



Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

www.wccm.org

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JOHN MAIN SEMINAR 2011 ALIVE IN CHRIST

Led by

Timothy Radcliffe OP

University College, Cork, Ireland:

11-14 August 2011

What does it mean to be alive in Christ? This is a tough question in a society often secular and hostile. Timothy Radcliffe, former master of the Dominican Order and international speaker, will explore the roots of our identity and life as baptised people.

The University site is connected with the patron saint of Cork, St Finbarr. It is believed his monastery and school stood on the bank of the River Lee, which runs through the lower grounds of the university.

Pre Seminar Retreat: 8-11 August
Led by Laurence Freeman OSB

Pilgrimage: 14-16 August to Skellig Michael, Kerry (John Main's county) and Bere Island (Laurence Freeman's) Gougane Barra - a monastic site associated with St. Finbarr. Places limited to 30.

Site: www.jms11.com

Tel: Call 00-353 66 7137484

E-mail: sylviajms11@gmail.com

Meditatio Seminar on Mental Health

London, May 4th and 5th 2011

followed by an optional themed meditation retreat (6-8 May)

The Second Meditatio Seminar will address Meditation and Mental Health. It will be followed by a residential Retreat allowing space for practice and deeper reflection on the issues. The seminar brings together those working professionally and spiritually on mental health and wellbeing. It will also be relevant for people working in the clinical field to improve mental health of those with mental distress and mental illness by highlighting the role of meditation as a spiritual practice with natural effects on mental health.

Among the speakers will be Dr Norman Rosenthal (discoverer of the SAD syndrome and author of *Meditation and Mental Health*), Fr Joe Pereira (Director of Kripa Foundation India), Dr Jonathan Champion (Senior Adviser to the UK National Health Service on mental health policy), Fr Laurence Freeman OSB and others.

Further information and registration details will be published shortly. To register your interest, please contact:

Brijji Waterfield Tel: (44) 07980 581351 E: meditatio@wccm.org and visit the Meditatio page on: www.wccm.org

Significant Dates for 2011

Retreats, Conferences and Seminars

April 17-24 Holy Week Retreat, Bere Island

May 4-5 Meditatio Seminar on Mental Health, London

May 20-26 US National Retreat, Detroit

June 10-12 Canadian National Conference, Ottawa

June 18-25 Monte Oliveto Retreat, Italy

August 11-14 John Main Seminar, Cork, Ireland

September 3-9 School Retreat (Silent), Fara Sabina, Italy

September 14-24 Ten-day retreat, Bere Island, Ireland

September 26-30 Priests' Retreat, Bath England



A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Dearest friends,

The truth is never for resale, unlike most of the things we acquire in the course of our life – whether by gift or by our own effort. These things – possessions or knowledge and other achievements – can be recycled, passed on and made useful in new ways. But truth itself only has one owner and exists in an eternal present. It is always obvious – anyway, it is as soon as we see it, like finding the last clue to a crossword. But it is always elusive, too. It slips out of our hands as soon as we try to own it.

We are talking here of truth, not answers to questions or solutions to problems which of course can be written down and passed on. By truth I mean something more like the joy one feels at a new birth – Greg Ryan, our beloved wccm.org webmaster, has been bubbling like a bottle of champagne since the birth of his granddaughter Charlotte; or like the unexpected expression of the goodness and generosity of human nature – Pauline Peters whose house was affected in the recent Queensland floods felt this as friends and friends of friends and complete strangers poured in to help them in their hour of need and messages from the community worldwide poured in. In such experiences we see something which is disturbingly seen to be not a thing, but reality itself and with a clarity and immediacy that nothing could exactly reproduce or record. Truth is always in the moment.

Rav Chem, an eighteenth century rabbi, was once instructing his students in the Torah when the invading troops of Napoleon made a commotion outside as they entered his city. The students rushed to the windows to watch; but the rabbi continued sitting, reading his texts. When the students had finished he reprimanded them for being so easily distracted by what they perhaps thought was an event of world historical importance. This, he said pointing to the Torah, and our study of it, is what is really of world historical importance.

In an age of twenty-four hour news where many become addicted to a news fix seven times a day – the number of times St Benedict says we should stop to praise God – Rav Chem's rebuke seems quaint or even irresponsible. But he

reminds us of an important point which neither modernity nor technology has yet replaced – the need to pay attention and to be faithful. The best means known to humanity to live in the light of truth is to fulfill this need, this deepest of all laws. If we can do so we become present to what is truly important in our time and we are better equipped to respond to it appropriately and effectively. If we fail to respect this law, through distraction and the wrong kind of activity, on the other hand, we drown in a flood of information and trivia.

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In our new Meditatio House in London the generosity of many meditators around the world has helped us to furnish it nicely. However we have still not got the right coat stand. Over the holidays we had some large groups come to meditate and for midnight mass. As we were in a very cold spell everybody brought many layers of clothing which piled up in a jumble in the bookroom or the hall. After a long cold journey, it's easy to take off a coat and throw it onto a pile of other coats and hats, but not so easy to find where your own ended up when everyone else is leaving. Our thoughts and plans and activities can quickly become a jumble of this kind in which the truly important ideas and intentions get crowded out and then buried under a load of ephemera. This leads us to feel stressed and disappointed. Stressed because we cannot find the way to prioritise properly and defeated because we know what we should do and yet can't seem to do it. Meditation – one of its benefits – is something we can do and it acts as a coat stand, reducing the jumble and helping us find what is truly ours.

A good number of people came to hear one of our Guiding Board members, Sean Hagan, give the John Main Lecture at the meditation centre at Georgetown last semester. Sean is the chief counsel of the IMF and therefore not immune to the stresses of our age. When he spoke about meditation in his life he referred to the benefits of his twice-daily practice for his work and lifestyle but he added that this was not the essential reason he meditated. There was more to his life and concerns. So, he saw life as a whole as the context for his meditation and because of this his meditation enhanced the whole of his life. People listened in some admiration and then asked the inevitable first question, 'but how do you find time for it?' His answer which an unemployed monk could not have given with nearly the same authority or effect, took people by surprise. "Time is not the problem," he said, "if you want to do something badly enough you will always find the time."

It is not all about struggle and effort. The right coat arises from the jumble if you let it.

It reminded me of St Augustine's insight that the key to understanding a human personality is to find out what it really desires. Because our desires so easily form a jumble and give rise to conflict, what we really desire has to be unearthed and protected at the bottom of the pile, in the ground of being. Once found it needs to be revered because, as the desireless desire for God that it is, this desire will keep the light of truth shining continuously in all areas of our life.

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The reason we cannot 'remember' the truth but can only live it in the present, as the gift that never becomes a possession, exactly explains why we need a daily practice. It helps us see why an inner spiritual discipline is essential for a life of freedom which is not corrupted by obsession or addiction and all the myriad ways in which jumble happens.

When we think we can encapsulate the truth in a set of words or beliefs we fail abysmally. We then often try to cover up the failure by insisting that everyone adopts these beliefs. Hence arrogance, prejudice and religious violence. Yet the truth, like cheerfulness, has a habit of always breaking through.

These irruptions or epiphanies are experiences of non-duality where we are freed temporarily from the grinding two-dimensional reality of the object-subject separation that is so painful but that we take to be inevitable. These moments of grace arrive, like the Magi, from an unknown country and leave again after they have deposited their gifts.

In the experience of spirit – this means when our ordinary experience is known within the spiritual level of consciousness – the usual here-there, I-You, inner-outer, then-now, categories are subtly dissolved. What emerges when these falsely solid divisions are removed is precisely what we are looking for. We see that it was always there but that our way of seeing had prevented us from recognizing it. Identity remains but no longer in an isolated, separated sense. Now it is in relationship, always moving into communion, that we see our selves and others – as if in a single great self. The elaborate evasion techniques and fears that kept us from experiencing this before now seem suddenly laughable, even when we see how much distress and embarrassment they caused.

In the Christian thought about God this non-duality of truth is a central element. It even helps us understand the most essential of all statements of God – that God is love. We can hardly hold to any level of Christian identity without being touched by this pure thought – dogma are not really merely ideas but emanations of pure thought that are best understood by the simple – of the non-duality (not one, not two) of love.

This pure truth about God, explaining our relationship to God, is born into humanity with Jesus. In a human person limited by time and space and matter as we all are, we meet a person who is simultaneously word of God and son of man.

We can emphasise one or the other of these aspects at a rational level alone but we can hardly hold both sides of the coin towards us at the same time. This paradox is typical of all those moments of revelation when we step into the light of truth and, if only briefly, bathe in it.

Paradox shows us the difference between 'thoughts' and 'thought', the theme of the French National Conference this year. It is no wonder then that the early Christian thinkers – in this purer sense of the meaning of thought – fought so hard and long to protect and develop an idea that seemed so absurd and superstitious, especially to their sophisticated contemporaries. Without this paradox the meaning of Jesus is lost in a litany of morality and wise sayings, many of which can be obtained at a cheaper price elsewhere.

Through this non-duality of God and Man manifest and embodied in Jesus, humanity has found a window that allows us to see further into the blinding light of God. A perception takes form in this dark light which became our thought of the Trinity. This is the logical consequence of non-duality, the third that unites the not-two as obviously and naturally as a child is born to the union of a man and a woman.

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"THE DESIRELESS DESIRE FOR GOD
WILL KEEP THE LIGHT OF TRUTH
SHINING CONTINUOUSLY
IN ALL AREAS OF OUR LIFE."

Non-duality sounds philosophical. And in the real sense of philosophy as the 'love of wisdom', it is. But in more immediate terms it is also simplicity, unity and peace. These are not merely desirable states that increase our happiness and fulfill our potential. Today they are experiences we desperately need to understand and recapture in the life and discourse of our struggling societies.

I recently participated in a discussion with scientists, economists and politicians on the crisis looming around us from several directions. The scientists were trying to read the data and make patterns from it so they could produce models that might predict where the tipping-points of the environment or food security would first occur. The economists were calculating the trends and the diplomats and politicians were factoring in the human element. I, of course, was left with the spiritual which after such a feast of intelligence and imagination was not so hard.

Quite clearly what is needed in our time is a new way of thinking – maybe not always as pure as the contemplative thought we discussed at the French conference – but purified by the dismantling of the more rigid barriers between the over-specialized disciplines of modern life. This would allow us better to see the whole of the picture and all its integral connections with new eyes. New strategies and responses would be born from this new way of seeing. Eventually the objective look would merge into the vision that arises from knowing that we are part of what we are looking at. Then even in practical affairs we might be occasionally capable of acting wisely and compassionately. The religious traditions possess the spiritual wisdom that facilitates this, above all the universal wisdom, the spiritual science of meditation.

If the truth is indeed true and not a fabrication of our minds then the end of all forms of knowledge, all approaches to what we call the problems of the world, is the vision of God. Because of the way science, religion, politics and art have been thrust apart by recent history the idea of the goal of humanity as the vision of God seems to most an oddly religious and even largely fantastic distraction from the real issues of life. It could easily seem to be an escape from reality. But in the ages of greatest integration and deepest spirituality the clarity of this goal of life was seen as clarifying all the daily challenges and technological solutions of life.

In the deepest and clearest moments of perception we see how our many silly questions preoccupy us and waste time. What are you called, what do you do, how successful are you? The nameless stranger and the intimate friend are equal, one and the same. Anniversaries or feasts are not commemorations asking us to think of the past but ways of helping to reconnect with what cannot, should never, be lost or forgotten because it is always present.

So the vision of God in Christian thought is not what it has often been thought to be. It is not a huge audience in differently priced seats looking up at the Creator on his throne waiting for some twitch of his face or other expression to signify that he does actually know we are there. Who wouldn't prefer a sinful, suffering life on earth to that idea of heaven? Aquinas, however, understands it at a much purer, contemplative level of thought.

The vision of God is first of all, he says, perfect vision. Until this vision is reached all human knowledge – which is usually dominated by the data of physical vision and the concepts of mental vision – is limited and frustrated by the inactivity of the eye of the heart. The vision of God is also, he says, perfect praise. It is easy to praise imperfectly – flattery, a feeling of obligation, fear of disapproval. Perfect praise arises irresistibly from the experience of gift. The unconditional generosity of another towards us, and the liberating experience of gratitude floods over us sweeping away all jealousy, envy and sense of unworthiness. This leads into the next element of the goal of human existence, the complete satisfaction of desire. Mythologies of heaven often pick this out from the others as

explaining all of what heaven means. It is a nice fantasy but not much of a reason for living. The satisfaction of desire in heaven is the fulfillment that lies beyond what we have or could have wanted or hoped for. No one can fulfill all their known desires because of this nature of fulfillment. It lies beyond the imagination. There we discover that the meaning of God is the infinitely surpassing of all other pleasures. Finally – although there is no finality about it – the vision of God is a 'community of supreme delight'. Because all are sharing all that is good with everyone else and everyone will love everyone else as himself; we will all therefore rejoice in each other's well-being.

Seeing this vision as the goal of all human existence and endeavour must change the way we live. To begin to see it we have to begin to experience it. Community helps us to do this.

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Community can only happen when the ego is transcended.

"THE END OF ALL FORMS
OF KNOWLEDGE IS THE
VISION OF GOD."

False community – like a tyranny or a group living together merely for its members' own convenience and security – does the opposite. It gives permission to hide behind our ego,

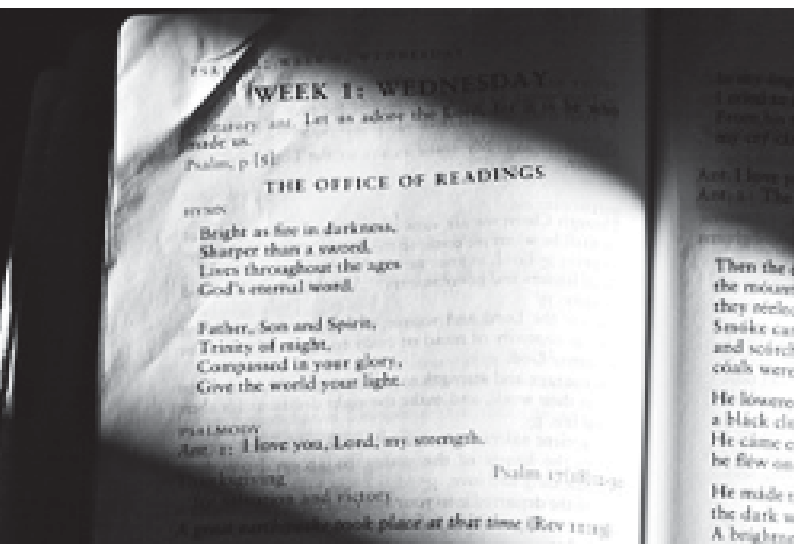
often with pious or altruistic pretensions, protecting rather than transcending it.

Meditation creates community wherever it is practiced simply because it transcends the ego and even a little transcendence goes a long way to reveal the true nature of our selves and our relationships with others. Because this revelation of our essential goodness and our potential for communion is so exciting, community is powerfully attractive, though it soon becomes – the favourite word is 'challenging'. Giving up our illusion of being an outside observer is deeply worrisome to the ego and yet in community, as in meditation or a good liturgy, there can be no observers.

Objectively standing outside while partially participating is a useful illusion. We would have no scientific breakthroughs without it. But like time it is an illusion that does not stand up to scrutiny. Time is also a useful illusion. It enables us to be on time for things and get things done in time, yet in our clearest moments we see how all time is eternally present. Similarly, how can anything or anyone be actually, objectively outside the web of relationship that constitutes reality? In virtual reality, however, which we have got so good at creating, such false identity is not only possible but expected of us. But in meditation we renounce the virtual and seek only the real.

Time and separation dissolve in the transcendence of the ego. In meditation we put this pure 'thought' into practice. We live it as if it were true and then discover that it is true. We are not thinking about it during the work of meditation in the way that I am thinking in writing this and you are in reading it. But by becoming silent, still and simple we prepare for the opening of the blossom of truth and even before the

◀ *Benedictine Oblates of the World Community read the Divine Office and share in the life and work of their local community.*



flower opens we can begin to be aware of its delightful scent.

It is of course all a learning process, as John Main taught:

What each of us can learn, if we have the courage to enter into this silence, is that it is in silence that we really begin to learn. It's in the silence that we really begin to enter the experience of what it means to be. (Door to Silence)

Like the students of Rav Chaim we are easily distracted from the lesson. Our thoughts in meditation may be subtle and pleasing or painful, crude and disturbing. The hard thing at first is to accept that all thoughts need to be laid aside: as the desert fathers taught so simply, 'prayer (of this kind) is the laying aside of thoughts'. Surely, we think, good thoughts are better than bad ones, true thoughts than false ones. Of course they are, but in meditation the invitation to silence is as absolute as the invitation to the wedding feast in the parable of Jesus.

Our thoughts are like traffic on a busy highway. There are busier times, accidents or construction are going on mentally too. Like cars, thoughts flow in different lanes, some slower than others, some flashier than others, all at different levels of consciousness. Sometimes thoughts stray across the

boundaries and we get confused or panic. Like traffic most of the time, thoughts in meditation attract our attention, superficially and fleetingly. We keep an eye on them, just in case, and check in the rear-view mirror of memory for an extra sense of security. In heavy traffic all this ephemeral mental attention leaves us after a time feeling tired and stressed. In meditation the deep, sustained and steady attention, which is both the work and the journey of meditation, instead leaves us refreshed and clarified. It is the pure kind of work that renews rather than absorbs energy.

On some highways a special lane is set aside for buses or for multi-occupancy. It is a sign of our culture that we create massive traffic congestion with cars with a single, separated and isolated, occupant. No wonder cars are so emblematic of the modern world with its psychological ideal of personal autonomy. In these special lanes, however, vehicles can travel faster going in the same direction as others. The analogy with meditation is not exact, of course, as this spiritual lane is not legally restricted and is in fact open to all, but it remains less travelled. The way that leads to life, Jesus said, is narrow. It is narrow not because any are excluded but because the focus is single-pointed. The paradox here that perhaps keeps people from getting into the open lane that sweetly expands to accommodate the traffic, is one that the ego cannot readily grasp; it is that the narrowing of attention leads to a broadening of the mind and an opening of the heart.

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We can get into this lane at any time. There is no expiry date on the invitation. It is always dated today. But the earlier we start the better.

At the first Meditatio Seminar in London last month we considered the value to our world of teaching meditation to

children. The experience in Townsville has inspired many other schools around the world to do the same. As we listened to teachers and psychiatrists on the topic it was hard not to conclude that the question is not 'why should we teach meditation to children?' but rather 'why on earth don't we?' In the pure thought of which children are capable, the laying aside of thoughts is perhaps not easier than it is for us but certainly simpler. The young child, for example, does not distinguish so exclusively between play and work. For them, playing and at least this kind of praying seem – as in fact they are – quite similar. Returning to the mantra then quickly becomes, not a chore to be resisted but a rule of the game that is played better and more enjoyably when you keep to the rules. Shouting at the referee also doesn't help anyone, either.

Coming to meditation later in life presents problems but also our motivation to embrace the discipline can be stronger simply because we know the necessity for it more clearly. We would find it easier however if we took it more lightly – saying

"MEDITATION IS THE PURE
KIND OF WORK THAT RENEWS
RATHER THAN ABSORBS ENERGY."

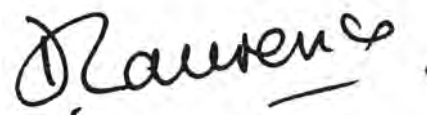
the mantra 'gently' as the tradition advises and integrating it into ordinary daily life as routinely as possible. Letting go is not a violent process. Once we get the hang of it, it actually

seems quite natural and often enjoyable.

In ancient traditions the different levels of consciousness were observed and analysed at least as carefully and accurately as neurologists measure brain energies today. The first pioneers of this human quest for truth and unity understood that apart from waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep there is a fourth state. In this state we are true and one because we live and move and have our being within it – as St Paul said we do in God. But they also warned that we cannot separate this fourth state – let us call it spirit – because it both includes and is beyond the other states of mind. We recognize the ordinary in it. But in it everything is extraordinarily ordinary.

St Bernard said that the soul is like an unopened parcel. Some of us may still remember opening well-wrapped Christmas presents not long ago. However carefully and attractively packaged the wrapping had to be untied and laid aside if the present was to be seen and received. Maybe it was what we wanted or not, but hopefully we appreciated the thought behind it and what the gift represented. Imagine a life where the gift seen is always perfectly what we wanted and more, and consumes all desire other than the wish to enjoy and share it. Imagine a life where the laying aside of the wrapping and the discovery of the gift became the presence of the giver and led to the sharing of it with others – and that all this becomes one blissful yet distinct operation called being. Then lay the thought aside again. Meditation is not what you think.

With much love,



Laurence Freeman OSB

NEWS FROM THE WORLD COMMUNITY

The following is a small representation of the life of the Community. For weekly news and more information visit the Community web page: www.wccm.org

SOUTH AMERICA

ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL

During his 5th visit to Buenos Aires in November, Fr. Laurence Freeman gave the talk *Un Nuevo comienzo: meditación en un tiempo de crisis* (A new beginning: meditation in a time of crisis) at Del Salvador University, Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogical Psychology and launched *De la palabra al silencio. Meditación Cristiana* (Word into Silence) by John Main. He then led a meditation retreat for 100, *El ojo del corazón* (The eye of the heart), near the city. Participants in this mid-week retreat came from 12 different Argentine provinces and from three bordering countries: Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile.

BRAZIL



Rio de Janeiro Retreat

Fr Laurence led two retreats in Brazil at Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Meditators from all over Brazil came. During Mass at the Rio retreat we received the final oblation of Hileana Carneiro.

In October, a group of Christian meditators met for a day retreat in Sao Paulo with the Catholic theologian Fr James Alison for a conference on the thought of French anthropologist René Girard. There was a fruitful exchange of experiences in the group with a closing reading and meditation period. For some, it was their first contact with the local Community and everybody shared a sense of joy and companionship.

INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND 3/4 DECEMBER 2010



Fr Laurence with philosopher Bertrand Vergely.

As the snow fell and blanketed Geneva and its airport, we began to wonder if our inter-faith dialogue seminar wasn't doomed to failure before it had even begun. One of

our speakers was due to arrive from Tel Aviv, another from Casablanca and the third from London. A rabbi, a Sufi master and Father Laurence, and, needless to say, we had no plan B! But the Spirit moves in mysterious ways and the airport opened just in time to permit the flight from Israel to land, to close again the next day for more than an hour, the flight from Morocco circling overhead while the snow ploughs worked diligently to clear the runway once more. Fr Laurence had

waited patiently in London for his flight to leave. As the three speakers entered the candle-lit room at the Château de Bossey overlooking Lake Geneva, the silence, reverence and sense of expectation were palpable. The heavy snowfalls had created a cocoon into which we all gratefully sank. Fr Laurence was our first speaker, introducing the theme of Sacredness and Silence, followed by brief introductory remarks from Dr Skali and Rav Guedj who spoke particularly powerfully at the beginning of the Jewish Shabbat. On Saturday, there were conferences from the three speakers further developing the theme and in dialogue. Most importantly, however, each speaker led the participants in periods of contemplation as it is experienced in their tradition and these moments proved to be intensely unifying for each of us.

Deborah Walton: deborah.walton@gmail.com

NATIONAL COORDINATORS' MEETINGS

The national coordinators of the community will meet by region during the year. They will share their national experiences and also receive input from the Meditatio Seminars and events which they will go on to share with their own communities:

February 10-13 Asia Pacific Region meeting, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; March 11-13, N.Europe meeting, London; April 1-3 Central and S Europe meeting, Geneva; May 13-16 Latin American Meeting, Caracas; October 14-16 East European Meeting, Poland; October 28-30 N and Central America and Caribbean Meeting, Jacksonville Florida

NEW IT COORDINATOR FOR WCCM AND NEW WEBPAGE



Adriano Massi, who lives and works in Rome is the new WCCM IT coordinator. He has already redesigned the new wccm.org community webpage with many new features and simpler organisation. Visitors can become members and ask to receive special mailings and information.

SPAIN

In November, I was invited to represent Fr Laurence at a two-day Interfaith Conference on Meditation in Barcelona. I did so with the support and translation skills of the Catalan National Coordinator Marco Schorlemmer. On the first day, it was wonderful to see teachers from the Sufi, Tibetan Buddhism, Taoist, Vedanta, Christian Zen and Christian Meditation traditions listening to and respecting the truth in each other. There were differences, especially in the theological

descriptions of the Ultimate: God, Brahman, the Tao and the Void, but when describing the spiritual discipline of meditation and the experience in the depth of the soul (whether we call it our Buddha nature, the Atman or the indwelling Christ, the consciousness of Christ) the correspondences were profound. I was reminded of the words of Bede Griffiths OSB that 'when the human mind reaches a certain point of [spiritual] experience it comes to the same understanding'. In such an environment, it was so clear to see that each wisdom tradition shares in the One Truth. There was such an atmosphere of harmony and

friendship, that John Main's teaching that 'meditation creates community' proved to be so true.

Marco also took me to one of the two Christian meditation groups in Barcelona, which he co-leads with Helena. Apart from the usual group members, many had been attracted by the Conference. There were 90 people attending and very responsive to our teaching. Meditation is, therefore, under Marco's care, flourishing in Barcelona.

Kim Nataraja, International School Coordinator

IN FOCUS

Polly Schofield

The love of silence grew within me as a child when - due to political persecution of my family in Budapest - I often had to hide in a church near where I lived. It was a beautiful thousand year-old building, usually empty except for the solitary eight-year old in one of the pews. So when I met Father John in Montreal, it was as if we had known each other. Fr John often cautioned against the kind of self-reflective attitude that observes other people's spiritual journey. 'Do not talk about your experience - just meditate.' He seldom spoke of his own. To this day, I cannot speak coherently about it and the longer I meditate the more difficult it seems to become.

One sunny day in May, as the snow was melting, Mark and I presented our two sons, seven and eight years for instruction at the Monastery. At first, Fr John refused. 'We are here to teach adults' he said 'not children.' I suppose I was insistent, because after a while he relented (with a sigh) and said, 'There is a young monk here, see what he has to say.' The young monk was Brother Laurence, and he accepted. So every Saturday, Mark and I would take Julian and Dominic and later Adrian, up to the monastery where they had the run of the house and learnt to meditate. They were the nucleus of the children's meditation group that has spread world-wide.

Meditation was not on my agenda. I just wanted my children to have a good grounding in Christian life. Educated by the Sacred Heart nuns I had the comfortable knowledge that God loved me - and I loved God back - it was enough. Then I met John Main. Living near him over the years and being loved by him is the greatest grace in my life. It opened me up to a new joy and freedom, an expanding reality, that Saint Paul called passing 'from glory to glory.'

One of Father John's rules was that whoever was in the monastery during the four times of daily meditation was to come to meditate. There was no one at the door, on the phone, in the kitchen - we all meditated together. Nothing else took precedence. On one occasion, there was only him and my very-shy self at the midday meditation. We said the Office, facing one another across the room and meditated. As I left I

said 'Isn't it sad that nobody came.'

He looked at me almost sternly, and said: 'Just remember this Polly, for the future, for the rest of your life;'

he spoke in a measured serious tone, 'It doesn't matter if nobody comes, it's

not your fault, so don't take any blame. If a thousand people come, it also has nothing to do with you. Take no credit. As long as you are there!' His words are indelibly etched in my memory. As I meditate today with groups, with dying patients, their families, or in an empty room alone, I remember his words - it is about fidelity, never about numbers.

After Fr John received my Oblation - on one of the happiest days of my life - I spent more time at the Monastery filled with great joy. I was with him often in the weeks before his death. I would feed him and read to him but I sat mostly in silence, and from his bed he would just look at me. The experience changed and charged my life. It is present to me now. So I continue to meditate, not giving it much thought, teaching people by meditating with them, even if the longer I have been on this path, the less I have to say about it. Perhaps it communicates through me.

A few months ago, I was invited to a remote part of Hungary to teach meditation to a young American couple, Baptist missionaries who wanted to learn contemplative prayer. We said the daily office and meditated. They were enthralled by Fr John's taped talks. They are passing on the practice to the groups who come to their house. Fr John often said that meditation is less a method of prayer than a fellowship. It is ultimately a relationship of grace. It is the simple daily practice of meditation that leads to the realization that the teachers, friends and family I meditate with are the real treasures of my life.

Looking back over the years, that first meeting with Fr John and those blissful early years it all seem an ongoing preparation for a gradual awakening - into Love.

Polly Schofield, Montreal





Born Contemplative Madeleine Simon RSCJ

Penelope Sturrock, ed.

Madeleine Simon RSCJ had an intuitive understanding that children are 'born contemplative'. This book helps adults who care for children to share in their openness and longing for God in the silence, stillness and simplicity of Christian meditation. This new edition brings an experiential dimension to her enduring message. An invitation at the end

of each chapter encourages the reader to respond not only to the content but, more importantly, to the experience of sharing the prayer of silence with children. The book will help practising meditators who are looking for a way to introduce meditation to children. It will also encourage those who have not practised meditation to begin in the interest of children.

softcover book 156pp #6177 £7.50 \$11.95US

PILGRIMAGE:

Part 1: An Introduction to Christian Meditation (27:10)

Part 2: The Daily Practice (20:00)

Part 3: Meditation Creates Community (16:10)

Part 4: Meditation for the World (19:10)

The NTSC edition with subtitle options for 9 languages will be available by April 2011.

• *PAL Format with English subtitles*

• **Pilgrimage:**

• **The Way of**

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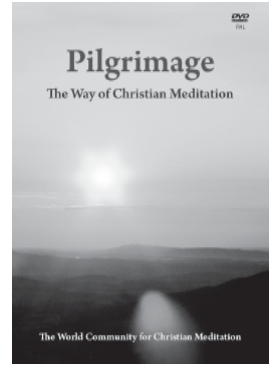
• *Narrated by*

• *Laurence Freeman OSB*

• Laurence Freeman OSB describes the tradition of this ancient way of prayer and John Main's personal journey. In teaching how to meditate, he reminds us that this is an ongoing work and faithfulness to the daily practice is a liberating spiritual experience open to all. He gives an overview of The World Community for Christian Meditation in which the heart of the community is the weekly meditation groups. They enable the tradition of the teaching to be passed on and help newcomers to persevere on the inner journey. Recently a new outreach called MEDITATIO has been formed that realises the aspiration of the Community to express its contemplative life in work for peace, justice and compassion.

This DVD, presented in four parts, is particularly useful as a teaching resource at introductory workshops and group meetings, and for sharing with people who are interested in the teaching and work of the Community.

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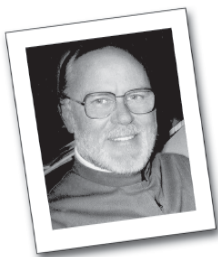
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Words by John Main....

Meditation leads to concentration. Purity of heart is sharp vision. As we say our mantra we narrow down our concentration to a single point. That single point leads to this vision. All the ego, is put aside and our vision is concentrated wholly into the mystery, the vision of God. The secret is learning to come down to that single point. (from Door to Silence)

PLEASE MAKE A CONTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO YOUR MEANS TO THE COST OF THIS NEWSLETTER AND IF YOU CAN TO THE WORK OF THE COMMUNITY WORLDWIDE.

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