

Meditatio

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for Christian Meditation



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The work of listening

Laurence Freeman reflects on how meditation can take us beyond our interior noise to discover the silent nature of our being



Photo by Laurence Freeman

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A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

Average city noise today often reaches 70 decibels which is equivalent to being in a room with a loud vacuum cleaner. As most people in the world now live in cities, we are becoming acclimatised to noise, just as animals like foxes, which used to be entirely rural, are now becoming urbanised. Urban evolution means accommodating ourselves to the noise of traffic, planes, subway trains, construction, fridges, leaf blowers noisy neighbours and ever-louder muzak in elevators and restaurants. Research indicates that getting used to such noise levels is harmful. It is a form of pollution causing insomnia, depression, aggression and isolation. Noise is more than a nuisance. It is a serious problem – and not only for meditators who naturally seek quiet and generally feel a deep appreciation and need for silence.

I have been leading several long silent retreats recently. Travelling between them, I became more than usually sensitive to the noise in modern life that we take for granted. Exposure to it also effects us when, like Jesus, we withdraw to a quiet place to pray. Arriving in a truly quiet place, like Monte Oliveto where we have just finished the twenty-seventh annual weeklong silent retreat, can at first be a shock. We wait for familiar levels of loud noise and, at first, can feel a sense of absence, even of loss, when they don't come. Then we notice there are sounds. Not noise. But sounds, natural sounds. There is bird-song, a quite excited sound when you really listen to it and full of meanings we can't decipher; and insects, the constant background sounds of summer days and nights; and the wind in the trees; and the church bells that sound loudly during some of the meditation sessions but surprisingly

don't distract or annoy the roomful of meditators. Then there are human sounds, a sneeze, cough, physical movements, which also don't bother you provided they are natural and considerate. Noise is unnatural and doesn't care what it disturbs. It feels it has right of way and always claims it. Sounds reach us subtly from the great silence of nature and then draw our attention to it.

As we adjust to a silent place and



its natural sounds, we become aware, in the absence of outer noise, of the constant level of our own inner noise. We can't blame the neighbours or the traffic for that. This is the point where the work of silence begins. We are so habituated to our inner noise that we unconsciously seek to sustain it. We reach out for new input and sense-stimulation. The most obvious sign of this is the psychic umbilical cord we have grown with our mobile phones. We turn our attention to them additively for stimulation and distraction, to keep on consuming. If there are no messages we play a game. The subtle

spaces of silence and solitude that existed in the past, when we walked down the street or waited for a bus or a dentist appointment have been sucked away by the *daimon*, the other self we think we find in the phone.

Distraction has always been with us in the human condition. The Desert monks thought of it as our original sin, the fall from pure attention. It is the growing intensity of inner noise that is our present crisis. We are worse

off, not completely different from our predecessors; but this means we can find in the past a wisdom to apply to the conditions of modern life.

God is delight and those who are faithful are in God, called home from the noise that is around us to the joy that is silence. (St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*)

Augustine asks 'why do we rush around searching for God who is already here at home with us? If only we would be with God'. The resistance to silence is built into the human attraction to noise. Even when we thirst for silence and want to 'come home'

to ourselves, there is a corresponding impulse to jump up and run away back into distraction.

The first part of the work of silence is to become comfortable with ourselves. Facing down the restlessness and fidgetiness that transfers from mind to body, we gradually discover that we have a friend to trust and whom it is pleasant to be with - in ourselves. As with most friends, we tend to idealise, even idolise them at first and then learn that their faults and failings are part of their attractiveness. Similarly we come to recognise our own problems and self-contradictions as part of what makes us loveable. We pass from shame and guilt in relation to ourselves, from an obsessive need to be better and succeed more, to an ease and amused affection for ourselves which actually permits improvement to take place more naturally.

A Buddhist teacher once told me how surprised he was by the level of self-rejection and low self-worth he found in his western students. He saw it as their biggest impediment to spiritual development. This self-alienation is at the root of so much of the loneliness and inability to make sustained intimate commitments in our culture. It sets up high levels of incessant inner noise. This then blocks out the sound of silence that comes to us, with healing beauty, in all the natural sounds and sights of the world. Our inner noise disrupts our senses and the sense we make of them.

A long-term international research project, called Breakthrough Listen, is surveying one million of the nearest stars and one hundred of the closest galaxies. It is listening for signs of intelligent life 'out there' and its technology is sensitive enough to pick the equivalent of an aircraft radar. What if we were

also to listen to the silence in which sounds travel? We might recall our own lost spiritual intelligence 'in here'.

The work of silence is listening. By listening to the silence we are drawn into love with it, we find it to be friendly not fearsome, and we ourselves begin to become silent. Reflecting on this experience theologically, we can say it is part of the human process of divinisation, of becoming 'like him, because we shall see (and hear) him as he truly is.'

We can begin this work of listening anywhere, anytime. In the street or in your room. At a business meeting or at a meditation group. At first, by at-

*Silence brings us directly,
not always easily, to self-
knowledge*

tentively listening even to the noise, you shift from distraction to stillness. You will then begin to see the difference between the noise and those natural sounds that make us aware of silence. This is the practice of the presence of God that we can do anywhere – for some, more easily in the supermarket than in church.

The important thing is to keep listening. The mind may think it is waiting for a message arriving in a big noise or shattering 'experience'. Like Elijah in the desert we have to discover that God is not in the strong wind rending mountains, nor in the earthquake or the fire, but in the 'still small voice'. This progression suggests the growing sensitivity of the mantra as we move over time into more subtle levels of saying – and listening – to it. When Elijah heard the still small voice he went out of his cave to get a glimpse of God and also to experi-

ence the life-changing question 'what are you doing here, Elijah?'

We are not listening for messages telling us what to do, relieving us of the responsibility for our own existence. In the work of silence we meet the answers we are looking for in the form of intimate and inescapable questions. Strangely, these questions bring us more comfort – and courage to change – than any answer. We can always question answers. But the question that is an answer is truthful. Silence brings us directly, not always easily, to self-knowledge. It propels us out of self-absorption and our noisy self-conflicts. Whenever we move to a new degree of self-knowledge we change: values, how we spend our time and money, our priorities, our perception of the world. The work of silence brings us closer to ourselves. It also propels us into the vast interstellar spaces, as all the mystical traditions teach. This is from Attar, the Sufi:

Ours is a way you cannot understand. Each moment of this quest a person must feel his soul is spilled and unremitting zeal should force him onward at whatever cost. The one who pauses on our path is lost. (*The Conference of the Birds*)

It is a mark of a genuine spiritual teaching – not a consumerist one that looks for good sales figures – that it emphasises this need for perseverance. Jesus said 'no one who starts to plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.' Of course, we all look back, with longer or shorter glances, and want the silence to be crowded out again by noise. But when we return to the work we are fitter for the kingdom and we understand the path better.

The latest Chinese supercomputer can perform 93 quadrillion calcula-

tions per second. Even this, however, could reach its limit one day. The human heart has no limit to what it can know. The more it loves the greater its capacity – as we can see in parental love for example. This is a way to understand ‘eternal life’ – not as an unrelenting extension of a linear dimension but the capacity *in this life* with all its limitations, to experience boundlessness. Suzuki, the Zen master called it a ‘void of inexhaustible contents’. St Paul speaks of what no

spends time online has to avoid mental saturation by discovering what it really means to be an ascetic.

Asceticism is the exercise of intelligent self-control for the purpose of greater joy and fuller experience of life. The work of silence is the essential ascesis for modern people. It is not a deprivation but a breakthrough. It takes us beyond the echo chamber of our interior noise. By learning to listen we discover the healing nature of silence - and its innate happiness.

To help this work of silence to become part of life we need to acknowledge our practical need for help. These needs have daily, weekly and annual rhythms. There are daily aids we can use – our own Daily Wisdom email, for example – which give a friendly nudge to remember and make space for the work of silence today. There is daily *lectio*, reading the gospel, or some daily readings like John Main’s *Silence and Stillness in Every Season*. The weekly meditation group is a powerful help and builds a sense of community and friendship with others on the same path. Every meditator trying to deepen the work of silence would also do well to make an annual retreat, to clean and service their interior life. Pilgrimage to places of sacred silence where there is palpable presence is an enjoyable and increasingly popular way of supporting and deepening the work.

I feel Bonnevaux, where the work of silence was carried out daily for centuries, is going to be a place where people will find peace and the loving-kindness for others that flow from true silence. We have recently been talking of the three levels of silence that will combine there – the hospitable silence of the core community, the silence of the conferences and dialogues that will bring a contemplative mind to the challenges of our world and the silence of the hermitages and longer retreats. As the work of silence leads us to solitude and self-knowledge, it simultaneously leads into community with those, like us, whom we recognise as soul-friends.

In *Silence* - the book by Shusaku Endo and now an acclaimed film by Martin Scorsese – a Portuguese Jesuit missionary to Japan during a period of ruthless persecution encounters what



Bonnevaux

eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived: the things God has prepared for those who love him’.

Our ordinary minds, however, do have limited capacity. Our interior noise, self-reflection, monologues and conversations, anxieties and fantasies, take up space and, if we don’t delete a lot, it will lead to burnout. Modern stress points to the inability to pause and restore in ourselves the essential rhythms of healthy existence. With 300 hours of YouTube videos uploaded every minute, anyone today who

By becoming silent we listen in all aspects of life with greater precision and other-centredness.

Intimacy with self, which is self-knowledge, is necessary for intimacy with others and with God. Intimacy – such a conscious and painful need of our time – begins from within by reducing noise and allowing us to feel at home in and with ourselves without constant external stimulation. When we meet the great silence in solitude we are empowered to come closer to others in the detachment that comes with listening.

he calls the awful silence of God. He waits for a message from God about the cruel suffering the Christians are undergoing. No such intervention arrives that would give meaning to their ordeal and the 'silence of God' becomes a dark, negative force blocking out the natural sounds of silence from the natural world.

Behind the depressing silence of the sea, the silence of God...the feeling that while men raise their voices in anguish God remains with folded arms, silent.

This is an ancient human, pre-Christian, complaint about God based

The work of silence and understanding the meaning of silence has never been more urgent for humanity

on an imaginative understanding that defeats its own purpose. It is not uncommon for people on meditation retreats to raise this problem as they work towards a new understanding of God and insight into the nature of silence. Fr Rodriguez, in the book, is a good man, though vain in his priesthood and obstinate in his image of God, who endures the 'sickening' silence until it crushes him and destroys his faith – at least, the kind of faith he had been clinging to.

His own noisy, religious ego had blocked out real silence, including the sounds of silence manifesting the beauty of the world and carrying us into the true silence of God. He seems estranged from the contemplative wisdom of his own tradition that tells us 'there is nothing so much like God as silence'. When we are deafened by our inner noise we easily mistake this for silence, although it is its opposite.

It gives silence a bad name - a fearful, distasteful, false silence. In the same way a glaring light from a camera phone that you unfortunately look straight into can disturb our vision of what is before us.

By contrast with Fr Rodriguez, Etty Hillesum saw the nightmare scenarios of the Holocaust close up – a world that was filled with the worst kind of noise. It led her, however, to find God in the midst of it, to see and listen to the beauty of creation around them. Instead of complaining, she strove to protect the space that God needs and that we need God to have. She found silence as prayer and prayer as silence.

I'll turn inward for half an hour each morning before work and listen to my inner voice. Lose myself. You could also call it meditation...A quiet half-hour within yourself...But its not so simple that sort of quiet hour. It has to be learned. A lot of unimportant inner litter and bits and pieces have to be swept out first – irrelevant distractions, the clutter is ever present.

The work of silence makes us hear the noise of our inner clutter. But if we understand and come to love the work we will not be discouraged by the distractions.

The goal of meditation is not just to develop a quiet mind. That is a natural and desirable result. But the real goal is to discover our silent mind, the silent nature of our being. Many people start with the limited first goal and discover the big goal. Many also, especially those trying to do it all on their own, give up just as they are about to make the breakthrough.

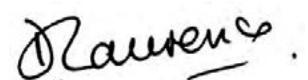
The big watershed is becoming aware that we need to let go of all that we hitherto understood to be

thought. 'Wait without thought, T.S. Eliot said, because thought would be thought of the wrong thing.' Gradually – but with occasional flashes of understanding – we come to understand why the 'monk who knows that he is praying is not truly praying and the monk who does not know that he is praying is truly praying.' At first this sounds like something weird or frightening. Later, it is seen as the proclamation of the greatest human freedom.

The work of silence and understanding the meaning of silence has never been more urgent for humanity. Science and technology have worked miracles, reduced suffering and brought cultures closer together. But the speed of change has led to overwhelming noise and blurring of vision. We have not yet learned the self-control necessary to master our own devices. We live in a 'post-truth world', where political manipulation occurs in bursts of 140 characters. A very high volume of noise and distraction is needed to maintain the post-truth era. The contemplative mind is, in social as well as mystical senses, a means of liberation and survival.

No wonder John Main places the work of silence at the heart of his teaching and urges us to:

Make time available every morning and evening of our life. During that time be open to the light, to God, to love. Not thinking our own thoughts, or planning our own plans, but entering into an ever more profound silence as our being becomes rooted in God.



Laurence Freeman OSB

News

The Way of Peace Fellowship Dialogue A gathering of wisdom traditions at Georgetown



Brahmachari, Geshe Tenzin Negi, Laurence Freeman and Sean Hagan

The Way of Peace grew out of the 1995 John Main Seminar – The Good Heart – in which the Dalai Lama commented on the Gospels and had a dialogue with Laurence Freeman and other Christian teachers. The Way of Peace includes dialogue in spiritual practice, collaboration for the common good

of humanity and pilgrimage as well as meetings among scholars.

It has recently inspired the Way of Peace Fellowship, which formed among students of Georgetown University and Catholic University of America in Washington DC. The Fellowship held a dialogue at George-

town University on 18 April with students and three teachers from different traditions: Brahmachari Vrajihari Sharan (Director of Hindu Life at Georgetown University), Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi, (co-founder and Director of the Emory-Tibet Partnership) and Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB (Director of The World Community for Christian Meditation). Sean Hagan (member of the Executive Committee of WCCM) was the moderator.

The three main themes of the panel concerned contemporary spirituality and religion: the role of meditation; dogma, doctrine, and scripture; and education and values. This was the second Way of Peace Fellowship Dialogue, and was sponsored by the John Main Center at Georgetown University, the Catholic University of America, the World Community for Christian Meditation, and the Meditatio Foundation.

The fellows' views...



I think inter-religious dialogue is becoming more important in our world today. The most important is the physical coming together. We often sort of get "bogged down" with dogma and doctrine instead of meeting face to

face. Being a "fellow" is the perfect term, because I have gotten to know a lot of people. We all learned a great deal from each other. Again, that personal connection changed me more than anything and changed my personal meditation practice as well, because, like Fr. Laurence said today: the most valuable thing that can come out of meditation is meditating in community. That is one of the ways that one feels that overwhelming call to something greater than ourselves and to love, that we can share the gift of meditation with other people.

It would be great for the Fellowship to

continue. It seems to have enough interest and enough people behind it to continue. I hope the fellowship can attract more students from even more varied disciplines and backgrounds. And maybe we can get to a point where other universities could have designated spaces on campuses, just as Georgetown has the John Main Center. It would be great if we could have something similar at CUA. It could be part of the University community. Right now it seems sort of suspended between the two schools. That is something I look forward to in the future. **(Libby Federici, Fellow from CUA).**

News



I think it's important that we understand different religious traditions and backgrounds in order to understand what makes the world function. And especially right now, with the tumultuous kind of world that we are living in. I think it's really important when

you have such religious discrimination. We all need to understand each other in order to come together and have peace in the world.

The Fellowship inspired me to commit more fully to my meditation. I was meditating twenty, thirty minutes a day. In my group, our focus was mostly on meditation, in different meditation practices. So, I started to meditate for one hour a day, and now I feel great. I think it really inspires me seeing other fellow students here in Georgetown meditating so much. It just made me want to meditate more, which made me happier.

Something that would be nice to add

to the Fellowship would be to have a member of certain faith tradition, like a priest, or monk, or rabbi come to some sessions to speak with us. In my sessions, it was more student-run, just going throughout religious texts. I would like to have an expert opinion on the texts. I also loved the panel and I think it could even be expanded to a long afternoon with five panelists - something more intensive. **(Devin Slaugh, Georgetown University)**

ONLINE: You can watch the talks from *The Way of Peace Fellowship day and students comments at* <http://tiny.cc/WoPeace2017>

Bere Island Holy Week Retreat 2017



The Bere Island Easter retreat this year brought together a very international group of meditators during Holy Week (9-16 April) Fr. Laurence Freeman led the retreat and the participants were also able to join in the yoga practice led by Giovanni Felicioni. The talks were web-cast live so the global community could take part in this important moment of WCCM's calendar.

I was looking for some time to myself to

reflect on who I am and explore the future. One way of doing this was to go on a retreat. What I found most appealing about the retreat was that it was a form of meditation which is within the Christian tradition. I went to a Catholic School in Australia, so I came from a traditionally Catholic background. For me it was important to find a practical way of dealing with daily struggles, but within the Catholic context. I had previously tried yoga

and I am very open to learning about new practices, but what I found very attractive here were the thoughts of a Benedictine monk explained within the context of Jesus. (James, from Australia) It's been a whole week, which has enabled me to go back into myself, and have time to really meditate and to go deeper. Each day we had a talk with Fr. Laurence, looking at the Scriptures, for this week of preparing for the three days of Easter. I am going to go home and, I am always energetic about helping people to pray. But now I would really like to be able to work more with teenagers in high school. It really does help us to settle down, it helps us to take time and to be able to meet people where they are at, meet our God where we are at and it has just been a heavenly time. (Sr. Mary, Australia)

ONLINE: Watch the talks here: <http://tiny.cc/Bi2017>

There is no greater need in the Church and in the world today than for the renewed understanding that the call to prayer, to deep prayer, is universal. (John Main)

News

Bonnevaux: An example of teamwork combining energy and personal generosity



There is a professional and energetic team dedicated to realising our vision for Bonnevaux. Central to it are the architects who met in London recently to take us to the next level of detail. DP Architects in Singapore, an internationally renowned firm (who have meditation daily at their head office), under their CEO, Angelene Chan, are giving their services freely to the community. Mathieu Meur, Frven Lim and Kailas Moorthy are all part of the team working on the renovation schedule. Jeff Seeck, a

German meditator and engineer, has given his skills on the team as Project Manager - just who we needed at the right time! We see all this generously donated talent as a sign of the presence of the Spirit in Bonnevaux.

We will complete the sale during the summer. We intend to start work on the community house, guest house and conference centre in the Fall. Some national groups and many individuals are planning to visit next year, so we want to be ready to receive you. Our core community

(drawn from several countries and languages) is meeting next month near Bonnevaux, at the ancient Benedictine monastery of Liguge, to spend time in prayer and reflection together.

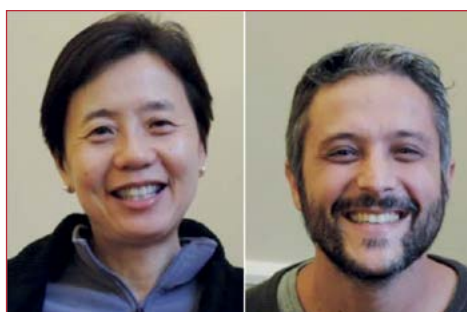
Thank you all for your very generous support - for the time, talent and treasure so many are giving. We have now reached the purchase price goal. We are more than half way towards the goal of Phase One.

If you haven't contributed yet please do so. However modest the amount it counts. It also greatly encourages our whole team working on behalf of the community to make Bonnevaux a stable centre of peace and for peace in our uncertain world.

You can contribute simply by clicking the Donate link at the website (www.bonnevauxwccm.org). If you have any questions about donations please contact Brijji Waterfield at our International centre: Brijji@wccm.org

ONLINE: Watch a video on the "Three Levels of Silence in Bonnevaux" here: <http://tiny.cc/BNSilence>

Associate Directors are announced during the Guiding Board Meeting



Celina Chan and Leonardo Corrêa

The Guiding Board meeting takes place every year with the mission of overseeing the direction and priorities of the community worldwide. This year the report from National Coordinators showed the growth of the Community worldwide (Overall the number of groups increased from 2553 in 2015, to 2570 in 2016.), the Bonnevaux Project was part of the discussions and two

new Associate Directors were appointed. Celina Chan (National Coordinator of China) and Leonardo Corrêa (Director of Communications) will assist Fr. Laurence, holding both inreach and outreach responsibilities and work to ensure that there is a healthy leadership pipeline in the Community to present a strong, positive image of WCCM's mission.

News

Christian Meditation retreat in Mandalay, Myanmar

By James Loh



Group photo in Mandalay

Mark Tin Win, the rector of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Mandalay, held the fifth consecutive annual Christian Meditation retreat in April during the Water Festival. The retreat began when Fr Laurence first visited Myanmar with Peter Ng and Pauline Peters in August 2013. Myanmar has a strong tradition of meditation due largely to the influence of Buddhism in the country. Burmese Catholic Christians, serious practitioners of meditation, took great consolation and confidence upon learning from Fr Laurence that WCCM teaches meditation in the Christian tradition. The retreat is held with the blessings of the clergy including Cardinal Charles Bo of Myanmar, Archbishop Nicholas Mang Thang of Mandalay and Archbishop Emeritus Matthias U Shwe of Taunggyi.

Columban Sister Kathleen and I assisted Fr Mark in conducting the 5-day retreat held at St Joseph major seminary of Mandalay in Pyin Oo Lwin. About 40 participants traversed great distances to come from different parts of Myanmar. It was a

joy to behold the faith and simplicity of the retreatants. Many novices from the Congregation of St Joseph of the Apparition attended, a community that has incorporated two periods of meditation daily into their congregation's schedule.

A typical retreat day began at 6am with morning prayer followed by the first of five meditations at 7am. There are two two input talks, daily Eucharistic celebration, rosary, and finishing the day at 9.30pm with Q & A and night prayers. All meals are simple. One can sense the material poverty of the community. The retreatants exhibit the fruits of their meditation very clearly. Their sitting postures are perfect. Young or old, religious or lay faithful, they sit straight and upright. Silence, stillness and simplicity are abundantly visible.

I gave a half-hour (including translation time) talk each afternoon. I spoke in English and Fr Mark translated into Burmese, a language both melodious and expressive. One English sentence may require three sen-

tences to translate.

My daughter attended the retreat with me. We brought resource materials and souvenirs, including beautiful and hardy cloth bags printed with the many icons of Singapore. The participants each received a bag, and they were overjoyed. Even Fr Mark could not resist asking me for one! Strangely enough with the providence of God I bought just enough bags for distribution.

On my return I brought back many goodies from Mandalay: Myanmar Beer, Noodles, Royal Tea, fungus and many other local produce, all cheap and good!! So the next time I visit Myanmar you may want to join me. If not for the retreat at least for the bargains!

May the peace of Christ reigns supreme in our hearts.

Indonesia

The community in Indonesia demanded justice for the incumbent governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly known as Ahok who was recently ousted and sentenced to two years in jail. Ahok supporters honoured him in different ways: with flowers, boards, balloons etc. The WCCM community joined them, adding one simple gesture: a meditation session held simultaneously at meditators' own homes across the region. The community, although small in numbers, view the issue in a broader perspective which involves the integrity of the whole country. The collective meditation for justice took place at the same time in groups or by individuals on 17 May.

News

National Retreat in Germany

This annual meditation retreat was led by Fr Laurence Freeman, held at St. Mary's of Helfta Convent in Sachsen, central Germany and attended by 35 participants, many of them returnees. There was a special atmosphere imparted by the Christ-centred mysticism practiced here by the 3 founding Cistercian sisters in the 13th century. The central topic of spiritual friendship was underscored and deepened by frequent meditation and silence practised for 2 days, contemplative walking, a singing session outdoors, a short pilgrimage to the living plant labyrinth, meaningful lectures by Fr.

Laurence, and the sense of community that grew among the participants.

At the close of the seminar, the present and future of WCCM Germany was discussed, with the sharing of ideas on paths to follow and initiatives to further meditation here. Fr Laurence described with enthusiasm and conviction the vision and form of the new WCCM World Headquarters soon to become a reality at Bonnevaux, France, not far from Poitiers.

The participants departed with some reluctance, but with a real sense of the spiritual friendship discovered and brought to life here at Helfta.

MEDITATIO CENTRE Contemplation for an Age of Artificial Intelligence

The Meditatio Centre in London received Dr Marco Schorlemmer on 20 May for a day seminar on "Contemplation for an Age of Artificial Intelligence." He is a scientist at the Artificial Intelligence Research Institute of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) and also WCCM coordinator for Catalonia. Marco leads a meditation group on the campus of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

ONLINE: Listen to all talks here
http://tiny.cc/AI_talks

In Loving memory of Agnes D'Hooghe-Dumon

By Jose Pype



Kamiel and Agnes

In the early morning of Tuesday June 9, Agnes D'Hooghe-Dumon passed away. Agnes was really at the origin of the Christian Meditation Community in Belgium. Not only was she at the beginning, she laid also the foundations of the Belgian Christian Meditation Community. She discovered meditation during a lifelong serious spiritual search seeking for her roots. Christian Meditation was her coming home. In the late eighties she went to London to meet Father Laurence to be sure of her discovery after reading some books of John Main. Immediately after her visit

she started the first meditation group, in her home, in Grimbergen near Brussels. In 91 this house became a Centre of Christian Meditation. In little years the meditation community was spreading over Belgium. The community now has about 60 groups and you can say that she is directly at the base of more than 30 groups. Agnes was a great and strong woman with a warm heart always trying to convince and win other people for Christian Meditation. It was really her passion and she was very eager also to convince the authorities of the Catholic Church to convince them of the importance to reconnect with the source. For her meditation was the way to reconnect with the living Christ in us.

She was also a guiding board member for several years and also the first European Coordinator. Last but not least, she was also an exceptional mother of four brilliant children and

was married with Kamiel D'Hooghe a famous organist. Her oldest son Thomas said me that he is deeply influenced by the spirituality of his mother and that meditation has become very important for him.

From 2007 on, she got gradually the symptoms of Alzheimer disease. A very difficult transit period for her to accept the loss of her usual communication. The last four years, she resided in a centre of care. Kamiel visited her every day; it was the best example of love I have seen.

During the funeral, Kamiel played on the organ a piece of Bach. The whole basilica of Grimbergen was filled with joyful organ music, which expressed the joy and thankfulness for her extra-ordinary life. She influenced the lives of many people and I am convinced that she goes on with that work from another place. A place, which we all carry in us.

In Focus

Argel Tuason from The Philippines



I am Argel, 34 years old, from The Philippines and currently finishing my Masters in Theology. I have been a WCCM member since 2013 and made my final oblation recently this year. I had been searching for a community I could call my own, I could call my home. That will accept me as I am, no more, no less. That's why these words of Fr John Main always reverberate in my heart: "When you are meditating you don't need to apologize for yourself and you don't need to justify yourself. All you need to do is to be yourself, to accept from the hands of God the gift of your own being."

Before, I had always been apologizing and berating myself for being gay, always needing to justify in my heart that I deserved a place, too, in the Church as a full member. But this internalized homophobia, this woundedness inflicted by the Church I have learned to love as my mother, was to

be renounced when I finally decided to leave my previous community. It felt like I was in exile, jumping from one community to another searching for "home."

I felt so alone, but in retrospect God was faithful, God was with me the whole time, through the people who journeyed with me during these darkest periods which I now realize as one of the brightest, too, since God's penetrating light was making something new within my heart. I think it was in God's perfect timing that I responded to the call of Jesus in 2013 to journey with him through a Christian Meditation community. And just after six months, I got attracted and responded to the way of life and to the idea of becoming a WCCM Benedictine Oblate.

At this particular stage in my journey, I see stability as faithfulness to my calling as to who I really am, to what God is calling me to be. It is faithfulness to my calling to be faithful to the Monastery without Walls wherever I am, because I bring and share this monastery with others, especially to those who are in the margins like myself. Because in the end, this monastery is really within me. And how do I stay faithful to and have stability and

stillness in this monastery which can be a place of refuge not just for myself but most importantly for others as well? Through the twice daily humble task of staying faithful to the mantra.

I feel grateful that I still have that link, however fragile and narrow it is, to the "Roman" Catholic Church through WCCM. It makes me feel that I still belong, that I am still "inside." I resonated so well with the way Fr Laurence described Jesus in his book *Jesus, The Teacher Within* along the lines that he is the one who is "inside" but always crosses over to the "outside." Like my master, I guess I will also be someone who forever will be an insider, but an outsider as well at the same time. Someone who will never be fully accepted as an "insider" so long as the church refuses to accept her LGBT sons and daughters fully as they are. Someone who will forever be choosing to be on the side of the "outsiders" as well, to be faithful to his true call to be a bodhisattva to those like him who are pushed to the margins and in need of the salvific message that God resides within and all you need to do is to be yourself, to accept from the hands of God the gift of your own being. No need to apologize for yourself and no need to justify yourself.



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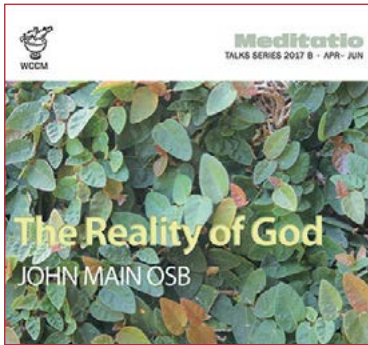
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Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is **10 September**

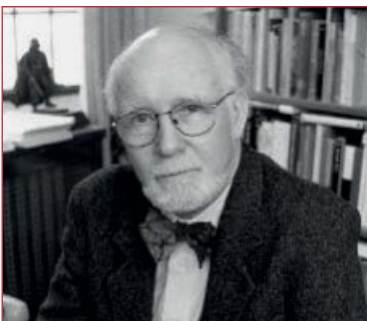
Events & Resources

Meditatio Series



Come to the John Main Seminar 2017

Praying with the Masters Today, presented by Bernard McGinn
10-13 August, Houston, USA
7-10 August, Pre-Seminar led by Laurence Freeman OSB



The Seminar will explore the development of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition from the early to the contemporary mystics. For more information and registration visit: http://tiny.cc/JMS2017_RG

The Reality of God

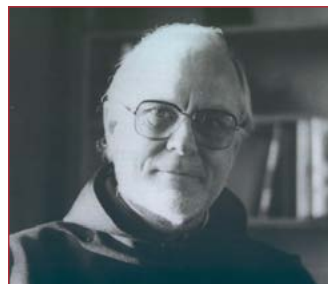
John Main OSB

These talks present meditation as a way to awaken to the reality and the nearness of God. The reality of God is to be found in our hearts, in the Spirit of Jesus. These are selections from Moment of Christ, published on CD and in print under the same title. Download the audio here: <http://tiny.cc/medseries2017B>

Meditatio Seminar

15-16 Sep, Dublin

John Main: Hunger for Depth and Meaning



The first day will comprise a series of talks by Prof. Bernard McGinn, a leading historian and writer on Christian Mysticism. The second day will focus on the life, theology, philosophy and general impact and influence of John Main and his teaching on Christian Meditation; speakers will include Fr. Laurence Freeman, Dr Mark Dooley, Dr Noel Keating and Mr Barry White. More information: <http://tiny.cc/jmconf2017>

Pilgrimage now is available online

The movie introduces the way of Christian meditation, and the work and vision of The World Community for Christian Meditation. The full video is available now in our Youtube Channel.

Watch here: <http://tiny.cc/pilgrimg>
Pilgrimage is also available in DVD which comes with 11 subtitles (To order, contact the resource center nearest to you)

More dates & events:

2 September
Silence in Science and Speaking in Faith: Alan Wallace and Laurence Freeman in dialogue
- London, UK
More info:
<http://tiny.cc/siencien2017>

15-22 September
Health & Meditation Retreat
Contact: theresawccm@gmail.com

22-24 September:
Bere Island Music Festival
Contact: theresawccm@gmail.com

1-8 October:
Fara Sabina School Retreat, led by Laurence Freeman
Contact: som@wccm.org

To order: contact the resource centre nearest to you. Our centres are listed below

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Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE CANADIAN CHRISTIAN MEDITATION COMMUNITY



Jack Murta opens the conference

Just be with God

See page C3

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

True Community

This issue of your newsletter is focused on the biennial National Conference, held this past May in Toronto.

You'll find a description of the Conference itself, plus two articles based on talks presented there – one by keynote speaker, Fr Paul Geraghty, the other by one of the Workshop presenters, David Walsh.

In addition, we have two reports on local activities from either end of the country – one by JoAnn Kelly-Cullen from BC, and the other by Ann Doucet of New Brunswick. These are the sort of articles your newsletter exists for, linking meditation communities far and wide, bringing together meditators from every corner of Canada into a truly Canadian Christian meditation community.

We also have no less than two articles by Ottawa's prolific Paul Harris. One is a review of a new film

on the life of Henri Le Saux, the French monk who moved to India and helped inaugurate the dialogue between Eastern and Western spiritualities, taking the name Abhishiktananda. The other has a French theme as well, reporting on the WCCM's Bonnevaux Project to establish an international retreat centre in a lovely valley in western France, near Poitiers.

Finally, there are also a few classified advertisements in this issue – probably a first! They are all designed to attract volunteers to fill positions with the Canadian community. Giving your time and talents to the wider meditation community is an excellent way of deepening your commitment to your own meditation practice. And it helps bring Canadian meditators from coast to coast into what Fr John always knew we would be come – a “community of love”.

**Love & Peace,
Jeff Ewener**

WCCM-CANADA 2017 BIENNIAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE Whatever You Think You're Looking For, You're Wrong

Fr Paul Geraghty OSB calls himself a disciple of John Main – “a teacher who was serious and who took seriously the questions I had within me.”

“He gave me,” he said, “as he has given all of us, the discipline of meditation – a priceless gift – but he also gave me the equally priceless gift of his own unshakable integrity and love.” When he died in 1982, Paul was at first bereft, but later learned to see Fr John in the person of the ancient Hindu guru, who leads his disciple to the door of his cave, bows and departs. From the cave of his own heart, Paul could see that Fr John had done exactly what he had come to do – his work was accomplished.

Paul spoke in a rich, humorous baritone voice, which still bore the lilting traces of a Scouse accent. His message centered around the knowledge that our lives are not in our control – and indeed, the more we try to control our lives, the farther away from them we get. If we could predict our own futures, there would be little point in actually living them. But meditation opens us to the freedom of the real world. It gives us the grounding and stability to experience the surprises of our lives and respond to them in humility and love.

In his first-night talk, he quoted a Zen story he had

Continued on page C4

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échos du silence and the French version of *Meditatio* are available from Méditation chrétienne du Québec, 105 ch du Richelieu, bureau B, McMasterville, QC J3G 1T5, 450-446-4649. info@meditationchretienne.ca.

Page design and layout: www.katemcdo.com

Cover photo: **Helen Elbertsen**

Just Be With God

The 2017 National Conference of the Canadian Christian Meditation Community was held in Toronto on the weekend of May 26-28. The venue was St Michael's University on the St George campus of the University of Toronto. While the venue managers could have been a little more organized, attendees all spoke highly of the experience they had and the learning they gained.

The weekend was opened by National Coordinator Jack Murta, who reminded us all of the CCMC "Mission Statement" – Don't think of God, just be with God. It gave us an excellent point of departure for a weekend of spirituality, learning, meditation and fun.

The keynote speaker, introduced by his old friend Clem Sauvé, was Fr Paul Geraghty.

Fr Paul met John Main in 1975 and immediately recognized his own authentic spiritual teacher. Liverpool-born and educated (in Law) at the University of London, Fr Paul came to Montreal with Fr John and lived at the Priory there until 1989, which is where he and Clem met. An ordained Benedictine monk by then, he spent the next 26 years as chaplain at Montreal Children's Hospital, a position as spiritually and pastorally demanding as any that one could imagine.

Fr Paul gave two formal presentations, Friday night and Saturday morning, followed by a panel discussion Saturday afternoon, and a Q&A dialogue Sunday morning, where he addressed a number of questions attendees had submitted over the previous days. (See article on Fr Paul's talks, which begins on page C2.)

Saturday included four separate workshops on particular topics, by presenters with considerable expertise in their areas. Rev Kevin Flynn, a distinguished academic at St Paul University in Ottawa, spoke on the relationship, sometimes a challenging one, between meditation and higher education, drawing on examples from his own experience and that of others.

David Walsh, a longtime activist for social justice, spoke on the relationship between the struggles against injustice, addiction and indifference and the sustaining faith we gain through prayer and meditation, and in the writings of the great spiritual masters of today. (See article on David's talk: "Meditation & Social Justice", page C4)

Paul Tratnyek led a workshop on meditation with children, a topic he is uniquely qualified to discuss. Paul has been instrumental in an historic expansion of interest in meditation in elementary schools, in recent years, particularly in the Catholic school boards of Ontario. As his colleague Jake LaPierre said at one point, "This is a heck of a ride you've got us on, Paul!"

Rev Marilyn Metcalfe, a Benedictine Oblate, led a workshop on meditation and physical, mental and spiritual wellness. Marilyn drew movingly on her own experiences overcoming physical challenges, and the often more debilitating mental reactions to these, through the gentle discipline of meditation, lectio divina and prayer.

Workshops were attended by those with a particular interest in each of the areas, and the discussions were very lively.

Following the conference the CCMC National Board held its regular meeting, enjoying the rare treat of having so many of its members from across the country physically present to one another. Exciting plans were initiated which will be discussed in future issues of your newsletter, once they've had a chance to mature.

But before goodbyes were said, attendees watched a beautiful film on the new international retreat centre at Bonnevaux, France. Readers can learn more about the Bonnevaux Project from Paul Harris's article in this issue, "Creating Community".



Jeff Ewener
Toronto

WCCM-CANADA 2017 BIENNIAL NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Meditation and Social Justice



PIERRETTE BERGERON-THERRIEN

Workshop & Keynote Presenters: L-R Marilyn Metcalfe, Kevin Flynn, Paul Tratnyek, David Walsh, Paul Geraghty

Author Scott Peck talks about a conference at which one of the Berrigan brothers spoke – they had long been involved in radical civil disobedience on behalf of disarmament. Someone asked Fr Berrigan how he could continue over decades to do his work when it seemed to have no obvious results. He responded, “We don’t even think about results. If we did, we would be dead by now. The results are not our concern. We just do what we think is right, what we feel we have to do, and leave the results up to God.”

“Being at the service of the happening of God’s grace” is one way to talk about social justice. We are there to serve and we often cannot know in advance what the results will be. We listen to the Spirit. We are to be available for what is needed to be done. We try to discern what is possible for us.

A turning point for me personally in my faith journey was reflecting on the Old Testament stories where God’s vision is continually rejected, and stories where injustice abounds (not much different from today), yet God remained faithful. One can feel God’s pain in reading the scriptures of prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Amos and Micah. The vulnerability of God comes alive in these readings, and in the life of Jesus in the New Testament.

I visited my brother Tom several times in the 1970s & ’80s when he worked in the barrios of Lima, and with indigenous people in the mountains of Ecuador. I could literally feel the pain of God in the unjust structures that force people to live in poverty. One could experience the ‘principalities and powers’ that St. Paul writes about, which are a cause of so much injustice.

In my work in renovating and managing buildings, I have often tried to involve individuals in recovery. I once invited 15 men, whom I had met while volunteering at an addiction treatment centre, to do resto-

ration work at the Flatiron building in downtown Toronto. I was young at the time and many of the men had serious addiction problems, but they worked hard and I could see how having a sense of purpose made a real difference in their lives. That experience shaped my interest in finding ways to help create places of hospitality and support for vulnerable individuals – such as Tent City on the waterfront, resource centres for people who are homeless, and transitional housing for individuals in recovery from addiction and/or mental health challenges.

Meditation combined with reflecting on scripture has been essential to me for connecting with a strong trust that God will carry me through my own personal struggles, and I try to be awake to the Spirit that is always opening new doors to opportunities to serve. Through these experiences, combined with reflecting on the messages of prophets such as John Main, Fr Laurence, Joan Chittister, Henri Nouwen, and Marcus Borg, I have been awakened to the healing power of Jesus in my life and in our world.

Fr Laurence wrote recently:

I once asked an old rabbi friend of mine to a dialogue and suggested we speak to the question: ‘Does God have Favourites?’ In his talk he said that when he was young he believed that, of course, God’s favourites were His Chosen People, the Jews. In middle age, his thought had evolved to the liberal point of view that God has no favourites (a position held by St Paul). But, in old age, he came to believe that God does have favourites; they are the *anawim*, the Hebrew word for the poor, all who depend primarily on God alone, the marginalised, the voiceless, and the persecuted.

David Walsh
Toronto

Whatever you think you're looking for continued from page C2

found in a work of Richard Rohr's. A disciple asks his teacher, "Is there anything I can do to make myself more enlightened?" The master replies, "As little as you can do to make the sun rise in the morning." "Then," asks the disciple, "what's the use of the spiritual exercises you make me do?" "To make sure you are not asleep," replies the master, "when the sun begins to rise."

In his first and second talks, Paul quoted from some poets who had inspired him. One was the Scottish poet, Malcolm Guite:

Begin the song exactly where you are.

Remain within the world of which you're made.

Another was the Welsh poet, RS Thomas:

*But the silence in the mind
is when we live best, within
listening distance of the
silence
we call God. This is the deep
calling to deep of the psalm-
writer*

Guite in particular points out the pathway that links the poets and the mystics and the meditators:

*In three in one and one in three, in rhyme,
In music, in the whole creation story,
In His own image, His imagination,
The Triune Poet makes us for His glory,
And makes us each the other's inspiration.
He calls us out of darkness, chaos, chance,
To improvise a music of our own,
To sing the chord that calls us to the dance,
Three notes resounding from a single tone,
To sing the End in whom we all begin;
Our God beyond, beside us and within.*

It is when we are walking that path that we can experience what Paul called "expanding consciousness" – in which, he said, "we leave behind a God who is far too small, and discover a God who is infinitely vast."

Paul's sense of humour came across in everything he said – and made up for some difficulties with audio. He told of meeting an old neighbour of John Main's family in Ireland. The man recalled them well. "Oh, the Mains? They were posh!" he said. "They had tennis rackets!"

Humour is based on surprise, and surprise happens when our expectations are overturned. This is not always a laughing matter. But it is what meditation and a growing spirituality teach us to be ready for, faithful and unafraid.

During Sunday's Q&A session someone asked him, as a chaplain who had known many frightened and bereaved parents, what we can say to someone who is suffering. He answered, nothing. We have nothing to tell them. All we can do is walk with them through the suffering. "I don't look for meaning in suffering," he said. "But I've seen enough of it to know that suffering is not the end."

The present moment is where God is. And in some way we cannot fathom, it is what God does. As meditation leads us deeper and deeper into it, we

see more and more clearly how surprising everything actually is.

Paul quoted Eckhart Tolle: "Do not resist the present moment." A large part of our suffering, he said, comes from our resistance to the experience of suffering, our fear of it. We need to face what is happening right now – face it in faith and hope – and that is what meditation leads us to.

We may not be aware of this transformation as it is happening. And the shape it takes will be nothing like what we expect it to be. Paul told one audience member, "Whatever results we think we're looking for in meditation, we're wrong!" Our job is not to expect anything, but merely to be present, and ready.

Underlining this, Paul quoted from a poem by Mary Oliver, called "Prayer":

*just
pay attention, then patch
a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway
into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.*

**Jeff Ewener
Toronto**



Keynote Speaker Fr Paul Geraghty:
A disciple of John Main

PIERRETTE BERGERON-THERRIEN

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION AND THE BONNEVAUX PROJECT

A Place to Unify and Heal

It has been said that in each age God raises up prophets and teachers to ensure his work is carried out. Benedictine monk John Main, (1926-1982) – whose teaching on Christian meditation has spread to 2500 Christian meditation groups meeting weekly in over 100 countries of the world – is regarded today as one of the great spiritual teachers of the 20th century.

But John Main was also in a real sense a prophet. He had a deep insight and prophetic vision that his teaching on silence and stillness in contemplative prayer would be primarily handed down in weekly gatherings of meditators. He once said: “Meditation creates community”. It was his hope that this teaching and practice would be shared in an organic way through support groups of men and women meeting in homes, churches, schools and work places. He had a profound understanding of the ancient tradition of Christians gathering together as a community to pray.

Meditation Groups: Communities of Faith

Laurence Freeman, successor to John Main in 1982, and Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), has pointed out that “John Main saw this modern expansion of contemplative prayer as originating in the communities of faith and in the liturgy of the heart in the early church. These early Christians also gathered in small groups in one another’s houses. This coming together in prayer formed the *koinonia*, or social interaction and communion, that was the distinguishing mark and power of the early church. These small groups met to pray and offer support and encouragement to each other in their common faith. John Main felt that meditation was a journey to take with others.”

The Bonnevaux Project

To support this worldwide explosion of Christian Meditation groups and train a new generation of leaders to teach meditation, as well as to provide a permanent Christian meditation home and retreat house, Laurence Freeman announced over a year ago the proposal to acquire a site in France for a new International Centre of the World Community for Christian Meditation.

Laurence Freeman points out that contemplative centres through history have been communities of peace and reconciliation and that it is now time to develop a centre geared to the additional needs of

the 21st century. He points out that training of group leaders will be one of the very important priorities. In addition he emphasizes that: “The Centre will be open in an inclusive spirit for people of all ages, beliefs and backgrounds to unify and heal minds and hearts.” The centre, he feels, will deepen the contemplative dimension of Christian life and also bring forth the fruits of meditation to people of other religions or secular beliefs. In addition a wide range of retreats and events will be shaped to the needs of participants of various cultures.

The Location

The location of the proposed new centre is called Bonnevaux (beautiful valley), and is located on the site of a 12th-century Benedictine monastery, close to the city of Poitiers in France, and a 90-minute train ride from Paris. The property has 120 acres, a large forest, with a stream and a lake that will offer a deep sense of peace, stability and beauty to groups and visitors. Fundraising for donations is now underway to purchase the site in 2017 or 2018. (bonnevauxwccm.org)

The daily life of the Bonnevaux community and guests will be founded on the ancient monastic wisdom of *ora* and *labora* – the essential monastic rhythm of work, study and prayer, hospitality and service. It will live out this wisdom in contemporary forms and styles. A resident community will maintain this life, and all guests and visitors will be invited to participate.

Accolades to Bonnevaux

Reaction to the Bonnevaux project has been very positive from around the world:

Mark Carney (Governor, the Bank of England):

I am delighted to hear about Bonnevaux and that it promises to be such a beautiful and timely home for the community and a centre of peace in our world. I hope it receives all the support you need to realize the vision. I will look forward to coming there one day.

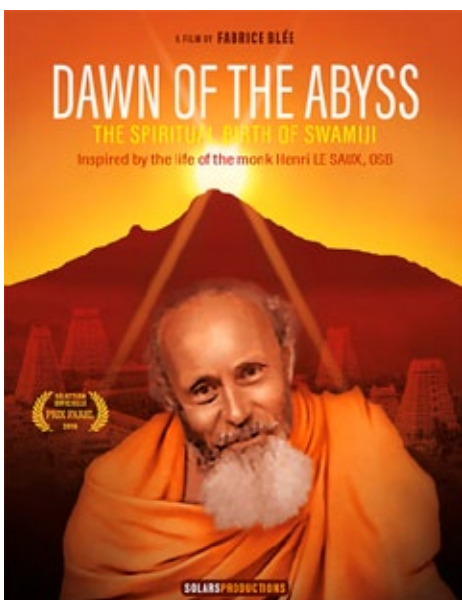
Thomas Keating OCSO (Founder of Contemplative Outreach):

The WCCM is enjoying immense expansion and is being constantly enriched by maturing meditators, some of who will want more advanced training. The house and grounds of Bonnevaux look very beautiful and well-suited to your purpose. As an ancient monastery, the walls are exuding grace all the time, like the special shrines of Europe and the Near East. It will help those who come to relax and find deep refreshment in the

Continued on page C9

FILM ON HENRI LE SAUX PREMIERS IN OTTAWA

Dawn of the Abyss



A new full-length Canadian film, *Dawn of the Abyss*, produced by Fabrice Blee of St Paul University, Ottawa, had its Canadian premiere May 11 at the Mayfair Theatre in Ottawa. The documentary depicts the spiritual awakening of French-born Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux, who spent most of his life in India as the revered holy man Abhishiktananda (“Bliss of the Anointed Lord”).

In India, Le Saux became a *sannyasa* or spiritual devotee and hermit, advocating the centrality of meditation to the Christian tradition, and exploring the devotional world of Hinduism. When in 1968 he departed for a life of deeper solitude, he turned over

the ashram he had co-founded to the direction of Bede Griffiths.

The film, which comes in both English and French versions, initially premiered in Geneva and Paris to enthusiastic reviews. The English-version screening in Ottawa included an hour-long discussion after the film, with producer Fabrice Blee.

Ottawa Christian meditators were out in full force for the showing. John Main mentions Le Saux in his book *Letters from the Heart*, and recommends Le Saux’s book *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*.

In describing the importance of silence and stillness in prayer, Le Saux once wrote: :

The aim of silent prayer is to quiet the mind, to free it from its instability and its innate tendency to dispersion, to gather it, as it were, at its very centre, to lead it beyond all its activities to the stillness of pure self-awareness. It is simply the preparation for the ultimate encounter with oneself, and for the ultimate encounter with the Father in the oneness of the Holy Spirit. Silence is the highest and truest praise to the Lord.

DVDs of *Dawn of the Abyss* are available via the film’s website, www.solarsproductions.com/boutique.html

Cost is \$24.99, plus \$3 shipping. Both English and French versions are included.

Paul Harris
Ottawa

Christian Meditation Retreat in Chilliwack, BC

On a rainy first day of April about 70 people gathered at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Chilliwack, BC to discover meditation in the Christian tradition.

The day opened with a talk about the teaching of John Main, the benefits of meditation and the mission of the World Community for Christian Meditation. A letter about Doing and Being by School Director Kim Nataraja was read, and the video *The Essential Teaching* by Fr Laurence was presented. Our first introductory meditation period was followed by many questions and comments. An 11th Step WCCM group member from neighbouring St. Thomas Anglican Church shared a moving testimony of how Christian meditation helps him in his struggle with addiction and anxiety.

Before we did our second meditation, a Roots of the Tradition PowerPoint created by Colleen Donald demonstrated that prayer of the heart has always existed within Christianity. This way of silence and interiority is evident in scripture and the writings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, saints, mystics and present-day contemplatives including John Main and Laurence Freeman.

Participants shared that the retreat was a meaningful way to experience how the practice of silence, stillness and simplicity can help us move from a state of doing to one of attention, presence and being.

JoAnn Kelly-Cullen
Vancouver



**CANADIAN NATIONAL
OBLATE RETREAT 2017**

***From Fidelity
to Love***

Canadian Oblates: A Community of Love

The annual Canadian Oblate Retreat was held in June at the Cistercian Monastery Notre-Dame in Rougemont, Quebec. Unlike last year – when the stillness in the abundant, lush garden was so acute and silence prevailed – this year every leaf danced with joy in the light breeze. The sounds of the frogs in the pond and the singing birds in the surrounding trees bid us a warm welcome.

The main concept of our retreat this year, under the direction of Apollonia (Polly) Schofield, National Oblate Coordinator for Canada, was “Fidelity” to the Rule, which leads to “Love”. Polly quoted Dom John Main as saying, “the Universal vocation of the Oblate is Love.”

Our main task as individuals and as a community is to return – and to keep returning – to the silent centre. Fidelity is required, as it is necessary to faithfully meditate daily, every morning and every evening. Polly described how all activity ceased in the Prioory, as ordered by Dom John, when it was time to meditate. There were no exceptions.

June 24, 2017, I committed myself to the service of God, in my final oblation, and Barbara Halubec, from Montreal, was received as a novice, conducted by Polly. We became one, “in a community of Love”.

As I started my car homeward, the magnificent strains of Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah” burst forth from the radio. We were surrounded by Praise, Thanksgiving, and Peace, as we journeyed forth.



L-R Polly Schofield (Canadian Oblate Coordinator), Maureen Sandrock (new Oblate), Dorothy Wood (Maureen’s mentor)

As Father Laurence Freeman has told us,

Becoming an oblate in this community is an assent and a commitment to the re-centering of one’s life and of one’s awareness in this mystery of Christ and of God. It is one way, among others, in which this universal human journey is given meaning and focus and is enriched, no less for the good of others as for our own, by joy and peace.

**Maureen Sandrock
Montreal**

gift of profound silence that the facility is certain to provide. With my prayer and friendship.

Mary McAleese (President of Ireland, 1997-2011):

It is past time for the World Community to have a permanent home, a centre of deep peace and an invitation to reconciliation in our troubled age. As soon as it is ready I plan to visit Bonnevaux and its many attractive qualities, not least the ancient contemplative origins which infuse its natural beauty with a spirituality which I am sure will touch many an anxious heart and clear many a confused mind. It is a venture worth encouraging and supporting.

Richard Rohr (Founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation):

I fully congratulate the World Community for embarking on the project of this new centre for its whole community and for all who are seeking depth and peace. It is truly a beautiful place and I am sure it will communicate the beauty of the peace of contemplation. Having an ancient monastic origin adds another dimension to the spirit of the place. I know that all contemplatives will feel welcome here, and I hope all friends of the WCCM will fully support this great venture.

Charles Taylor (Philosopher, author of *A Secular Age*):

For usually solitary meditators like myself, it is a great boon to be able from time to time to meditate in community, and all the more so in a retreat house set in beautiful surroundings like Bonnevaux. I am very pleased that the WCCM is taking this initiative.

Archbishop Paul Gallagher (Patron of the WCCM and the Secretary for Relations with States in the Secretariat of State, the Vatican, Rome):

As we are all aware our world is in a mess just now... We recognize that the way forward must be rooted in prayerful discernment. The World Community for Christian Meditation is helping many to deepen their prayer life, and accordingly to find that inner peace, which is so precious in these troubled times. Accordingly, it is my hope that the realization of a new International Centre at Bonnevaux may strengthen WCCM's mission.

How Do I Make a Donation?

To receive a tax receipt, make your donation through The Canadian Christian Meditation Community Registered Charity:

- ~Send cheque or credit card to PO Box 52, Station NDG, Montreal QC H4A 3P4. In the memo line, write "Bonnevaux Scholarship Fund".
- ~E-transfers to christianmeditation@bellnet.ca with "Bonnevaux Scholarship Fund" in the message.
- ~Phone 514-485-7928 for credit card payments and more information. Do not send credit card details by email.
- ~Or see "Donate" on the CCMC website: wccm-canada.ca

Tax receipts will be issued in January for the previous calendar year.

Find out more! Go to bonnevauxwccm.org for the latest news, videos, interviews, plans and photos about Bonnevaux. Or visit the Facebook page: [Bonnevauxwccm](https://www.facebook.com/Bonnevauxwccm).

First North American Oblate Retreat



The Oblate retreat was held in Chicago from June 9–11. It was led by Laurence Freeman and hosted by the US Christian Meditation Community. Canada was

represented by the Canadian Oblate Coordinator, Polly Schofield, together with Fred and Magda Jass, and JoAnn Cullen.

NEW BRUNSWICK ESSENTIAL TEACHING WEEKEND

Learning the Language of the Innermost Self

Friday, April 28, a foggy rainy day, welcomed fourteen meditators to the Villa Madonna Retreat Centre in Rothesay NB, on the beautiful Kennebecasis River for the 23rd Canadian School for Christian Meditation: Workshop on the Essential Teaching. Visiting meditators came from Prince Edward Island, Riverview and Fredericton NB, Dartmouth NS and two local meditation groups. The group was led by the resource team of Phil Barnett, from Winnipeg MB, Lucie Smeltzer-Legault of Gatineau QC, and Len Moore of Dartmouth NS. Denise Connors of Quispamsis NB, CCMC Atlantic Regional Coordinator, was principal organizer for the weekend, ably assisted by the local Villa group.

The main focus for the weekend was to reaffirm the teaching and practice of meditation for those who had been meditating for some time, and to reach out to new members.

Friday evening, Phil discussed the aims and objectives of the School. In *Sharing the Meditation Journey*, Len Moore invited everyone to share his or her story of their journey. They had come to meditation through many different paths. Some sought to deepen their faith, others had experienced times of crisis, and a need for peace and calmness in their lives. Some had been meditating for twenty-five years, others were just beginning. All sought closeness to God through “silence, stillness and simplicity.” The evening concluded with night prayer and the group was encouraged to keep silence until breakfast the next morning.

Saturday morning explored the Essential Teaching. Len Moore explored the value of silence: “The language of the innermost self.” In addressing the issue of distractions during meditation we were urged to follow the 4Rs: Resist no thought. Retain no thought. React to no thought. And return to your mantra.

In Session 3, *An Introduction to Meditation*, we broke into small groups to practise how we would have an informal chat with a friend about meditation and how we were personally drawn to the practice. This was followed by a reading: John Main (*The Hunger for Depth and Meaning*) and meditation.

In the afternoon we broke into small groups again to practise introducing a new member to our meditation

group. This was very helpful – many of us had been the only one present when a new person arrived. We learned to “be prepared” and to “be welcoming.”

Phil led us in *The History of the Tradition*. Phil explained the CCMC’s organizational structure, beginning with the individual meditator and the small group. There are 6 regional coordinators who do the local planning, and the National Council led by a National Coordinator – they produce the newsletter. The World Community for Christian Meditation is led by Fr. Laurence Freeman, with the new World Retreat Centre in Bonnevaux, France.

On the last evening, there was a Q&A Practice session led by Phil who divided us into small groups to discuss our question. This led to some interesting and productive discussion. Then Phil presented each participant with a copy of the *Sharing of the Gift* resource book, followed by a social evening.

Sunday morning took us through the Stages of the Journey. Once we hear the “call” to meditation, a trial period ensues, which can last a long time. Then there is a learning period when we deepen our understanding and eventually there is commitment. In the “distraction” stage people may stop meditating – this too is part of the journey and requires perseverance and fidelity. The journey is not linear and different people may take very different paths .

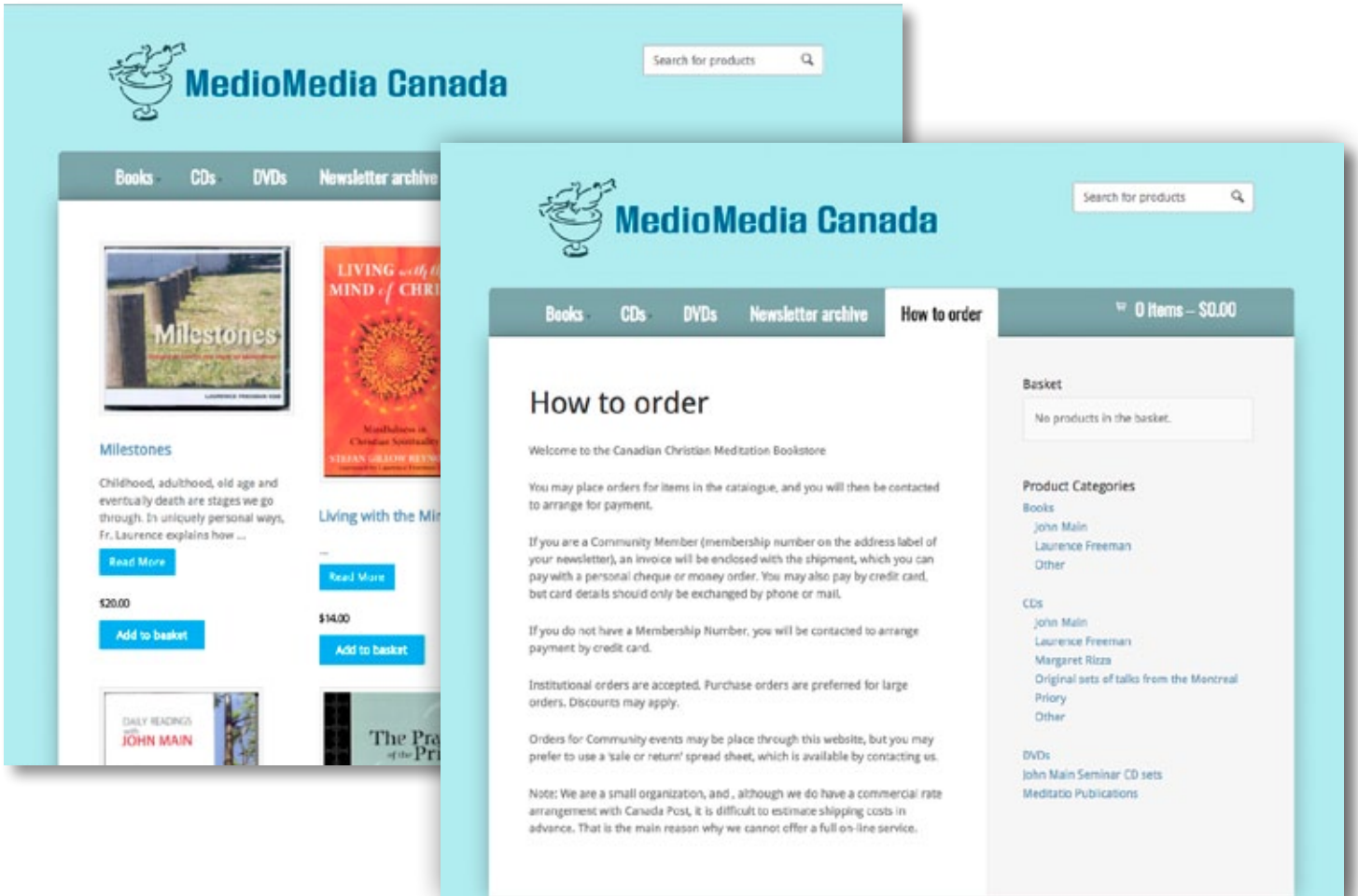
The whole team led us in *Leading a Meditation Group: A Pearl of Great Price*. Requirements for starting a new group: Two people with some experience in meditating get together to start it, with a willingness to lead and a commitment to be there and to provide a welcoming environment.

We closed the weekend with a worship and sending forth service, and the presentation to each of us of a candle with the words “Remember Jesus calls you.”

We wish to thank the Villa Madonna Retreat Centre for a welcoming spiritual environment and wonderful home-cooked meals. The weekend could not have happened without the commitment of Denise Connors and our excellent resource team of Phil, Len and Lucie.

**Ann Doucet
Rothesay NB**

Introducing the new Canadian Community Bookstore website at www.mediomedia.ca



Canadian Christian Meditation Community

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PRACTISE YOUR PRACTICE

WCCM-Canada Volunteer Positions for You

The World Community for Christian Meditation–Canada needs many volunteers to carry on our work of bringing together a nationwide meditation community. Your Regional Coordinator can help direct you to many of these. The three below are particularly urgent and important. They all require commitment and faithfulness, none take up too much time, and all of them can be done from wherever you live – not unlike meditation itself! Each position offers a rich opportunity to deepen your practice through service to your meditation community, with strong, gentle support for you throughout your learning process. Write today – and find out how rewarding it can be to support your fellow meditators!

Friends Program Coordinator

The Friends Program is the crucial link between the Canadian meditation community and the global WCCM. The Friends Program generates financial support for the WCCM to carry on its international activities in more than 120 countries – including Fr Laurence’s tours, and planting the seeds of meditation practice in less privileged countries and places.

WCCM-Canada is looking for a new Friends Program Coordinator to manage the annual Canadian Friends Appeal. Enthusiasm and organizational skills would be helpful, and you would work with the existing Coordinator until you felt comfortable taking the wheel.

Contact: The Canadian Christian Meditation Community Friends Program at friends.wccm@gmail.com or call **416-962-7111**.

Facebook Page Manager

WCCM-Toronto is planning to create a Facebook page on which to post information about upcoming events in Toronto and nation-wide, and to foster dialogue among meditators.

Once it is up, a volunteer will be needed to maintain the site, keep it current, respond to messages etc. You don’t have to live in Toronto to do this – Facebook is everywhere!

If you know your way around social media, this could be a perfect way to use your skills to help others! Contact Elaine Mills: **416-567-7111** today!

National Newsletter Editor

The newsletter you’re reading right now needs a new editor. It comes out quarterly, and so requires focused activity for just a few days every 3 months. If you or someone you know enjoys working with words, this would be an enjoyable duty. It also offers an excellent opportunity for a young graduate in journalism, literature or communications.

The current editor would work closely with you for an issue or two, till you feel ready to be in charge.

Contact Jeff Ewener at jeff@jefferyewener.com for more information.

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