

# Meditatio

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## A new Way of Peace

In June **Laurence** Freeman and the **Dalai Lama** met to discuss their dialogue in India next January as well as a new **Way of Peace** series



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Dear Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman

There is something very beautiful and particularly human about a group of people leaving their beds first thing in the morning, closing their doors quietly so as not to disturb the silence and converging on their common space of prayer together. They go to their accustomed chair or cushion – we are all creatures of habit – and settle, waiting for the bell. Whether it is in a monastery or on a retreat, where a temporary community is formed over time, this silent common purpose and unanimity is deeply revealing. It shows how like animals we are – watch birds flock for the night and migrate in the winter or mammals trekking their daily paths to forage and feed their young. We recognise something of ourselves in this natural behaviour. Yet to converge, before the hunting and gathering of the day, simply to pray is also to recognise ourselves as human and to expand in self-knowledge.

At Monte Oliveto the annual retreat has become a tradition. It is always different. The chemistry of the nationalities – twelve this year – the individuals who have come alone or the group of friends who have come together, the personality of the monastic guest master (everyone loved the merry and attentive Dom Lorenzo), Giovanni's new metaphors for his yoga class ('your limbs flow like olive oil'), the liturgical feasts (the Corpus Christi procession around the church which we joined in to the puzzlement of some and the mixed nostalgia of others): everything is cyclical yet nothing is repeatable. Places and life-rhythms are like old friends. We recognise them with happy satisfaction and relief that they are still with us. All joy has recognition in it. Life is not only new but, even more significantly, renewable. We 'catch up' with each other and thus remember who we are, advancing a little in consciousness each time we recognise an old friend.

At the first meditation of the day which we call 'optional' so that people don't feel guilty if they can't make it, nearly everyone is there, on time, becoming still, waiting for the bell to sound

like runners in a race. Some coughers will need to be reminded to be more mindful; but generally the instinct to be silent and still together is very strong. Then as the bell launches us into the work of silence we realise how noisy is the world daring to come in and visit us through the wide open windows of the long meditation hall: swallows, doves, a distant but omnipresent cuckoo, the bells waking up the monks for their Office, the spluttering Fiat bringing the loud-voiced signora who works in the vegetable garden below and whom the guest master has, to the best of his ability, trained for the past week to be quiet(er) during the morning prayer. A symphony of noise beside the work of silence.

*As soon as we have started the journey of meditation we become aware this lack of awareness in ourselves*

Yet, as any experienced meditator knows, it is not the external noise that distracts us but our internal distractions that become the noise that hides the silence. You are meditating and your mind is scattered. You are hanging on to the mantra as onto a handrail on a ship in a storm, avoiding the relentless demands and grip of your problems or hurts or daydreams. Then a door bangs or a loud voice penetrates the room from outside or someone fidgets near you, irritation arises and you blame the noise or movement for making your work more difficult. But if you are meditating and you have been led to a state of peace and attention, you have found some degree of clarity and wakeful stillness and are free, for a while, from your besetting thoughts and emotions. Then a door bangs or someone coughs loudly. But it does not arouse anger. It can be accepted, like the intrusive cuckoo, simply for what it is. No blame. Compassion is stronger than anger.

This year our theme was the "book of the heart" and the stages of the contemplative journey. It may be hard to measure the spiritual but the masters of the spiritual life have understood how helpful it is to have a map and a sense of the steps we pass through. The time involved for each step varies for individuals; and there is no pill for speeding up the process, only the medicine of faith which saves us from wasting time.

Chartres cathedral in Northern France is itself a book in stone with the stories and doctrines of our tradition illustrated with great beauty in a powerful harmony of art and faith that the modern mind can barely understand. In a pre-literate age this was how the people learned. The stained glass and the sculptures were the comic books of their time but also one of the highest achievements of a civilisation. On the west portal of the building, inserted among the many small sculptures expressing the most important beliefs and ideas by which people once made sense of their lives, there is a special sequence of six. They show a veiled seated woman holding a book in different ways and representing the stages of contemplation.

These were the pictures that informed our daily conference during the warm days of the Monte Oliveto retreat. After meditation, breakfast and yoga the same silent converging took place, this time in the Aula S Benedeto, the conference room we entered in the far left corner of a large red-tiled courtyard that had absorbed the sun for centuries. To keep people awake but also to remember how mind and body together are our organs of perception, we took a break half way through each conference. We filed out into the courtyard and were led in simple sense-awakening exercises, touching the ancient smooth stone walls or stretching up into the blueness above. Then filing back refreshed and smiling for the second half of the talk.

In the first sculpture in the sequence the woman is in a pre-contemplative state. As soon as we have started the

journey of meditation we become aware of this lack of awareness in ourselves. Until this awareness dawns we are really lost. Perhaps later we remember it as a stage, not so distant, where we couldn't understand or feel interest in whatever contemplation or meditation might mean. We were either too busy or too frightened. We may have been chasing after the 'something' we hoped would satisfy or justify our existence without really knowing what the 'more' was that we



lusted for. Or we may have been disillusioned and depressed, unconvinced that the 'something else' beyond what we were and had in our lives even existed.

The woman has a vague and spacey look. She is holding the unopened book in her left hand. Her right hand is hidden. The active and contemplative aspects of the person are not integrated or even aware of each other. In this pre-contemplative stage it is hard for us to see why we should change, let alone how. Or, if we can, change is a thought that we kick into the unseeable future. Sometimes this attitude is straight denial as in the alcoholic whose life is being ruined by his addiction but who says he has no problem and, even if he did, he could control it. Or it is simple resistance to change because the devil we know is better than the one we don't. Much of life, decades, can pass fruitlessly, stuck in this stage. Only later do we see the meaning of the opportunities we missed and wonder why for so long our own heart was indeed a closed book to us.

The book is a symbol here not of

conceptual knowledge but of the heart which has reasons that reason does not know. In the second sculpture Lady Gaga becomes Lady Contemplation. Her expression is more awake and engaged and there is the sense of exploration and discovery that accompanies receiving and opening a new book.

St Bernard said that the first stage is to 'consider constantly what God wants, what is pleasing and acceptable to him.' This is coded language for most people

must be broken and what is inside must come out. As the chick needs to peck itself out of the shell so only we can open the book and start the journey of self-knowledge. Sadly no one can give us this self-knowledge. At first, because it is so different, we feel disoriented. Time slows down, space changes – neurological science seems to have found the parts of the brain where this experience is mirrored. But what is happening cannot be so easily explained. We are evolving in consciousness as we open the book and start learning what it has to teach us. Chapter 44 of The Cloud of Unknowing says that we will at times feel a 'strong and deep ghostly sorrow'. It is not a psychological depression or a negative state at all and in fact the mystical tradition says it is good for us to get to this sorrow. It is not about what we have and don't like or what we don't have but want. It concerns the unshakeable sense of separation, the shadow cast by the ego between ourselves and everything we are in relationship with. The Cloud says that this sorrow cleanses the heart, not only of sin, but also of the pain (the karma) that sin has earned. And what makes this intermittent sorrow endurable is that it reveals to us what we most deeply want and have been programmed to find. This is not consumer spirituality. Speaking about a purifying sorrow sounds odd but it truthfully reflects the experience of the journey of meditation. We learn at this stage what the Bhagavad Gita means by saying that we must do our work without attachment to its fruits. Or what the parable of the workers in the vineyard tells us about the distance between ourselves and God (the ego's perception of things and the knowledge of love) that is bridged, not by our demanding our rights, but in the ministration of grace.

So Bernard means that when you start to open the book of the heart don't give up half-way through the jungle. Eventually we simplify and purify the rag and bone shop of the heart so that we connect with the 'will of God' in itself rather than merely as it egotistically affects us. This shifting from our usual egocentric approach is the big change in consciousness and in daily life. We may sense that something mysterious is happening in us. Other people just find us a little easier to live with.

Meister Eckhart said that the shell

must be broken and what is inside must come out. As the chick needs to peck itself out of the shell so only we can open the book and start the journey of self-knowledge. Sadly no one can give us this self-knowledge. At first, because it is so different, we feel disoriented. Time slows down, space changes – neurological science seems to have found the parts of the brain where this experience is mirrored. But what is happening cannot be so easily explained. We are evolving in consciousness as we open the book and start learning what it has to teach us.

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Thomas Aquinas liked asking questions. He asked 'is attention really necessary in prayer?' He liked multiple-choice answers too. So, 1) Attention is not necessary for us to gain basic merit for the time we give to prayer. Like some cushy jobs, you get paid just for turning up. There are people who feel relatively satisfied if they merely say their prayers. 2) Attention is not necessary either for gaining favours from God. Some benefits

accrue just with the practice. Cholesterol, stress are all improved. 3) But attention is absolutely necessary for the 'refreshment of our soul'. The more radical and lasting transformation, the opening to the life-giving and enlightening depths of the book of the heart come from the work of attention which is the essence of prayer, at least of 'pure prayer'. As with any book we can skim it, toss it aside for the easier entertainment of TV. But a good book rewards the work of reading and can change our life.

This is what is happening in the third sculpture. The woman is holding the book with both hands, deeply concentrated and attentive. She's fully into it. Recollection (mindfulness) is the term used to describe the state where we both recall what we have forgotten and pay attention fully to the presence of God here and now. Between the two is what researchers into memory call the ToT point, the tip of the tongue moment, where we can almost recall a name or a face but can't quite complete the process. The same brain research shows, not surprisingly, that it is more difficult for us to remember things that we took in when our attention was distracted or divided. The more attention we give, the easier it is to pull it back into consciousness.

How do we view this state of attention? As hard work, like revising for an exam or as being absorbed effortlessly in something delightful? Children take so well to meditation, I think, simply because they enjoy it and because they enjoy it simply. One of our coordinators for the Meditation in Schools project told me recently that he has been struck by so many reports of the children – who learn to meditate at school – practicing it on their own at home as well. This is having a noticeable impact on many families and their internal relationships. Not a few parents have started meditating as a result.

A child likes to play and takes play very seriously. Play is observable in birds and mammals because of the long periods of time they have to pass in a state of complete dependence on their parents. Perhaps it is from play that human culture and religion develops. In sport the game is governed by rules and children too enforce the rules in their made-up

games. To break the rules in order to win is human but universally considered to be wrong. What if we were to approach meditation as a form of sacred play, with simple but clear rules governing what happens in the space and time allocated to it? The rules are inherited as part of a tradition in which they have worked effectively a long time and which makes them easier to trust. They must be freely accepted – no discipline that is harshly imposed works at a spiritual level. But the point is to play well, to find joy in the absorption in the game, to shake off at least for a while the burden of our self-consciousness and egotism.

Meditation is the work we do, the



game we play in order to receive the gift of contemplation. Contemplation is knowledge born of love. It takes us on a journey of vaster inner proportions than intergalactic travel. The destination is an infinite degree of loving. A football manager once remarked about the 'beautiful game': Football's not a matter of life and death. It's more important than that.

Only in joy can we see how serious something really is.

Lady Contemplation now passes into silence. The book is again closed, on her lap. Her hands are joined and she appears to be completely in harmony and serenity.

For the time being she has laid aside her thoughts, even good ideas and insights, and found the stillness of mind which opens naturally into stillness of spirit. She is being with God rather than

thinking about God. In this 'offline' state of pure prayer a real and profound work is being accomplished even though the meditator may have no sense of being actively involved in it. Not only are the roots of the negative states of mind – what the desert monks called the principal faults – being pulled up. Our understanding of God is also being remade along with our sense of our selves. Familiar or culturally shaped images of God may now seem irrelevant and false to the experience of God that has silently been opened to us at a level deeper than thought or imagination.

Outside of the meditation times this new theology has to be confronted. It

can be disturbing or even feel as if we are losing our faith, whereas in fact we are deepening it. The soul, Meister Eckhart said, must become 'empty and free' so that she can attain the purity of a virgin in the 'ground of her being'. The virginal state is a metaphor, of course, for a way of being innocent and purely open to the conjugal embrace with reality, the spiritual marriage. Union with God is always the first time. We may experience this in fleeting moments or not even be aware that we have passed through such states – or that they have passed through us. But they are increasingly part of the journey we are making and, even if we are unaware of them, they leave a deposit in our ways of acting and reacting in the 'online', active aspects of our daily lives.

As with art or intimate relationships, so with the contemplative journey -

which is the art of intimacy itself - there are moments of ecstasy. In the fifth sculpture the soul is shown in this state where we stand outside ourselves. The book is again closed in her left hand. Her right hand is raised and she is looking down to her right – whether in a sign of greeting, or peace or even an instinctive defence, is not definable. The left brain cannot easily explain a right brain event. It is not merely an out of the body experience or even 'an experience' in the ordinary sense of the word at all.

Perhaps it is not only ecstasy but also enstasy - a word coined to describe the state of serenity and standing within oneself. Eastern and Western perspectives on contemplation come together in these two terms. But, however it is understood, it is less about a particular experience that we would like to repeat or sustain and more of a revealing of a whole level of experience that is continuously present but of which we are rarely conscious. Yet it is what all our distractiveness and dysfunctional behaviour is built on and, if these more disordered states of mind could be awakened to the existence of this deeper level of reality, they would be healed and calmed.

I want nothing. I know nothing. I am nothing. So elusive is this experience of union in God to description that it is often best evoked by the language of negation. Similarly, terms like poverty of spirit, stillness and silence have to be understood in relation to what they are trying to describe in a special way. Otherwise, they are easily understood negatively as meaning the absence of their opposites which comprise our usual state: of over-stimulation, hyper-activity and excessive communication through words and images.

Another term that attempts to do the fifth stage justice is detachment or non-attachment. All deeper spiritualities agree that this is the state that we need to embrace and cultivate in order to breakthrough into the deepest part of our selves where God, the ultimate reality, serenely shines. Union with God is impossible without union with ourselves and so the soul must penetrate to its own ground before God can be 'born' in the soul.

Detachment is not merely escape from the world but a way of living the online part of life while staying in touch with the offline state: contemplation in action, silence in the midst of thought. This is the secret of creativity and resilience. To be able to detach our mind from its usual patterns and prejudices, all its habits, is the pre-requisite of thinking outside the box, seeing what is beautifully simple and yet once it has been seen it is absurdly obvious.

This explains why meditation needs to be integrated into daily life and why it is in daily life we will see its fruits. Times of retreat, or participating in a weekly group, help us to achieve this; but it is in the field of daily life and work, relationships and responses that the reality of union can be seen. How can we love the God we cannot see if we don't love the person we can see? Or, putting it another way, by coming to union with those we can see we realise our union with God.

The last sculpture shows the medita-

### *Meditation is the work we do, the game we play in order to receive the gift of contemplation*

tor sharing the gifts of contemplation with others. It is, not exclusively, but an essentially Christian understanding of the meaning and nature of the whole journey. It is the test of authentic sanctity. For the Buddhist it would describe the bodhisattva ideal and, for the contemporary Christian, it also shows the relationship between contemplation and evangelisation.

The book is closed, nearby and she is looking outwards, energized and engaged. But she still appears centred and is not distracted in her activity. Mary and Martha have merged. The ideal of sharing the fruits of contemplation is embedded in Christian understanding. *Contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere* is an old phrase that means to contemplate and transmit to others the fruits of the contemplation. Yes, contemplation is an end in itself, the goal of life. But the end is endless

and so there is always more detachment to fall creatively into, always more to share with others as a part of our own journey.

More than any other teacher Jesus has empowered his disciples and given them his own Spirit, to continue his mission in the world. This is so overwhelming a concept that we need the dimension of contemplation even to begin to grasp it. Otherwise we will reduce it to a merely activist dimension and see it as primarily concerned with expanding numerical membership of the church. It is more than that because Jesus is more than a founder of another religion. The mystery of Christianity, and the paradox of Jesus himself open to us fully only through this dimension.

Why do we even need to think about stages of the journey? Not in order to assess our own progress in a self-fixated way but rather to come to a more selfless clarity and sense of order in what we are doing. The journey is spiritual, and therefore not measurable or mappable. And yet it is a human spiritual process and we benefit from a sense of the inner logic and purpose of what we are being led through. The real reason for understanding it is not to control it but to be able to communicate and share it better.

Our culture, our institutions are descending in to ever-deeper disorder. The culture of our financial institutions seems severely corrupted. Even the churches seem unable to distinguish between things temporal and things spiritual. Education, medicine, government, law and science also show the same symptoms of the loss of the spiritual dimension of reality – and even a loss of memory of what has been lost. To teach meditation as a spiritual practice today means to be aware of its physical and psychological benefits but even more of its spiritual fruits. Perhaps this is a contribution that every meditator can, in his or her own way, make to turn the crisis breaking over us into a breakthrough for all humanity.

With much love,

*Laurence*

Laurence Freeman, OSB

# Meditation on the Margins

In silence all divisions fall away. **Meditation** helps to restore **dignity and peace** to those socially and economically marginalized



## A friend for the homeless in Boston

**Cristina Rathbone**, Episcopal Priest and group leader

The other day I overheard someone asking one of our regular meditators what we were all about. "Growing in love," she shot back immediately. "Which isn't as easy as it sounds. Believe me," she added. "Just you try it yourself for a while and see!"

She is right. While simple enough as a concept, growing in love is not easy. It is often painful, and messy, and full of emotions that feel very like the opposite of love. And it can be frightening too. Love by its very nature is open, and openness, many of us have learned through our own broken pasts, can be dangerous. This is why I've come to believe that it is really only possible to embark (and stay on) this journey in community. And it is why we come together each week to work and talk and pray together too.

Ours is a bit of a rag-tag crew to tell the truth: mostly made up of un-housed men and women, we look like the kinds of people regular churches want nothing to do with. And yet our little com-

munity is alive and thick with God's love in ways that isn't always so visible elsewhere. We laugh and sing and cry a lot. And we pray a lot together too. And while meditation isn't typically the first program newcomers seek to join, many find their way to it after a time, and then most stay.

I was surprised by this at first, but I've realized over time that there is a kind of spacious and reliable stability in the stillness we enter together which restores even the most spiritually drained human being. And through the many (and many egregious) ordeals of life on the street, the simple, humble repetition of the mantra serves as a kind of anchor, I've come to see, connecting each meditator with the love that is God.

After two years of meditating together, Maranatha is etched not only in the hearts of our group, but also in paintings that will soon hang on the walls of our meditation room and – in at least one case – across the top of a well packed back pack as well: Maranatha in

thick black permanent marker, clearly printed by the handle, so that its owner will remember, every time he heaves all that he owns onto his back, that he is loved. Maranatha. It draws us together, and keeps us there, united in the love we seek to grow into. Maranatha, "Just try it yourself for a while and see...."

## Sitting Still

**Paul Estes**, member of St. Paul's Meditation Group, Boston

Meditation, as prescribed by my teacher's teacher's teacher John Main, has become a vital part of my daily routine. Through the stillness I've noticed that the random babbling thoughts that once ruled my mind come less and less often. Clearer thoughts and more acute expanses of memory have filled the void left by the calmness. It hasn't been an overnight, highly noticeable

change, but rather a slow healing love that is God, whom I sit with each moment of each day. This is not a "Praise God and remember He died for our sins!" church moment. No, meditation is one-one time with our Father. A moment when we sit and simply bask in His love for us. These moments I cherish more than any Sunday service. As beautiful as our services can be, there is simply no point in comparing them with meditation. With our meditation there is no mediator giving you their opinions of the Gospel, no community in prayer, it is simply you and God within, sitting in the stillness. The best part of meditation is the realization of how much He loves me. There is no greater love in the known universe. All I can really say to make you a believer is: sit still, be calm for 20 minutes each morning. See and feel, be witness to God's love for you and observe for yourself how it changes you from within.

# Meditation, the Marginal and the Emerging Church

**Terry Doyle**, Oblate, works with addicts and the marginalized in the UK



This spirit in me has manifested in many ways over the years, most notably through my work with those lost in the world of addiction to drugs, the homeless and offenders.

My current role is to help "Build Recovery in the Community", to challenge stigma and discrimination, to improve the treatment options of service users and to build people up to live more productive lives as a part of, and not apart from their community.

For me it is very simple, if we can all help people feel more accepted, more valued, more loved then we are helping to raise a person's sense of worth, of higher self esteem and my faith tells me that we are all Beloved Children of God, no matter what mistakes we have made in the past. This is why the practice of Christian Meditation is so invaluable, as it helps to connect us all to a place deep within ourselves that is beyond our guilt, our shame, our sense of unworthiness. And in time our disciplined practice can help us to heal into wholeness and if our disease shows up as addiction to drugs, then this healing allows us to grow beyond our need to fill ourselves with an outside agent to give us a buzz,

or to numb any pain or to opt out of life because it's all got too much to handle.

Meditation helps to connect us to feeling more worthy, frees us from guilt and shame and empowers us to say Yes to life again by becoming more willing to reengage in a more wholesome way.

I have found practices such as Qi Gong and Tai Chi can provide a valuable anchor in a person's often chaotic lifestyle, and can help raise an individual's energy levels so that they naturally outgrow negative addictive behaviours and begin to choose more wisely. Such practices also help to gradually lead us to stillness by learning to focus on the breath and certain movements of the body thereby improving our ability to be present, to be focused and still enough to sit and say the mantra which is even more difficult for those whose brains have become fuddled with drug abuse.

There is a Chinese Proverb that helps here, that "patient, persistent practice reaps great rewards", which also helps overcome the addict's need to change the way he feels and as quickly as possible. Moreover, there seems to be a growing trend for instant gratification in modern society, hence ongoing disciplines such as Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Yoga and Meditation play a vital part in empowering us all, not only those addicted to drugs, in getting ourselves out of the way and learning to "let go and let God".

I am currently looking to secure funding to develop a Centre in a deprived ward of Middlesbrough in the North east of England, which will serve to act as a place for inner healing, of contemplative prayer, of "energy medicine" and meditation, as well as a hub to help those who are marginalised and living in poverty to learn how to feel more worthy to engage again with life and all that it has to offer.

I feel that this could become an aspect of a radical and Christ like "emerging church" that can encourage the marginalised through meditation and other practices, to "wake up" to themselves and their True Reality, and through community organising to "wake up" to

the injustices of current political realities, thereby helping people to become less dependent on outside agencies or drugs to do things for them and more empowered through the Spirit to life more fully.

## June and Bill: meditation with homeless in Houston in the 90's

**Rev. Helen Appelbeg**



In the 1990, Oblates June Holly, an educationalist and her husband Bill Harrison, a physician, were part of the first medical team to help start Lord of the Streets, a centre for the homeless and displaced of Houston in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. At dawn each Sunday morning, Bill and his cadre of medical students held clinic for the men and women who were in dire need of medical attention. June was by his side and helped organize a support group for the women. Bill and June also started a weekly meditation group that continued to meet for the homeless that met regularly for years. Bill often quoted one of the men who told him how much those weekly meditations meant to him: "When we meditate together every week it is the only time it feels safe for me to close my eyes. The rest of the time there is no place anywhere that I can trust closing my eyes because whatever few things I own will most likely be stolen and taken away... but here, in this place I am safe."

## Inter Faith

### New "Way of Peace" planned with the Dalai Lama



"I am very happy to meet again with my very close friend.. not only a friend but truly a special brother"

With these words, in a short video message to the World Community, His Holiness the Dalai Lama described his meeting with Laurence Freeman OSB, on 18th June, in Manchester, UK. They spoke about the dialogue they will share during the next WCCM Pilgrimage to India in January 2013. The

dialogue will focus on the similarities and differences between Jesus and the Buddha and what discipleship means today. They also discussed plans for a new series of Way of Peace events which they will again co-lead.

**Online:** See photos of the meeting, the Dalai Lama's video message to The WCCM and an interview with Laurence Freeman about their friendship at [wccm.org](http://wccm.org)

## Interview



By Leonardo Corrêa

Carlos Alberto Libanio-Christo OP is a Dominican writer and social activist who was a political prisoner for four years under the former dictatorship. He is known throughout Brazil and Latin America as 'Frei Betto' and was special advisor to President Lula. His social commitments are underpinned by a strong contemplative practice and theology. He will be a speaker at the first John Main Seminar to be held in Latin America, in Brazil in August 2012.

*Can you tell us something about your personal experience with meditation? Do you have a daily practice?*

**Frei Betto:** I always enjoyed prayer. Since I was a teenager I've saved the first 30 minutes in the morning to connect with God. And when it is possible, I do the same at the end of the afternoon or just before sleep. I learned to meditate in 1965, when I was a Dominican novice. My masters were St. Terese de Ávila and St. John of

the Cross, whose works I studied very deeply at that time. They both made me detach from imagining God "far above" to finding Him in the center of my heart. I meditate without words and try to avoid any image in my mind. Some days this is easy. Other days, the house is crazy, as Teresa of Ávila says of the imagination and quieting my mind is more difficult.

I have described this spiritual journey in my book with Leonardo Boff (Mystic and Spirituality). Between 1969 and 1973 I was in prison, during the years of military dictatorship in Brazil. They were four years spent in a sort of spiritual retreat.

There, without any worry about time or place, I went more deeply into my meditation. It became part of my daily life. The benefits derived from meditation are my spiritual peace, my critical sense and my lucidity of mind.

*What do you think is the importance of recovering this tradition, especially for people in the Christian world?*

Meditation is a spiritual exercise as ancient as humanity. And It's not

necessarily connected to a religious tradition. Buddhists who embrace a philosophy of life and not a religion, are masters at meditation. The Gospels, especially in Luke, tell us that Jesus used to meditate for hours, even spending all night in prayer.

Sadly, the Catholic Church has, ever since the seventeenth century, undervalued meditation, arising from the fear that believers might develop a spirituality that was out of the control of religious authority. And, even now, meditation is not properly valued everywhere in our Church. Though interest in meditation is increasing, there is still a lack of space where people can experience it without being induced to embrace this or that specific religious denomination.

*What do you feel about The World Community for Christian Meditation? And what is your hope for the John Main Seminar?*

I have deep admiration for the work of the World Community. It gathers people from different religious backgrounds – even open to atheists and agnostics. I believe that the John Main Seminar will be a moment of epiphany, a manifestation of the transcendent in our lives making a connection among the participants, with God, with our neighbor and with nature.

*The JMS 2012 will focus on spirituality and the environment. How do you see the connection between contemplative spirituality and a well-balanced*

*relationship of humanity with the environment?*

Preservation of the environment depends on a contemplative behavior, or a healthy veneration of nature. Marcelo Barros and I worked on this issue in our book "Love Makes the World Fertile – Ecology and Spirituality" (El amor fecunda el universo). The Andean Indians venerate the Earth as Pachamama, the Big Mother that generates life. This idea is present also in the Biblical tradition. Life on Earth came after 13.7 billion years of evolution of the Universe, following the Big Bang. As the Creation story relates in Genesis, Adam means Earth and Eve means Life. We will explore these themes more deeply during the Seminar.

*"We are most Godlike when we give our self without measure: when we loves. And it is without measure that God gives himself to us". (John Main)*

## Retreats

### Bere Island



Easter, Bere Island hosted the traditional WCCM Holy Week Retreat. People around the world could watch the webcast talks in real time. The videos of the talks can also be found on our YouTube Channel at [wccm.org](http://wccm.org)

### Australia



Masterclasses for teachers and a retreat for senior students were held in Townsville and Melbourne in May. A new website on Meditation with Children will soon be published.

### School Retreat

Liz Watson and Gene Bebeau joined Laurence Freeman in leading the International School Retreat in Connecticut, USA in May. This is a more intensive silent retreat with one short conference daily and daily meetings for the participants. The eight talks on the theme of Spirit are available for download at [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)

### Monte Oliveto Retreat



Another regular retreat in the WCCM year is at Monte Oliveto. In June the theme was "The Book of the Heart – Stages of Contemplation". Giovanni Felicioni led the morning yoga and Tim Casey, former director of the John Main Centre at Georgetown University, who was at Meditatio House in London this year, and Mary Ann Gould coordinator for S. California made their final oblation at the retreat. ONLINE: listen two other participants speaking about their experience in Monte Oliveto: [wccm.org](http://wccm.org)

## Meditatio Seminar: The Spiritual Ground of Wellbeing - Meditation as an Art of Healing



By Don Boyle

The Meditatio Seminar, on 22nd May, in York, was chaired by Professor Peter Gilbert and addressed The Spiritual Ground of Wellbeing - Meditation as an Art of Healing. More than 100 participants continued the dialogue that began at our May 2011 London Seminar. Key speakers from the world of psychiatry, psychology and the spiritual traditions of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam, and a range of practical workshops on wellbeing and recovery em-

phasised the practical aspect of the topic.

Don Boyle, chair of the Meditation Mental Health group, reported the encouraging results from our recent WCCM study into meditators' experience that offer important comparisons with other research about the regular practice of Christian meditation and its effects on wellbeing and wholeness. The seminar included a workshop facilitated by two qualified nurses and Christian meditators, Bob Bedwell and Jayne Macgregor, who shared their direct experience of using mental health services and their journeys of recovery. Terry Doyle addressed meditation in relation to addictions and healing movement. Dr Suzanne Everett facilitated a workshop on mindful eating and eating disorders.

Fr Laurence's powerful keynote speech encouraged us to engage with secular practice and scientific inquiry confident about the contribution we have to make by teaching meditation

from a spiritual tradition. The Seminar also celebrated the launch of the Meditatio Journal on Meditation and Mental Health, containing the papers presented at the 2011 seminar. A new Meditatio publication by Jim Green "Meditation and Mental Health: Mercy not Sacrifice" was also launched.

### Meditatio Forum: Salvation or Enlightenment?

"Salvation or Enlightenment? was the theme of a day of dialogue between the Tibetan Buddhist, Dr. Alan Wallace and the Benedictine monk Fr. Laurence Freeman on 21st June in Westminster Cathedral Hall, in London.

**Online:** The talks of "Salvation or Enlightenment?" are available for download from our Audio Catalog, at [wccm.org](http://wccm.org)

## Laurence awarded the Order of Canada



By Paul Harris

In Ottawa on May 25th, Laurence Freeman received the highest civilian honor in Canada, the Order of Canada, for his work in sharing the teaching of Christian Meditation in Canada and around the world. The Order of Can-

ada recognizes recipients for a lifetime of outstanding achievement dedicated to the community and service to the nation.

Governor General David Johnston recognized Laurence Freeman: "as an internationally recognized spiritual leader and proponent of peace and interfaith dialogue, founder and director of The WCCM, who regularly circles the globe to introduce meditation as a means of inner transformation and connection between peoples and religions. He is also a respected speaker, author and theologian".

Laurence said he was "astounded" and "honored" to receive the award and accepted it on behalf of the World Community. He felt it was not so much a personal honor as a recognition of the world-wide hunger for

spiritual renewal and the recognition, expressed in different ways, that each person is created for a unique destiny and a unique fulfillment in God". After receiving the award he said: "receiving the honor reflects powerfully on Canada's breath of vision and wisdom to recognize the spiritual dimension of the global issues of our time".

At a reception of Ottawa meditators, Dr Balfour Mount, known as the "father of the palliative care movement in Canada", and a meditation group leader, stressed the remarkable energy and love demonstrated by Laurence in sharing the teaching of Meditation around the world. He also added: "he is a remarkable human being, a scholar, has a great sense of humor, as well as an extraordinary focus and deep spirituality".

### In Focus

Anna Bonetto



I come from Italy, carrying on my shoulders a Catholic background which had never been much more to me than a line on my passport. As soon as I was old enough for it not to be too inconvenient for my family, I stopped going to Mass or having any interest in what I once thought of as "spiritual life". Very soon my medical career as a paediatrician, and all it meant to me, became my whole life and my reason to live, without much space left for anything else.

Two years ago I decided to move to London to continue my training there. A week before leaving Italy, advised by a friend, I attended a workshop on human communication, held by some kind of Christian organization.

In short, it was about the neurological and spiritual foundations of how we perceive and live in the world and the ways we are deceived and deceive ourselves.

During those three days, for the first time I heard the word 'spiritual' associated to words like love, compassion, and non-judgement, and I suddenly thought there was, maybe, something in my life which I was

*What then is meditation to me now? I cannot find a definition that fits, but my heart, my soul and my body are saying it is something I need*

missing and which was not only important, fundamental, but also joyful. It was also there that I heard about meditation for the first time.

With these new pieces of information and some new awareness I then left Italy. In the turmoil of my new life in a foreign country, a new job, a new language, friends and family back home, I found myself trying out meditation with the few indications I had, DIY style, but in search of a still point, some reference point. It did help and I hold a sweet memory of those few moments which were moments of kindness toward myself. But I was

soon swallowed by the crazy routine of my new London life: anything that wasn't work became a waste of time, meditation included.

Almost a year later a dear friend of mine brought me, with some resistance on my part and lot of patience on hers, to the WCCM Meditatio house in London, where eventually meditation began to be part of my life. I found there what I didn't know I needed: support, someone around and behind me who was holding the space for me to be still and silent and aware. I found the nurturing and healing relationship I'd always proudly thought I could do without, but which I so much needed. I found community and I understood what it meant. Since then, despite a few setbacks, meditation has become part of my life.

What then is meditation to me now? I cannot find a definition that fits, but my heart, my soul and my body are saying it is something I need. Did it change my life, then? Thank God it didn't! There are so many changes going on that I always feel like I'm in the middle of a storm. Meditation is my safe place where I can come back, it is always available to me as the community is a place within and out. Here I am reminded that the world cannot be bothered with whether I am perfect or not. And the storm subsides.



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Editor: Leonardo Corrêa ([leonardo@wccm.org](mailto:leonardo@wccm.org))  
Graphic Design: Gerson Laureano  
International Coordinator: Pauline Peters ([paulinepeters2@gmail.com](mailto:paulinepeters2@gmail.com))  
Coordinator, International Office, London: Susan Spence ([susan@wccm.org](mailto:susan@wccm.org))  
The World Community Web page: [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)  
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## Reviews

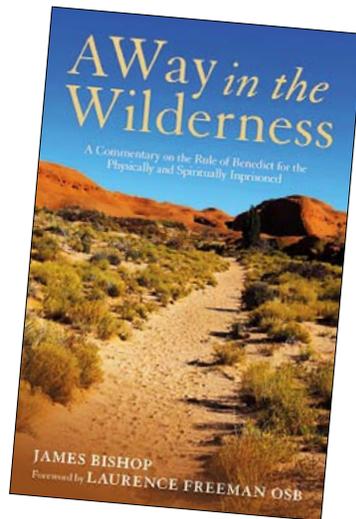
### A Way in the Wilderness:

A Commentary on the Rule of Benedict For The Physically And Spiritually Imprisoned (Continuum, 2012, 248 pg). James Bishop

James has spent ten years in prison in California. In this arid environment he began a conversion process, started to practice Christian meditation and became a WCCM oblate. Today, out on parole, trying to adapt to life again, he wrote a remarkable book with very wide appeal. Don't expect a deep theological analysis on the classic text of Saint Benedict. But the book brings a sincere and lucid vision of a man in transformation using the Rule and meditation as supporting resources for his change of course. James was qualified to see parallels between life in prison and life in a monastery: both with specific rou-

tines and rules.

The richness of the book lies in the author's capacity to see and interpret



the Rule in this context of his own life especially in the tough prison environment. This paragraph illustrates his unique approach: "Can you imagine,

just for a moment, what prison would be like if no one spoke? Imagine how quiet the yard would be. Imagine how quiet the block would be. That would be something, wouldn't it? If everyone were doing it voluntarily, there would be a certain peace, a peace that normally is missing. I used to meditate during the count times because the block was so quiet at those times. (Chapter 6 - On the Spirit of Silence).

James doesn't speak only for the imprisoned, people held in physically in jail. He thinks the Rule can help all of us to become free of our "internal prisons": conditions, compulsions and misunderstandings.

"Through the Rule and through meditation, I have come to know that I was in a self-made prison for many years, and when I was finally sent to a physical prison, I became freer than I had ever been before in my life". (Introduction)

### The School Journey: The Story of Christian Meditation in UK Primary School

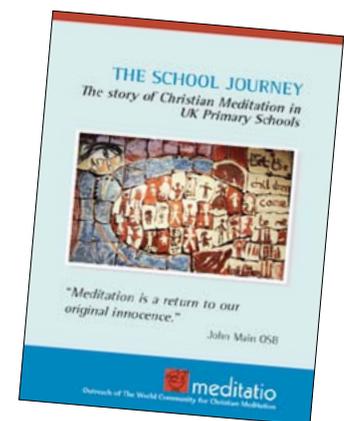
This DVD highlights nine of the many primary schools which have successfully adopted Christian Meditation on a whole-school basis. Listening to the comments from Head Teachers, teachers and governors and the children themselves powerfully illustrates the significant benefits and fruits that come from this simple practice.

This DVD is one of the best and most persuasive ways of presenting the need for meditation in schools.

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 Tel: +1-520-882-0290

AUSTRALIA:  
[jpanetta@energy.com.au](mailto:jpanetta@energy.com.au)  
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 (also) Rainbow Book Agencies  
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