core work of the weekend was a visioning day on Saturday, facilitated by Réal Sabourin who is the leader of a meditation group at Winnipeg's St Boniface Cathedral. We very quickly came to appreciate Réal's group dynamics skills, and his infectious enthusiasm. He led us through a process of identifying those areas of activity that we do well now, then dreaming up a wish list of things we would like to do in the next year to 18 months.

After a refreshing lunch break Réal highlighted two areas for us to work on:

- **Demographics** – to reach out to people under 55
- **Communications** – marketing, social media and the internet and the wccm-canada.ca web page, identification of allies/opponents (for bridge-building)

We split into two groups to develop action plans.

Action on Demographics

- Contact Christian Catholic Outreach and get the Christian Meditation message out to them.
- **Meditation in schools:** set up a school meditation sustainment team.
- **Youth weekends** such as Youth Summits are organised by the Roman Catholic Church in the Provinces. Contact organisers and see if we can offer them a speaker on Christian meditation.

Action on Communications

- Move towards **replacing (in large part and over time) the newsletter**, which costs \$20,000 to produce and distribute each year, with a one-page e-letter with links to online articles. It would be short and snappy and inviting to the reader. It would also be timelier, full-colour and potentially more frequently published.
- **Fundraising:** explore various forms of aids to fundraising – e.g. credit card companies, Canada Helps, etc.

After the hard work of the day we welcomed the opportunity to travel by bus to nearby Assiniboine Park. The weather was a bit brisk, but we enjoyed a walk in the English garden (not many blooms at this time of year!), and appreciated the unique sculptures in the Leo Mol garden.

The evening session provided an excellent opportunity to meet with the local meditation community. About 25 meditators joined the Council members and provided a wonderful pot-luck supper. Following dinner we had a discussion and sharing time which was very informative for all of us.

On Sunday morning council members accompanied their hosts to church. Several of them were able to give short talks about meditation to the congregation, and our National Coordinator, Jack Murta, gave the homily at St Mary Magdalene Anglican Church.

We all felt that the experiment of a personal meeting in the “off-year” was well worthwhile. We got to know each other better, accomplished much more than we could have with the usual teleconference, and were able to connect with meditators who would not normally be able to attend national events.

It was a very positive experience for us in the Winnipeg Christian meditation community too, providing energy and broadening our vision. It gave us a chance to live the reality we often overlook – that we are part of, and supported by, a much wider community than just our weekly group.

**Phil Barnett
Winnipeg**



L-R: Réal Sabourin, Denise Connors, Mia Klein-Gebbinck, Jack Murta, Barbara Chouinard, Bill Meek, Elaine Mills, Jake LaPierre, Phil Barnett, Colleen Donald.

ANNUAL MEDITATION RETREAT IN ROUGEMONT

“This spot of heaven in our lives”



L to R: Jo Ann Cullen, Polly Schofield, Maureen Sandrock

Once again the meditators, Oblates and Oblate novices (about 30 of us in all) met at the Cistercian Monastery in Rougemont, Quebec, for the annual retreat hosted by Polly Schofield and Magda Jass.

Polly is the archivist for John Main’s papers, including the talks he gave at meditation sessions and various conferences and meetings over his lifetime. She prepares talks for us based on these archives, which we are privileged to hear over the course of the weekend.

John Main’s words are also to be found in his books, but many of the pieces Polly selects have never been heard by the public – a treasure for us! He speaks to us about never being alone, for the Spirit is always present in us.

I was also so pleased to learn about how John Main developed our simple form of meditation (almost too simple to be believed, some say!). He taught me that “the only reality I know is myself.” Such wisdom can allow us to think before we pass judgment on others.

During the weekend we were invited to follow the monks for the Divine Office and for mass. Along with

the talks, we had periods of meditation and some free time to explore our lovely surroundings. We could also fraternize with the husky dogs that guard the orchards from the deer.

Several people became novice Oblates during the weekend, and we were all invited to attend this meaningful ceremony. Following the Rule of St. Benedict is and will be a great challenge in life, but one that promises to help us free our spirits to love unconditionally.

Our final farewell was a song by Steve D’Annunzio – “Got to Know Gatineau” – which expressed so beautifully his love for Quebec. Steve drowned about a year ago, at this time of year – too young to have been taken from us! His mother, Francie, was lovingly in attendance.

Many of us are looking forward to returning to this spot of Heaven in our lives next year, which will be the 26th year since we first began to gather together here in 1991.

**Joan McKinnon
Montreal**

On with Persevering Christian Meditation

Why is the saying of the mantra so difficult? Is it normal for me to have so much difficulty and discouragement in trying to pray this way? Is it really worth all this hard work?

These are great questions, which many of us have asked from time to time – myself included. But over the years, I think I have very slowly begun to find some answers.

We seem to face three great obstacles when we begin the practice of meditation, and our spiritual journey to inner stillness. The first is discouragement. The second is the feeling of helplessness we experience when we realize we have no map for this journey. And the third is the challenge of surrender, of just letting go.

We are not alone in finding the discipline of meditation a challenge. Many of the great saints and teachers in our tradition have understood and sympathized with our difficulty, even describing it as a quiet martyrdom.

St Gregory of Sinai in the 14th century spoke of the pain and difficulty we face on this way of prayer, the continual difficulty of saying our prayer word. But he urges us to “persevere persistently, and with ardent longing seek the Lord in your heart.”

The anonymous author of the 13th-century *Cloud of Unknowing* says frankly, “The way of prayer is hard work, very hard work indeed... but on no account think of giving up. Prayer is a mighty conflict to your last breath.”

There is a great paradox here. Meditation is often a way of darkness, of unknowing, in which we can no longer sense the presence of God. A meditator in Ottawa once said to me, “In my prayer life, God seems to have disappeared. He seems like a billion light years away.”

But this dryness in meditation is usually temporary, and coupled with joy, inner peace, and a firm conviction that we will find God in our aridity, in our distractions and helplessness.

We are frustrated at times, yet we nevertheless feel a mysterious but powerful attraction to the indwelling Christ. And from time to time God reveals His Presence to us in the darkness. This of course is the work of grace.

The key, it seems to me, is not to become anxious about the day-to-day course of our spiritual journey. Meditation requires a leap of faith into the unknown. Our path to God is ours alone, and God is our guide. He knows the way, not us. We have to have faith, and to follow Him – and let go of our instinct to take control.

The prophet Isaiah encourages us:

*Whoever walks in darkness
And has no light shining in them
Let them trust in the name of the Lord.
Let them lean on God.*

St Paul also reassures us: “You can trust God not to let you be tried beyond your strength. And in any trial he will give you a way out of it, and the strength to bear it.”

And finally, we have the consoling words Jesus gave to St Paul: “My power is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness.”

John Main shows the truth of these promises when he tells us that the recitation of the mantra grows easier as we persevere on the journey. With time, the torrent of thoughts lessens, and we enjoy a greater sense of calm, stillness and inner peace.

And of course, these challenges are so much easier to handle together, in a community of fellow meditators. When we attend a weekly meditation group, we meet others on the same journey, and often experiencing the same discouragements.

When we share these experiences with one another, we receive strength and hope from others, and the encouragement to continue – and we give it to others as well. Meditation is a journey we should take with others.

Hang in there!
Paul Harris
Ottawa

NATIONAL COORDINATORS CONFERENCE,
UNITED KINGDOM, JUNE 29-JULY 3 2016

Finding Our Path for the Next 25 Years



L-R: Jean Bebeau, national coordinator, USA; Teresa Tratnyek; Paul Tratnyek, coordinator: meditating with children, Canada; Sebastian Gendron, Quebec coordinator; Laurence Freeman, director, World Community for Christian Meditation; Jack Murta, national coordinator, Canada

The 2016 national coordinators conference was held in London on the 25th anniversary of the founding of the World Community for Christian Meditation.

Anniversaries are always good times to look back on what has happened over the life span of the organization and an ideal time to look ahead into the future. When we look back, the growth of Christian meditation has been prodigious. At present there are approximately 2500 active meditation groups around the world.

This growth was made visible at the conference of national coordinators. Sixty-six people attended, from forty-three different countries – including China, Ukraine, South Africa, Australia, Asia and most of Europe. Four countries represent the most numerous and active meditation communities – Australia, England, the United States and Canada. We can all be proud of what has been accomplished over the last 25 years.

And what can we expect as we move forward into the next 25 years?

It is generally agreed that **meditating with children** is the most promising and exciting aspect of Christian meditation today. Teachers say that to see young people practising silence and stillness in their class rooms, at the beginning of a busy school day, is truly remarkable.

Meditating with children is now practised in 28 countries around the world, with thousands of children meditating with their teachers during school time.

Canadian schools are among the most active, with 1700 teachers leading Christian meditation in Ontario Catholic schools, and an estimated 15,000 children meditating daily. It makes you wonder what effect this will have on meditation in 30 years' time!

There is a very good chance that we will see a **new home for Christian meditation** for the world community in the next few months. The proposed location (and at this stage it is only proposed) is an hour and a half outside Paris. The centre would operate as the new home for the WCCM – designed to lead and instruct, to accommodate essential teaching activities and to be a centre for the development of Christian meditation leaders. It will be structured to welcome groups of young people, hold dialogue with other faiths, interact with scientists, artists and thinkers, and be an important location for retreats, rest and solitude.

The consensus was that the time is right for a new home, and that it will be of immense benefit to our community over the next 25 years. But a good deal of work has yet to be done – on the location, financing, budgets, etc. As the project moves forward, the whole world community will be kept informed.

Another area of special attention is introducing Christian meditation (Meditatio) to the **wider community**, or the secular world. As our community matures there is a move to introduce Christian meditation to new areas throughout our society.

Continued opposite

As meditators, we need to continually ask ourselves: “Is there a connection between meditation and the many needs of our society?” The answer is obviously yes! In numerous countries, meditation is offering its benefits to people in many different sectors of society: in business, education, health and science, and in areas of social justice, for the poor, the homeless, the imprisoned. This important area is set to grow substantially over the next few years.

As our meditation community matures, we are experiencing growing needs in the area of **social media**, and for greater e-communication throughout our organization.

As the community expands into many countries and different language communities, **translation** of documents, books, talks, videos etc., is becoming a major issue. It was agreed that this challenge must be addressed in the near future.

The key to everything that we do as a community is keeping our focus on the “**essential teaching weekend**”. These meditation teaching/learning sessions need to be encouraged and held regularly throughout the year. The strength of our meditation communities around the world is centered on the local group of 3 or 4 or 5 meditators – nourished by meditators learning from others the way of meditation.

There is no doubt that the next 25 years will not only be challenging for the World Community, but also for Canada’s meditation community. I believe that it will also be very rewarding.

We need to remember at all times that as meditators our job is just to “plant the seed” – it’s God’s job to do the rest.

Jack Murta
Canadian National Coordinator



National Coordinators meditating

WCCM

Canadian Christian Meditation Community

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ENCOURAGEMENT, AFFIRMATION, HOPE

Sr. Hilda Frost, 1932-2016

As a community we are deeply saddened by the unexpected death of Hilda Frost OSB on June 26 in Winnipeg.

Hilda was born in Devon, England, May 22, 1932, and was a convert to Catholicism at age 16. At 21 she entered St. Scolastica Abbey, a cloistered Benedictine community in Devon, as Sister Imelda, and was professed in 1955.

She subsequently transferred to St. Benedict's Monastery in Winnipeg in 1983, reverting to her given name Hilda. She was captivated by the simplicity of the teaching of meditation as taught by Dom John Main. For a number of years she served as the coordinator for the Canadian Oblates of the World Community.

I met Sr. Hilda in Toronto at a community meeting and we formed an immediate bond, having discovered that we both shared a passion for early Anglo-

Saxon monastic history. She revered her patron Saint Hilda (614-680), Abbess of the famous Benedictine monastery of Whitby.

I asked Sr. Hilda once, why then would she come to a monastery in far-away Manitoba. She replied that it was her sacrifice. So simply – yet what it must have cost her!

For me, as for so many, she was Hilda who always encouraged, always affirmed, always filled me with hope. When I became Oblate Coordinator, she passed on her wisdom, and was always the first to thank and compliment me on my letters and articles.

Together with our community, and her sisters-in-religion, and the many lives that Sr. Hilda touched and guided – I too, shall miss her.

Polly (Apollonia) Schofield
Canadian Oblates Coordinator

Calendar of Events

Calgary

Monthly Christian Meditation “drop in” sessions at the FCJ Christian Life Centre, 219 – 19th Avenue SW, Calgary.

Thursdays, **September 1, October 6, November 3 and December 1, 2016:** 7 to 8 pm.

Introduction to Christian Meditation: Wednesday, **October 12, 2016,** 7 to 9 pm.

Silent Christian Meditation Retreat Day: Saturday, **December 3, 2016,** 9 am to 4 pm.

To register: phone: 403-228-4215, fax: 403-228-9459

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