



# WCCM

*Newsletter of The World Community for Christian Meditation*

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## *The World will be Saved by Beauty*

ADDRESSING THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, LAURENCE FREEMAN SEES CONTEMPLATION AS THE SIMPLE PROCESS OF REPAIRING THE BROKEN CHAIN OF BEING



*Autumn at Bonnevaux: Week after week, a profusion of cyclamen covers the woods and pathways.*

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## Dear Friends

A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

By the age of eight, I had mastered the London Underground. As I grew older, I always felt confident exploring the concrete jungles of new cities I visited and felt at home in the fast, impersonal flow of urban life. Parks were great places to play and have picnics, but I could not name most of the things that grew there, however lovely they were. I did love hollyhocks that grew up to three metres tall, on construction sites, sidewalks and gardens. As a child they seemed to me beautiful and eccentric, with their long stalks and large scarlet, pink, white or deep purple blooms. I was told they were biennial, but I was not observant enough in the natural world to verify it; there was always so much to do and discover in the city. But in our garden at home, I took on a childish megalomaniac project to restore a pond that had been filled in with earth and where a small forest of plants had taken root. The first big impact of nature on me was my attempt at deforestation, but it thrilled me that so much diversity and activity was present in such a limited space. When I went into the country, however, I felt I was going into a new world whose language I barely understood. If I was with a country-dweller who could read the smells and colours of the flora and fauna, I recognised how great were the gaps in my education and yet still felt that I did really belong there somehow.

After meditation this morning, a beautiful September morning, I walked in the autumn of the life cycle around the lake of Bonnevaux. The pandemic anchored me here for the past two years and graced me with the opportunity to learn more about the extraordinary wonders of the natural world that is always around us yet often ignored. As the trees change colour and the days grow shorter and the nights chillier, a profusion of cyclamen covers the woods



Cyclamens at Bonnevaux

and pathways, week after week. This lovely flower with delicate upturned petals, pink, white and light purple, seems oddly out of season just because it is so springlike. Different varieties can appear in any month, I am told. Now they seem like Nature's way of reassuring us that the winter that is coming will be a dark night of sleep but not an extinction of life. Like love appearing when least expected or the release of creativity after depression, these flowers prove hope by their simple beauty and just by being there.

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In Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin says 'I believe that the world will be saved by beauty'. In Myshkin, Dostoevsky wanted to create a character, a 'positively beautiful man', Christlike in his purity. He comes from a noble family but is an outsider in his social world, often ridiculed for his naiveté and mistakes, yet never taking offence but instead joining in the laughter at himself.

The 20th century writer Alexandr Solzhenitsyn challenged Prince Myshkin's statement, asking 'when did beauty ever save anything' in this bloodthirsty

and corrupt world? As he thought more about it, however, he saw its hidden luminous truth, not as a platitude but a prophecy. He identified it only with the beauty of art. In our century, as we see how imminent is the long-foreseen, long-denied ecological breakdown, do we need to believe Prince Myshkin but to find beauty not only in art but in its source, nature itself? And, if so, how do we reawaken that childlike thrill in the wondrous, surprising beauty of the world? We will save the world only if we love it. We cannot help but love what we find beautiful.

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All healing involves self-healing. The present self-healing of humanity will lead us, we hope, to a new stage of our evolution: the first step is asking what has gone so badly wrong? Human beings have always been violent and self-centred, greedily running after short-term satisfaction. Yet, with the unleashed powers of nature that science has discovered, and technology put to work, our usual madness has become catastrophically off-scale. The self-hatred that has always characterised the social interactions of *homo sa-*

*piens* and which we see in the individual psyche is now spinning out of control. The death camps and killing fields of the last and bloodiest century of history reveal the same virus as the pollution and destruction of the earth's ecosystems. The divorce between the inner and the outer ecologies is putting us at war with all other species. With all our staggering medical, economic, and scientific advances, why have we become so dysfunctional, so mad?

Universal wisdom sees the world as a 'great chain of being', but humanity has become its weakest link. 'Meaning' means conscious connection, being linked. And so, if the chain breaks, meaning is lost. The simple question 'what is the purpose of human life?' has been answered in an enriching multitude of ways; but with the growing sense of disconnection today, much of humanity, especially the more affluent, are seeing the spectre of meaninglessness. The different answers and descriptions woven by spiritual traditions then seem like ropes swinging loose, disconnected and failing the search for purpose. This endemic confusion and break with wisdom as a living transmission is becoming an epidemic; the local becomes global. It leads on to a devaluation of the human, a dehumanising reduction of ourselves lower than artificial intelligence, or to a DNA thread we can tinker with to recreate our species. To dehumanise the human is to brutalise the human. In such an agitated and chaotic state of consciousness, we can hardly be expected to see the beauty of the natural world.

We have therefore, as a second step, to repair ourselves, to reconnect the links in the broken chain of being: to see the beauty of human nature itself. 'Man must first be restored to himself, making of himself a stepping-stone to rise thence to God', St Augustine wrote,

inspiring John Main to see how the recovery of the practice of meditation could be shared with the contemporary world. With his genius of simplicity, he said that to 'get in touch with ourselves first' triggers the healing of the whole.

\*

The Buddha once taught a student by asking a question, 'If sunlight enters a room through an East-facing window, where does the shaft of light fall?' 'On the Western wall,' the student replied. 'And if there is no west wall?' 'On the ground.' 'If there is no ground?' 'On wa-

the violent turmoil of clashing opinions and judgments, this vision of beauty and its joyfulness is lost. Then the contemplation of nature cannot link us to the contemplation of the source of consciousness and to the ground of being. We burn out in the attempt to solve the ever-growing mass of problems. When they seem insoluble, we lose hope. The shaft of sunlight landing nowhere describes contemplation itself: paying attention to the no-thingness of everything, emptiness and the first of the beatitudes, poverty of spirit. In contrast, when the heart is set free from attach-



*The grounds of Bonnevaux are home to a rich diversity of species*

ter.' 'And if there is no water?' 'Then, I suppose', the student answered, 'it will not land.' 'Exactly', said the Buddha.

Repairing the chain of being, reconnecting to the beauty of human nature, seeing the beauty that saves us, is a single, simple, unified process. It is not about analysis or solutions but seeing. Contemplation is the simple seeing and enjoyment of the truth. It sets the light-beam of consciousness free. This is essentially joyful. We enjoy the truth even when it is painful.

When consciousness is clouded by

ment, possessiveness and obsessive clinging, consciousness expands and soars like the expanding universe.

Here is an example of how the illusion of materialistic scientism that underlies our wrecking of the environment is being exposed and dismissed by science itself – a true science that is itself a form of contemplation: if the universe is expanding, what is it expanding into? The answers of physicists to this question read like sayings from the mystics. The universe is not expanding 'into' anything and does not need

'outside' space to expand. It is a matter of scale. The expansion of the universe is not measurable like the increases and decreases of everyday life. There is no 'outside' to observe the expansion of the universe. Does this sound familiar?

I wish I could understand it. I also wish I could understand how meditation expands, heals and integrates consciousness and makes me know I belong to the whole. We can 'understand' it, however, from *within*, by understanding that we are understood. At the top of the chain of consciousness, there is no inner and outer, no distance between us and God. Here and there, 'God will be all in all' (1 Cor 15:28).

How can this save the world?

First, by freeing us from the stranglehold of materialistic scientism. Science is essentially a contemplative practice. Materialism is a modern variant of true science that caused a divorce of the wisdom of religious traditions from science and broke the link between it and the institutions of society. To teach a spiritual practice today, for example in business, education or medicine, it is usually necessary to justify it by a reductionistic proof of its health and social benefits. The full meaning – the linking connection – between meditation and the whole of human life is officially ignored although, of course, it manifests in the personal experience of those learning to meditate.

It saves us by restoring us, despite all the evidence to the contrary, to the knowledge of the intrinsic beauty and goodness of human nature. From this we come to see the beauty of hollyhocks and cyclamen again, of trees, creepy crawlies and giraffes.

Beauty is the manifestation of the whole in each part. Only the eye of the beholder needs to be whole for this vision of God - as 'all in all' - to be regained. Then we see creation as ever new.

The light beam of the Buddha's parable lands nowhere. This means it is not absorbed by any concept or image. It is not tricked and trapped by the painful attachments of the individual ego.

ect in our minds. The end of apartheid in South Africa, of Nazism or Soviet communism, was the end of a world for those who had invested themselves in them.



Bonnevaux, Abbaye

Where the spirit is, there is liberty: the result, as St Paul describes it, is a 'peace beyond all understanding'. The Buddha says it is impossible to reach the end of the world by walking, but unless you reach there, you will not reach the end of suffering. Peace involves entering a paradox, a mystery.

COP26 will happen in an apocalyptic global mood. For many apocalypse means only the end of things. But apocalypse also means 'revealing'.

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The end of the suffering of our era does not imply there will be no more suffering in human life - a fantasy idea fed by the illusions of consumerism. It means that we will arrive where we can see the purpose of suffering. Suffering and death as part of life can then be integrated into deep health. The 'world', as the Christian scriptures see it, is not the planet or the cosmos or all the foolish and corrupt things in society. It means the world we construct and proj-

Each time we meditate we let the light-beam of consciousness detach from thoughts and feelings so that it can lead us back to its source. It can be described as dying to self, 'cessation of consciousness', transfiguration. It is the end of the tyranny of divided consciousness and so also, of the dualistic, polarised, intolerant, brutal world it constructs. In recent weeks, with the return of the Taliban, Afghanistan reminds us of what every meditator learns. We should not become complacent or rely only on external supports, because old patterns we thought had ended can return unexpectedly. The light-beam free can become trapped again. 'Keep alert at all times.' (Lk 21:35)

What happens when our mentally, emotionally constructed world ends? The kingdom. When the reign of divided consciousness dissolves and the reign of God is seen, the cosmos becomes present, radiant in its beautiful wholeness. The contemplative person sees it with the eye of the heart, even

though the influence of the old world continues and its endless problems claim our attention. Jesus said he had 'overcome the world'.

The world can be overcome but not by creating an imaginary 'purely spiritual' reality which is what religions separated from their contemplative wisdom try to do. Meditation awakens us to the kingdom while keeping us connected to the harsh unrealities of the world – the injustices, violence and ignorance. If the contemplative were unable to continue to engage with these things, their meditation would itself be illusion.

\*

How then do we save the world from the domination of the polarised mind? How to release the experience of beauty for the healing and renewing of humanity?

The Buddha's climactic moment was under the Bodhi tree when he was enlightened. The dark forces of desire and illusion attacked him as they tempted Jesus in the desert. The Buddhist scriptures say that the spears of the dark force thrown at him turned into beautiful flowers that fell to the ground as he saw through their illusion. He penetrated through the levels of consciousness and reconnected the great chain of being. He touched the earth with his hand and the mother goddess came to affirm his achievement. Jesus too saw through the tempter's seductions.

The climax for Jesus was on the Cross in a moment beyond time that we cannot separate from the Resurrection. But on the Cross, planted in the earth like a tree, he released the power of compassion towards his enemies, not by saying 'I forgive you' but by connecting them to the ground of being itself: 'Father forgive them because they are trapped, tricked in their ignorance and don't know what they are doing'. Their



*Frog on the Bonnevaux lake*

sin – our sin in polluting the Earth – is also ignorance. It does not exist except as an absence and through its effects. These effects are terrible, but they are healed by the expansion of consciousness. Mother Julian came to this insight by seeing the purpose of her suffering: 'I did not see sin because I believe that it has no substance and no real existence. It can only be known by the pain which it causes. This pain does exist, in my view, but only for a limited time. It purifies us, gives us self-knowledge and makes us beg for mercy.'

\*

From its beginning, humanity has been painfully learning how to live in the world. We need to learn better. There is no quick fix, but there is something that brings together the different approaches to the crisis we are in, each at their own level of consciousness. If only meditation was a magic pill or a six-week course or a chip that could be implanted. But if that worked, we wouldn't be human or images of God. As contemplatives, we have to do what we can and feel called to do. Meditation will support and clarify action of this selfless kind.

Yet we still need to ask what differ-

ence meditation makes – the meditation I am practising in the community which it creates. One quality of the contemplative mind is that it endures uncertainty better than the divided mind.

We don't know many things. Will the apocalypse be destruction or revelation? If global leaders fail us and things fall apart, will we who are left be ready to rebuild? Every wisdom tradition gives hope to a fearful world. For the little band of Christ's disciples, it is the hope of resurrection. Our present crisis is more than a cluster of big problems. It is a dark night of the human soul we are passing through, and dark nights lead us through death.

Christianity has this saving wisdom: that death is transformative and resurrection is real and certain. What we contribute to the environmental movement, as Christian meditators, is not anger and anxiety. It is a clarity, rooted in the earth, about the purpose of human existence and about faith in the healing power of transcendence.

With much love

*Environment*

# Contemplating Earth: towards a shift of consciousness and behaviour

JIM GREEN PRESENTS THE NEW WCCM ONLINE COURSE

**8th – 29th August 2021:** another three weeks in the life of the Earth – its four-and-a-half billion years of existence extended by another twenty-one days. On the 8th of this month the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its Sixth Assessment Report, confirming that unless unprecedented cuts are made in carbon emissions, the 21st century will see global warming in excess of 2°C, with catastrophic implications for all life on Earth. The next three weeks also saw the announcement that the previous month had been the hottest July globally since records began, that 2020 had been the hottest year ever recorded in Europe and that Madagascar was on the brink of the world's first climate-induced famine. And all through this period – as for every day now, in every year – the wild-fires raged, floods surged, hurricanes left trails of destruction, habitats were relentlessly destroyed by human activity, and hundreds of species became extinct, never to be seen again on the face of the Earth.

It has also been the three-week period in which I have been writing an online course called *Contemplating Earth* that will be available on the WCCM website from October onwards. The opportunity to engage with the course is part of our community's contribution to the profound shift in consciousness and behaviour that now must happen if life on Earth is to flourish or even survive. In November, Glasgow hosts COP26 – the UN climate conference which many regard as the most important meeting that has yet taken place in the history of



humanity and of the Earth.

We could have called the course *Meditation and the Environment* or *Meditation and Climate Emergency*, but even those worthy titles wouldn't have opened up the perspectives that are carried by *Contemplating Earth*. The popular (mis) understanding of contemplation is that it involves paying targeted attention to a particular object or idea – a kind of patient and lovingly mystified scrutiny of something. The practice of contemplation itself teaches us that it is nothing like this. It has been described by some as the suspension of the distancing subject-object relationship in favour of a simple and silent participation in a loving “community of subjects.” It is the experience of wordless, open-hearted intimacy and presence. We can learn to contemplate from each other, from great teachers, from indigenous people, from children and from animals. The teachers of this life-as-prayer and prayer-as-life

are all around us. The greatest, though, might just be the Earth herself. The title of the course perhaps suggests that we start paying attention to our planet and to our relationship with it – and so we should, urgently. But as we deepen into our practice and our learning, perhaps we will realise that actually we are being invited to *join in* with what the Earth herself is constantly, effortlessly doing. The title of the course turns out to be a *description* of the planet and her ceaseless prayer: this is a *contemplating Earth*.

Writing the course brought the presence of questions – now much more urgent and vivid than ever before – that I and many meditators have long lived with: what is the relationship between contemplation and the need for direct action in the name of social justice? Is meditation a means to an identifiable end? Can it be instrumentalised in that way? What if all of our efforts are forlorn? Do we know what we want to

## Environment

achieve? (Or is escaping from all ideas of ‘achievement’ the only goal we can allow ourselves? What if it’s already too late? For what? What is hope?)

As ever, many questions and – as ever – no readily available answers. We will, as Rilke says, have to *live* the answers ourselves. The chapter titles that emerged may give you a clue to the kind of territory the course journeys through: *Now/Apocalypse; Hope; Intimacy; Different Dreams; Transforming Consciousness...*

It has been a privilege to spend these weeks in the close company of many great teachers, all ablaze with the truth of their vision: people such as Pope Fran-

cis, Joanna Macy, Thomas Berry, Hildegard of Bingen, Father Charles Brandt, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, Sir David Attenborough and our own Linda Chapman ([www.opensanctuarytilba.org/lindas-blog](http://www.opensanctuarytilba.org/lindas-blog)) whose words close the course and this article because they can never be spoken too often:

“Please engage in contemplative action in whatever way you can. Write to politicians, protest peacefully but with deep conviction, join climate and renewable energy groups. We cannot wait any longer.”

Here is the link to *Contemplating Earth*: <http://tiny.cc/ctearth>



# COP26 inspires WCCM around the world



The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) starting in Glasgow at the end of October has inspired a rich programme of reflection and activities within WCCM around the world. For details about the WCCM talks and gatherings taking place before, during and after COP26, please check our website: [http://tiny.cc/wccm\\_cop26](http://tiny.cc/wccm_cop26)

Also available on our website are resources on Meditation and the Climate Crisis, including a dedicated leaflet to guide online meditation for the earth, and materials geared towards children.

All our online and in-person meditation groups around the world are invited to meditate for the earth, especially during the period 25-31 October and 1-12 November.

### YOUNGER MEDITATORS

*How do we develop the right state of heart and mind to deal with the emergency on our planet and how does meditation help us? The best way to prepare for meditation is through small acts of kindness. What small acts of kindness can each of us*

*do for our common home?*

*How about meditating together?*

These questions formed an invitation by Tainā Malaspina (WCCM Director for Meditation with Young Adults) and Cristiana Coimbra (meditator from Brazil) to young people around the world to participate in a project that included 4 sessions focusing on reflections on COP26, the new online course *Contemplating Earth*, Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si*, and the documentary *Albatross*.

Ma Eliza Reyes from the Philippines who joined the first of these sessions commented, “Young people from WCCM are serious about promoting awareness of the environmental problems the world is facing today and about finding solutions to them. Practising meditation can result in us making more mindful choices about sustainable living and care for the environment.”

You can find the recordings of the sessions here: <http://tiny.cc/wccmenv21>

## News

## Bonnevaux: a new milestone

AS THE RETREAT CENTRE PREPARES TO OPEN, THE NEXT PHASE WILL BE THE CONTEMPLATIVE VILLAGE

The renovation work at the Bonnevaux Retreat Centre will be completed in November, and the official opening is planned for Spring 2022. This great achievement was made possible thanks to the generosity of many individuals from the community, foundations, and major donors - and the gracious leadership of Angelene Chan and her team at DP Architects. Angelene will be meeting online with WCCM national communities to describe the work done so far, as well as the next phase. We especially need donations for the Contemplative Village and landscaping. Sponsorship of cells or gardens in memory of loved ones or on behalf of national communities is sought. Angelene Chan is a new member of the Guiding Board and will be supported by Fr Laurence in the online sessions where she will bring the Bonnevaux vision to the national communities. For updates and further information, visit [www.bonnevauxwccm.org](http://www.bonnevauxwccm.org).



*On the left, the Conference Centre (Barn) and on the right, The Retreat Centre (Guesthouse)*

## A living faith - experience as a key element of spirituality

VLADIMÍR VOLRÁB CLOSES OUR SERIES ABOUT RESEARCH ON JOHN MAIN AND CHRISTIAN MEDITATION



As a priest, I often ask myself how to communicate the faith well to people. If we go back to the very beginning of the story of the birth of the Christian faith,

we see the great importance of direct experience. The apostles walked with Jesus and were drawn into the narrative from which faith flowed. Today, we seek to pass on the faith primarily through words of catechesis and education. However, we live in a time when words about Christian spirituality (among others) easily become shallow, and symbols are often misunderstood or misinterpreted. The natural environment of symbols and language is lost to the inevitable continuing secularization and cultural Christianity. Symbols are frequently misused for ideological and political ends that can go against the

spirit of the Gospel.

Thus, the question at the beginning of my dissertation is whether it would be better to put experience before words. To reverse the order and let the desire for words to bring answers flow out of direct experience. The dissertation is based on the person of John Main and his notion of spirituality in which experience plays a key role and from which we then come to know the truths of the Christian faith. He himself states that the path of meditation is primarily a path of faith not of thought. I believe this is a key understanding of spirituality mediating a deep and living faith.



*JMS 2021*

## WCCM 30 years on: celebrating the unfolding pilgrimage

On September 4, 2021, meditators from all around the world gathered for an online John Main Seminar with the theme “Community of Love - Celebrating 30 years of the founding of WCCM”. It was a moment to share silence, teachings, memories, and also art and inspiration. Fr Laurence’s talk on “WCCM and the New Christianity” was followed by a series of short talks by 12 meditators on different aspects of the Community and their experiences within it. You can watch all videos here: <http://tiny.cc/jms21rec>

**Laurence Freeman:** “So, today, as we celebrate, remember, and reflect on the 30th anniversary of the naming of the WCCM, we can have this sense of the fullness of time unfolding and touching us with the *pleroma*, the fullness of Christ. (...) What kind of community have we become over the last 30 years? Rowan Williams said that the WCCM, for many, is a model of what a truly Contemplative Christianity may look like in the future: Christian, Christ-centred, inter-denominational, free from the history of denominational warfare that all religions experienced.

**Peter Ng, Singapore:** “The question is: What has the last 30 years of the development of WCCM been preparing us for? I think it has been preparing us to contribute to a transformation of consciousness in the post-pandemic world.”

**Kath Houston, Australia:** “In the face of great difficulties, the light shines brightly in the world. Our communities continue to be self-motivated, and a whole lot of new things are coming to life.”

**Vladimír Volráb, Czech Republic:** “I believe continuing education is key for us. It is important for us to try to put our experience of silence into the world responsibly.”

**Sister Denise McMahon, Fiji:** “One of the great joys of my life in which I have really experienced the grace of living out my missionary vocation has been to share the gift of meditation to the children in the schools of Fiji.”

The contemplative life lifts us up above that inter-denominational conflict without losing the richness of those traditions. We are also able, therefore, to welcome non-believers, and there are many of them in the world today. They come to our groups, to visit us at Bonnevaux. People seeking, and not really knowing what they are seeking, are reluctant to identify with any particular tradition or path, and yet, they are on a path: the path of seeking. We can welcome them. In this Contemplative Christianity, we can also be eager for dialogue, not frightened of it.”

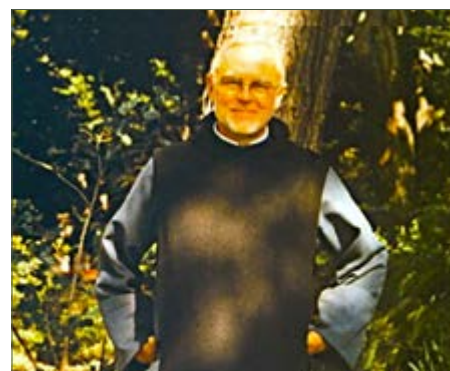
**Pascale Callec, France:** “The context of the pandemic has placed us at the heart of the ecological crisis and the need to engage very important individual and collective changes.”

**Josie von Zitzewitz, UK:** “It’s the contact with this community, which has been very close at times and loose at others, that has enabled the teaching and the practice to become so deeply rooted in my life.”

**Martin Malina, Canada:** “Yes, in our places, we unite with those who gather with us there, but ultimately the grace, love and freedom come to us a second time in the Worldwide Community, where we unite in the holy space of meditation.”

**Enrique Lavin, Mexico:** “Through this pandemic, a loving and beautiful community emerged through Zoom with all the countries from Latin America.”

**Magda Jass, Canada** (about the early



*Seminar also celebrated the life and legacy of John Main*

days of the Community in Montreal):

“I came regularly and said my mantra, I learned to live with uncertainty. I knew meditation was what I needed to do without really understanding it. Meditating became a necessity.”

**Taynā Malaspina, Brazil:** “Young people need this space of just being, so that they can breathe and be in silence in a society that stresses the importance of having things and doing things.”

**Nick Scrimenti, USA:** “The John Main Center (at Georgetown) brings an ancient institution like the monastic cell in a conversation with, and sometimes in opposition to, a modern education.”

**Jonathan Maresca, USA:** “The contemplative wisdom at Bonnevaux transformed my faith and vocation, but I would be lying to you if I did not say that it was the relationships that keep Bonnevaux as a sacred memory and a spiritual well-spring for me.”

*Books*

# Poetica Divina: Poems to Redeem a Prose World

SARAH BACHELARD INTRODUCES HER NEW BOOK



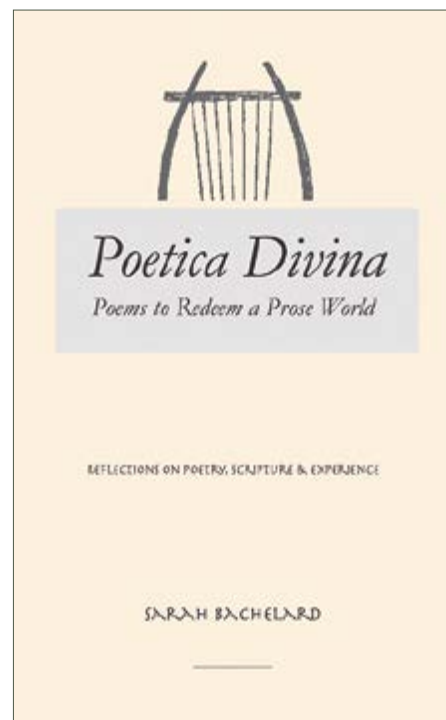
winter for three years, we explored four poems in conversation with a passage of scripture, discovering what the juxtaposition of sometimes unlikely texts opened up for us. The process of choosing each poem and its accompanying text was largely intuitive. As I prepared for each series, I let a poem ‘choose’ me – seeking to listen for what was energising and drawing me from poems I had recently read. And then, as the choice of poem became clear, I sought to allow a passage of Scripture to be given in a similar way – letting it come. Sometimes, I felt reasonably clear from the beginning about the connection between the two texts; at other times, the depth of their relationship began to show itself only as I sat with each one, and brought them into conversation with experience.

ered that such reflection leads always towards contemplation. Each poem and text touching into deep truths of reality, and, in the end, leading us to the edge of mystery – the point at which words run out, and what’s left is wonder, unknowing, silence ...

American poet Denise Levertov has said that, ‘Insofar as poetry has a social function, it is to awaken sleepers by means other than shock’. It’s this experience of poetry as revelation that has always drawn me. Good poetry opens our eyes to see the world more truly; it tunes us into the subtler frequencies of feeling and reality, helps us realise what in some sense we already know, but haven’t fully recognised. Poetry is a form of wisdom literature and in that sense, says Australian poet Les Murray, it is inherently ‘religious’. It’s not that there is something called ‘poetry’, a subset of which has religious or devotional subject matter. Rather, good poetry is itself religious. It connects and reconnects us to the whole of ourselves and our knowing, and the whole of reality.

*Poetica Divina* emerged from a series of reflections that I shared at Benedictus Contemplative Church. Each

So the process of writing this book itself involved a kind of ‘lectio’ or ‘poetica divina’, by which I mean an attentive, reverential, non-grasping engagement. I was not trying to ‘explain’ poem, Scripture and experience, so much as to delight in how they illuminate each other and the meaning of things. And, like all ‘lectio’, I discov-



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## Other new books from Medio Media

**Hold the Rope, Carry Your Cross - Christianity and the Ten Bull Pictures of Zen**

By Andrew McAlister

This book uses a re-imagining of Zen’s Ten Bull (or Ox-Herding) Pictures, seeing them with a Christian eye.

**COMING OUT SOON:**

**Meditators on Meditation and Marriage - The experiences of those who do both**

**Just Turn Up! - the journey of an aspiring meditator and the challenges they face on the way.** By Julie Roberts

*In Focus*

## Anu Pylkkänen, Finland



Finland is very Lutheran: about 70% of the population are members of the Church. In Helsinki, the reformed Lutheran church and its services are very down to earth, non-mystical and really open to everyone. It has both women and men priests and bishops.

Growing up in Helsinki, with its liberal and permissive spiritual atmosphere where the Church did not regulate or really exercise any strong role in our lives, formed my relationship with the Church. I am very grateful that the Church was approachable and sort of neutral. Even if I only went there for weddings, christenings, confirmations and funerals, the support and steadiness of the Church felt really good.

This Church, however, was not the place where I would go for spiritual nourishment. I have felt the strong pull of the simplest wordless *presence* for as long as I can remember, so I went looking for answers elsewhere. My path took me along what I would call the “usual eastern route”. I explored the really wonderful teachings of many Indian and Buddhist masters which still today I appreciate as precious jewels. I am enormously grateful for the doors they opened in me.

Meditation, I felt, was the way forward for me, and I longed to find a practice that would “make flesh” all these teachings. However, the last place I would look for this was the Church, as I had never heard of meditation being combined with Christianity. So when, some ten years ago, a friend saw a small advertisement about Christian meditation, we decided to go and see what it was all about. I still remember that little group where we felt so welcome. I had a sense of homecoming. It was something I immediately knew I wanted to go deeper into. From that day on, I have attended the group every week. I read John Main’s *Word into Silence*, which opened the door for me. It remains to this day the book to which

I perhaps feel closest.

The path, then, has presented a number of interesting adventures and challenges, such as giving many presentations on Christian meditation, doing translations, meeting absolutely wonderful people, and then also becoming the National Coordinator for Finland, and finally also returning to the Church.

A priest once said that he had to stop his theological university education, as he felt that they were only talking about recipes and there was no food on the table. When he found meditation, he found the food and then could go back to the university. Or as an Indian Master put it, “You cannot taste honey by licking a book where the word honey is written.” Meditation is the real experience.

I also feel that like any meal, the manna of meditation is best shared with other people. John Main said that meditation creates community and, as one of my favourite writers, Simone Weil, put it:

*“For nothing among human things has such power to keep our gaze fixed ever more intensely upon God than friendship for the friends of God.”*

(Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*)



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**Would you like to contribute to the WCCM Newsletter? Our next deadline is 20 November.**

## Events

### HH the Dalai Lama will bless Bonnevaux and WCCM during a dialogue online in December



*The Dalai Lama and Laurence Freeman at one of the sessions from The Way of Peace series*

The Dalai Lama will meet Laurence Freeman again, this time online, to speak on Unified Consciousness (the WCCM theme for 2022). It will be an online dialogue on 1st December, at 4:30 am (French time) during which the Dalai Lama will

bless Bonnevaux and the Community. The event will provide an opportunity also to celebrate a longstanding friendship and the 30th Anniversary of the founding of WCCM. More information will be published soon on the WCCM website.

### Pilgrimages led by Laurence Freeman in 2022

#### Holy Land (17-24 Feb 2022)

“Life is a pilgrimage – as every meditator comes to discover through their inner journey. When we go to the Holy Land as contemplative pilgrims – not tourists but pilgrims – we are strengthened in understanding life’s purpose. And so, we come to see our personal journey with deeper gratitude and wonder.”(Laurence Freeman)

#### Fatima, Lourdes and Bonnevaux (18-29 Oct 2022)

A journey to two of the foremost Marian sites, Fatima and Lourdes, plus a 3-day retreat in Bonnevaux. Meditating together, worshiping, sharing personal journeys, will become part of the healing and inspiration that each of these holy places offers the pilgrim.

For more information about both pilgrimages: <http://tiny.cc/pilgm22>

### WCCM online events

2 NOV

**Health Series - The Harmonies of a Healthy Life**, final session with Dr Barry White and Laurence Freeman

4-7 NOV

**Living Life Anew** - Highlighting the WCCM Spain, led by Laurence Freeman

9 NOV

**Speaker Series: A Healthy Intelligence for Our Digitised Societies**, led by Marco Schorlemmer

*MORE INFO & REGISTRATION:*  
*visit [wccm.org](http://wccm.org)*

### Bonnevaux events

These are in-person retreats hosted in a test-phase, to prepare for the official opening of the Retreat Centre Guesthouse:

9-13 NOV

**Seeing with the Heart**, a retreat led by Cynthia Bourgeault

29 NOV-5 DEC

**Saving Time** - Advent Retreat led by Laurence Freeman and Giovanni Felicioni

*MORE INFO & REGISTRATION:*  
*visit [bonnevauxwccm.org](http://bonnevauxwccm.org)*

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# Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE CANADIAN CHRISTIAN MEDITATION COMMUNITY



## FALL 2021

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Photo: Foley Mountain, Ontario in Autumn by Duncan Rawlinson, Creative Commons

# The National Appeal

The National Appeal invites us to think carefully about giving back to our community here in Canada for the gift we have been given, the gift of Christian Meditation.

Your donations help us to continue to share our tradition with the wider community in many ways and support the large number of groups meeting every week across Canada.

I know the past eighteen months have been difficult for our community as we have experienced uncertainty and disruption to our in-person relating. In a real way, we are now learning how to start again. Or, restart with what we have learned over the past eighteen months. And this is not an easy task.

But this time has been a blessing as well. We have shown resiliency in continuing to meet with whatever means possible – on Zoom, in new configurations and settings, meditated or otherwise. We have learned



new skills and continue to do so. The learning curve is steep! A positive result is that these days community members have more options like never before, to meet with other Christian Meditators in Canada and around the world.

The gift of meditation we have received is priceless and it is our wish to continue to share it. And share it we will continue to do! I hope you see evidence of these efforts in the pages of this newsletter.

The peace, the stillness, the harmony that we experience in meditation becomes the basis for all our action. (John Main, OSB)

I encourage you to support the Canadian community by giving to our National Appeal at this time.

With my love and grateful thanks.

**Martin Malina**  
National Coordinator

## FROM THE NATIONAL COORDINATOR

# Experiencing Unity Today

*Martin Malina gave this talk during the online John Main Seminar on September 4, 2021. Here follows an adapted version:*

In order to celebrate an anniversary, as the Canadian Christian Meditation Community does this year alongside the WCCM, we do so in unity. How we experience unity today depends a lot on our past.

My understanding of unity was influenced by the makeup of my family of origin: I have an identical twin brother. And all members of the family into which I was born—two parents and my twin brother—are ordained pastors in the Lutheran Church. Originally, this sameness meant that if we weren't of the same mind on any topic, or if we did not live under the same roof, our unity came into question for me. Of course, experiences of life and marriage and leadership have challenged this original notion for me.

Canada is the oldest national community in the WCCM. Canada is the place where the community of which we speak finds its roots. John Main died in Montreal. And his legacy in Canada resulted, over time, in the development of different institutions and organizations including meditators from Newfoundland in the east, to British Columbia in the west, to the

Territories in the north – or as we now say, 'from coast to coast to coast' – spanning a geography of thousands of kilometres and six time zones.

Today, there are individual meditators who do not belong to any small group meeting in a physical place. They may live in rural places and connect online to hear talks from Toronto, meditate with folks from Halifax or Yellowknife, attend Essential Teaching Workshops streaming from Calgary or do yoga and attend Mass from Bonnevaux.

So, where is the place where it happens, where we can notice our unity? Our Canadian diversity challenges the search for unity. We speak two official languages – French and English. Small groups dot the land from coast to coast to coast. Our regional differences are significant – whether French-speaking, Anglophone, Atlantic, Central, Western or Northern Canada, Indigenous. Our religious differences – Catholic, Protestant, un-affiliated affect the norms and the culture by which we lead and make decisions. Friendships and relationships are formed along generational, racial and cultural distinctions among youth and elders. Where is the place that unites us? Is there such a thing? These distinct places where we physically meet say a lot about what distinguishes even separates us.

*Continues opposite*

## Experiencing Unity Today *continued from opposite*

How can we find hope in the evolving Community of Love faced with all this lack of consistency in the social fabric of how we relate and experience unity? I believe the answer is not by renouncing these places. We are not hot-air balloons drifting aimlessly and disconnectedly from the ground upon which we live our daily lives.

The places in which we gather to meditate, matter. We naturally seek a physical place to which we attach our common identity in the community of love. They ground us in our identity as Christian Meditators. In board rooms, church basements, living rooms, offices, lecture halls, in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver, Yellowknife. We need our places.

But we also need more than these places.

This summer I canoed on the Barron River in Algonquin Park relatively close to where I live. There is a spectacular red flower found almost exclusively along this river: the cardinal plant, *Lobelia cardinalis*. What is special about this plant is that it requires not one, but two visits by a hummingbird to procreate. (Roy MacGregor, *Canoe Country: The Making of Canada*, Toronto: Penguin Books, 2015, p.131)

In other words, new life and growth require two visits, two connecting points, both. Not just one.

We need to start somewhere. We arrive at the big picture, the global scene, first by going deeply and rightly through the specific and the ordinary. This is the first touch point, in our places. We recognize and appreciate the particular place in which we meet each moment of our lives.

At the same time, “When we go deep in any one place, we will meet all places,” as Richard Rohr writes (*Daily Meditations*, 15 August 2021). This is the second and necessary touch point. And it’s where we discover and celebrate our unity in the community of love.

Contemplative Christians and meditators will appreciate reality in its wholeness, their connection, their

universal frame, instead of just their particularity. This is the paradox, of course. Both/And.

I therefore arrive at the concept of space. Not just place. There is a difference. We have our places. We celebrate them. We identify with them. We articulate them. Locally, where we are, on the ground, and with all their attending challenges and joys. Places, we go to. Spaces, we enter.

In Christian Meditation we enter a divine space. We enter it, because it is already there. It is divine, because it is grace, it is gift. This space can disturb and challenge us at times. And at other times it is a space wherein we find peace. It is nevertheless the space where God is free to meet us wherever we are.

I’m not talking about outer space, up there. I’m talking primarily about inner space. Interiorly, the space we enter can be the gaps between our thoughts, or when we enter through the doors of silence into the forest of our unconscious. It can be the ‘no-place’ of grief. This space can be the untouchable region of the apophatic, wordless, imageless prayer. On the outside, it is any place where we experience the gifts of silence, stillness and simplicity – in nature or indoors or online – with others.

In this meditative space God is there. God is everywhere – wherever there is the unbounded space of grace, the space of freedom and the space of love.

I believe it is in the space of meditation where we grow, find new life and experience unity in our community of love. Yes, in our places we unite with those who gather with us there. But ultimately the grace, love and freedom come to us a second time, in the world-wide community, where we unite in the holy space of meditation. Ultimately, we find our unity – despite our diversity – in the space of meditation.

The hummingbird visits not once, but twice. And maybe, many more times than that.

**Martin Malina**  
**canadacoordinator@wccm.org**

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# Thoughts on Meditation by Zoom



Thanks to the convenience of Zoom and the work of the Holy Spirit, our Holy Family Christian Meditation group has expanded to about 25 people from different churches and locations, from Kingston to Markham to Caledon to Stratford... and we even have someone joining us from Edmonton!

I asked a few people, “What has been your experience of meditating online?”

Here are some responses:

Lorie Wilson: “It has helped center me and keep me focused”

Norma Deacon: “The meditation sessions give me a feeling of calm, which lasts for the whole day and in fact the whole week.”

Carolyn M. Paradis: “I am surprised to learn through online meditation that silence builds community and the stillness fosters solidarity.”

Paul Fisher: “Meditation is new to me. In the prayers of the people we present our wish list to God. In meditation we allow God to silently heal us and lead us as God knows we need.”

**Rev. Julie Meakin  
Brampton, ON**

## One Meditator’s Journey

I had heard about meditation but never gave it a thought. After all, I was born in Sri Lanka, a Buddhist country, where meditation is a discipline, and lived there for forty years.

My friend’s daughter, Rondinne, invited me to my first meditation session, when I was on holiday in Australia. Rondinne was very serious about meditating, so I went to downtown Melbourne to do “Meditation in the Park”. The venue was at the corner of a busy intersection and on another side was a Lawn Bowling Club! So we had plenty of sound all around us.

We meditated for one hour. I do not remember using a prayer word (mantra) – instead the leader would sound the Tibetan gong ever so silently to bring our wandering thoughts back to our primary purpose. There were about 40+ attending. They were seated on lawn chairs, mats, blankets and some also had their sleeping bags. I spotted a butterfly and tried in vain

to keep my focus on this pretty colored creature. The hour dragged on. It was hot and I was exhausted.

Three years later, Rev. Glenda Meakin visited us at Holy Family and introduced us to Christian Meditation. We meditated for 5-10 minutes at first. Rev. Julie continued introducing us to many other speakers, Fr. John Main, Fr. Laurence, Kim Nataraja and others. Our Holy Family group was small, but has grown to over 25 people who meet every Wednesday morning via Zoom. At first, I felt it was not my cup of tea, but I have come to enjoy the inspirational talks and the fellowship we share.

I cannot say I have learned the art of stillness, or even freeing my mind of those million and one thoughts that pass through it, for even a few seconds, even with our prayer word. In spite of this I can see how meditation has many benefits and cultivates your well-being.

**Corinne W.  
Church of the Holy Family  
Brampton, ON**



# Living One Day at a Time

If this pandemic has taught us anything it's to consider those things that we think of as ordinary, now extraordinary. Examples would be going to a restaurant, lunch with friends, hugging a good friend, shaking hands and even attending places of worship. Everything that we previously took for granted now seems so precious. We do know that we will get through this difficult time, we just do not know when and in that sense it creates uncertainty, worry and anxiety.

Many of you know that I am a meditator. I lead meditation and also teach meditation, including too those that live and struggle with substance abuse. I try to meditate twice a day, in effect using my meditation time as bookends of the day – the beginning and the end of each day. In meditating we don't talk or think about God, we are just with God. I believe that God will always be present to us in silence and stillness.

As we go through this pandemic it is of immense help if we can try to live our lives one day at a time. Live in the present, in this moment! Meditation is a key to doing this. It is about silence and stillness. When we meditate we are taking our attention off ourselves

and placing our attention on a word or short phrase that is called a mantra (a prayer word). By doing this we move ourselves away from our egos and place our attention on our word or mantra. We let go of thoughts and images that form causing distractions.

Distractions cause our minds to dwell either in the past or the future. (Studies have shown that we can spend as much as 60% of our time thinking about what has happened in the past). When we meditate we simply let go of these thoughts when they arise. In the truest sense when meditating we are living in the present moment.

There is a short essay that captures perfectly what living in the present moment is all about. It is beautiful and has such wonderful meaning. Meditating allows you to live more and more in the present moment. Please enjoy the piece below.

We should all try to keep our focus on TODAY as we move through the pandemic "one day at a time".

Blessing to you,

**Jack Murta**  
Ottawa, ON

## *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*

There are two days in every week  
about which we should not worry,  
Two days which should be kept free  
of fear and apprehension.

One of these days is YESTERDAY,  
with its mistakes and cares,  
Its faults and blunders,  
Its aches and pains.  
YESTERDAY has passed forever beyond our control.  
All the money in the world cannot  
bring back YESTERDAY.  
We cannot undo a single act we performed;  
We cannot erase a single word we said.  
YESTERDAY is gone.

The other day we should not worry  
about is TOMORROW  
with its possible adversities, its burdens,  
and its larger promise.  
TOMORROW is also beyond our immediate control.

TOMORROW, the sun will rise,  
Either in splendour or behind a mask of clouds,  
But it will rise.  
Until it does, we have no stake in TOMORROW  
for it is as yet unborn.

This leaves only one day – TODAY.  
Any person can fight the battles of just one day.  
It is only when you and I add the burdens  
of those two awful eternities  
– YESTERDAY and TOMORROW –  
That we break down.

It is not the experience of TODAY  
that drives people mad.  
It is remorse or bitterness for some-  
thing which happened YESTERDAY  
And the dread of what TOMORROW may bring.

Let us, therefore, live but ONE day at a time.

(Author Unknown)

# Sabbath Rest

A walk to the river  
Trees so still  
waiting  
Soft breezes bend leaves gently  
into Earth's breathing  
Ah! so many shades of green  
that eyes exult  
as ears stay keen to twitterings  
and rustlings  
Below me  
the beach  
a church  
a sanctuary  
I sit  
still      open  
As waters lap in sweet contentment  
a voice  
I love you   love you   love you  
                around my heart

I live in a lovely town which was built by the Ottawa River. When I'm feeling sad or lonely, a consolation of which I can easily avail myself living in this sort of paradise, is to go by the river and just "be" there. Always, I come away refreshed and made new. My viewpoint in this poem was sitting on a quite steep

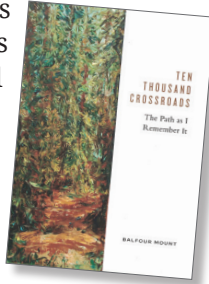
wooded and grassy hill looking down upon the beach and the river below. It was early in the day; all was very quiet, something one can find here and even more easily these days.

**Madelaine Mageau**  
**Deep River, ON**

# Ten Thousand Crossroads

Recognized as the father of palliative care in North America, Balfour Mount facilitated a sea change in medical practice by foregrounding concern for the whole person facing incurable illness. In this intimate and far-reaching memoir, Mount leads the reader through the formative moments and milestones of his personal and professional life as they intersect with the history of medical treatment over the last 50 years.

Dr. Mount first encountered John Main through an article in the Montreal Gazette in the spring of 1982. He was fascinated by the possibility of a link between meditation and the care of the terminally ill. He requested an interview with John Main which took place in the splendid library of the Priory on Pine Avenue. In October of 1982, Dr. Mount once again visited the Priory to invite John Main to give a keynote address at the International Palliative Congress. This time he was met by a young



monk, Laurence Freeman, who explained that Father John would meet him in his private rooms on the first floor. It was then that he discovered that Father John was suffering from terminal cancer. Despite this, Father John insisted on speaking at the conference. This was to be his last public talk – later published as *Death, the Inner Journey*.

Balfour Mount became increasingly involved with the activities of the Christian Meditation Community. He was the guest speaker at the 1989 John Main Seminar. At the pivotal 1991 John Main Seminar given by Bede Griffiths, Dr. Mount was appointed Chair of the Guiding Board of the newly formed World Community for Christian Meditation. He and his wife Linda were members of the initial board of Meditatio – The Canadian Christian Meditation Community.

Dr Mount's latest work, *Ten Thousand Crossroads*, can be ordered below

## Covenant amendment update

The National Council is in the process of updating the Covenant which has guided the work of the Canadian meditation community since 2003. There are some structural changes, particularly with respect to the Charity under which we have operated till now, and there are other changes which make it an appropriate time for updates which we would like to have in place before the Conference and General Meeting to be held next June.

The Covenant can be amended "by a unanimous vote of the National Council providing that the proposed amendment(s) is/are publicized in the Community's

Quarterly Newsletter six months before a vote is scheduled and the general membership is encouraged to provide comments on the issues involved."

In order to comply with the requirement for six months' notice of amendments the Council hereby gives notice that amendments to the Covenant of the Canadian Christian Meditation Community will be published on the Community website [www.wccm-canada.ca](http://www.wccm-canada.ca) by December 31, 2021. We invite your comments which can be sent to [canadacoordinator@wccm.org](mailto:canadacoordinator@wccm.org).

**Martin Malina, National Coordinator**

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

# Canadian Christian Meditation Community Conference



with **Laurence Freeman, OSB**  
at St Paul University in Ottawa, 10 to 12 June 2022

Join us for the next CCMC conference,  
a time to gather together for fellowship and prayer,  
a time to renew friendships, a time to renew our faith.

Questions and suggestions are welcome as we plan this  
event. Please email **[william\\_meek@bell.net](mailto:william_meek@bell.net)**.

**Registration will open January 2022**

**MORE DETAILS TO COME**

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