



The World Community for Christian Meditation

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You'd never mistake it for a gentleman farmer's showpiece or a dude ranch. Two parked trailers, tumble down barn, a farmyard methodically littered with pipes, crates, tools, sacks of things and piles of the rushes she uses for her weaving ? a place of daily industry. It is home and workplace for a remarkably gifted basket weaver and her partner, eccentric if you met them in a city or suburb but manifesting rare sanity here, in a small island community.

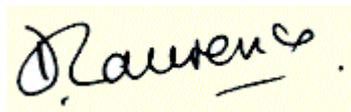
A desert father once remarked ?the time is coming when people will go mad and then they will point to a sane person and say he is mad because he is not like us?. It always renews your joy and hope to meet truly sane people but today you have to be prepared for their not looking sane. The weaver brims over with energy and a robust humour. She has the slightly edgy humility of a working artist and an earthy way of looking straight at you, holding eye contact; not, you feel, because she learned this from a management course but because she is interested in you as part of the world she inhabits.

The yard and adjoining field are filled with animals, horses, dogs, cats, chickens, goats. As the weaver's partner came to greet me I noticed a lamb come round the barn, too, following him. I asked him if he was now keeping sheep as well. It seemed odd that the lamb continued to approach us, as sheep don't ordinarily bond with people as closely as parables suggest. I noticed it was also walking somewhat oddly, unsteady on its wobbly four legs as if someone had slipped something into its grain that morning. It stopped beside us, like a child clinging to its parent, or a dog seeking company and exuded the emotional bonding that makes us feel that dogs love us. It looked at me looking at it, with the same directness as its protectors and seemed to say ?I am not an ordinary lamb?. As I couldn't follow this up directly with the lamb I asked its human spokesman who said, yes it was an odd little creature. The weaver had cared for it round the clock when very shortly after birth it seemed set to die. It was diagnosed with meningitis, inflammation of the brain and spinal cord. Later I looked it up and found that this was indeed an illness of sheep. My book on sheep disease says that ?the affected lamb can't stand and its rear quarter is weak. The brain is infected. Antibiotics may help but the prognosis is guarded.?

This particular lamb, mentally and physically damaged, had beaten the odds and was moreover assured of a caring environment for the rest of its days. However non-productive and expendable in the war of evolution, on the battlefield of Nature, it would always be safe here. There was something incurably sane and significant about this human care for a

damaged member of another species.

The breaking news that day was about the printer cartridge bombs discovered in the freight of some airplanes. They had also been carried on passenger flights and seemed intended for the slaughter of hundreds of individuals that, (un)naturally, the perpetrators of the murder had no interest in personally. Their only importance was as sacrificial victims, like the lambs slaughtered in the Temple or ?collateral damage? in any war. Perhaps what shocks and terrifies us most about terrorism is its inhuman impersonality. Part of the terror is that it proves how far the human can regress from itself, not merely into the pre-human but into a total degeneration of its own nature, something that nothing else in the natural world is capable of. However much we condemn it, we are implicated and accused by the simple fact of its occurrence. If ?they? can do this, could not I? Natural human empathy is inverted. Just as we feel proud when we hear of human courage and altruism so we feel humiliated and degraded by human inhumanity. Security experts say that an expert bomb maker is like a painter. He has a personal style that makes him stand out. How like art, in some Halloween inversion of holiness, the skills of destructions are. We speak of the ?art of war? and divert the creative imagination from works that bless to those that maim with maximum efficiency. My weaver friend and her brain-damaged lamb seem so eccentric, unimportant and marginal beside this scale of violence. The stony-heartedness of those inflamed with hatred seems undefeatable beside the silly, sublime, tender care a human can give an ovine invalid. What can cure the inflamed mind of a terror merchant and turn his heart of stone to flesh except infinitely more of the weaver?s wasted love.

A handwritten signature in black ink on a yellow background. The signature reads "Laurence" with a small flourish at the end.

Laurence Freeman OSB

The World Community for Christian Meditation, of which Laurence Freeman OSB is director, has recently opened a new outreach program ? ?Meditatio? (www.wccmmeditatio.org)

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