CHRISTIAN MEDITATION
NEWSLETTER

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JOHN MAIN SEMINAR 2005

AUGUST 8-14, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA,

A LEVER AND A PLACE TO STAND

LED BY RICHARD ROHR OFM

Richard Rohr is known worldwide as a modern voice of the Gospel emphasizing both the contemplative and the socially engaged dimensions of Christian life. In this year's Seminar he will lead a profound and stimulating reflection on the relationship between stillness and right action that overflows into justice.

As usual, the Seminar will be preceded by a retreat led by Laurence Freeman OSB ("Light and Dark: The Way of Unity") that will incorporate talks, meditation and integrated yoga sessions led by Giovanni Felicioni.

Full information and online registration is available on the Web site www.mediomedia.org or from your national Christian Meditation Coordinator. US and Canada may register toll free at 1-877-285-6809.

MONTE OLIVETO RETREAT

July 16-23, 2005

The 2005 Retreat at the mother house of the Olivetan Benendictine family, in the hills of Tuscany, will be led by Laurence Freeman OSB with Giovanni Felicioni leading the integrated yoga, July 16-23. For details and registration visit www.wccm.org or contact Susan (susan@wccm.org) at the International Centre, St Mark's, Myddelton Sq, London EC1R 1XX, UK Tel: (44 020 7278 2070)

INTO THE LIGHT

The World Community has said farewell, in this life, to two of its most beloved friends and teachers. Eileen was a sister of St Joseph, born in Brooklyn, NY. She had been part of The World Community since 1981. She led the John Main Seminar in 1990, as well as many meditation retreats that she led singly and with Fr Laurence. She was a major inspirational force in the setting up of the School. Her books and tapes continue her profound teaching influence and a posthumous collection of her essays and poetry is in progress. She died in Minneapolis February 3rd. Patricia, wife of Peter Ng and mother of Debbie, Terence and Georgina was the first meditator of our community in Singapore and with Peter the founder of the centre and strong local community there. Her joyful and loving presence nurtured and inspired many. Diagnosed 19 months ago with cancer and given 3 months to live she lived a full and joyful last phase and delighted to welcome the birth of her first two grandchildren. A conversation with her, Peter and Fr Laurence made last August has been published by Medio Media: *From Panic to Peace*. Patricia died February14th. May they rest in joyful peace and console those who grieve for them.

A GLOBAL CONTEMPLATIVE FAMILY

Our recent records show that there are meditators in The World Community in the following countries. To make contact with the Community in your own country visit **WWW.WCCM.ORG** or write to the International centre, St Mark's, Myddelton Square, London EC1R 1XX, UK.

Algeria, Andorra, Antigua, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Benin, Bermuda, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Fasso, Burma, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dutch Antilles (Curacao), Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Gibraltar, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel , Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Kiribati, Korea, Kuwait, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Mozambique, Myanmar, Netherlands, New Caledonia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Romania, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, St Lucia, St Vincent, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, Thailand, Tobago, Trinidad, Tunisia, UAE, Uganda, USA, Venezuela, Vietnam, West Africa, Western Samoa, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

A LETTER FROM LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB

DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Dear friends,

(The following is the homily given by Fr Laurence at the funeral mass of Sr Eileen O'Hea CSJ at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St Joseph, Brentwood, New York on 9th February)

When I arrived here last night the first thing I did after being shown my room was join the meditation group that meets here at the Mother House every week. It was a moving sign to me of Eileen's enduring presence and her deep influence on this community that she loved so dearly and that loved her so faithfully. That is one very important thing we are celebrating in this mass.

It is a sign of Eileen's unusual personality and the richness of her life in community that she is having two funeral masses: last Saturday in Minneapolis where she lived for the past 20 years; and today, Ash Wednesday, when we are all reminded of our mortality and frailty, here in Brentwood where she began her religious life 51 years ago, here where her roots remained fresh and lovingly tended. It is a gift for me to share our loss and grief together, and also our faith; to mourn but also to celebrate with you, her own Sisters of St Joseph, the life and work of a dear friend and my close colleague in The World Community for Christian Meditation of which she was a founding and Guiding Board member.

> *"Eileen was a pilgrim in the spiritual realms and a theologian."*

In Minneapolis a few days ago I reflected on Eileen's personality, a complex, subtle, clear, truth-filled, idiosyncratic, loving personality marked especially with the charism of prophet and friend. Tonight I would like to try to explore another of her charisms and the one that perhaps has had the most far-reaching influence, her great gift as a teacher.

EILEEN THE EXPLORER

She was a pilgrim in the spiritual realms and a theologian. Not a theologian in the academic sense but in the sense of the Christian Desert tradition which said that "the theologian is one who prays and one who prays is a theologian". She was an explorer of these pathways of the spirit, always seeking the next connection, the next transition in understanding. This questing, questioning, curious, challenging approach to life and her own ways of making meaning of life seem to have been part of her character even as a child. She always had a strong trust in her own sense of truth and justice. She could learn from others but she was quick to assess and if necessary contest their authority. This probably strengthened her solitary character – not an isolated or even lonely character – but a character that had early on found and embraced its own uniqueness.

Her ideas about God, the church, the role of women, religious life and the spiritual journey, all developed over time. They ought to have changed, of course, in a woman whose experience spanned nearly 70 years, who entered religious life in 1954 and died, faithful to her original vows, in 2005. Her excellence as a teacher derived from the diversity of her religious and theological conditioning and her professional training in other fields, from primary school teaching, to social work, family therapy and, in her maturity, from her spiritual direction, retreats and the way she taught the contemplative life as a teacher of Christian meditation. It is no small tribute to her religious family here in Brentwood that you were able for half a century to provide such an unusual individual with a continuum of community and affirmation in which she could evolve and mature in all these fields and find, by the end of her life, such a remarkable, distinctive integration.

I can't do justice to her journey and to her gifts as a teacher. Many of you and all of you as a community will want to complete what I attempt. Many of you have benefited personally from her sharing with you of her explorations and discoveries. As a teacher she had a freshness, a depth and an excitement – a strong but joyful seriousness – that she communicated both in the spoken word (the primary medium of all teaching) as well as in her articles, books, poems and tapes. She labored long and hard over all her talks and retreats. Writing was a labor for her although one that she enjoyed. When she took her sabbatical to write in a trailer in West Virginia she followed the discipline of the writer as well as the hermit. She once described to me the writer's pleasure in finding the work in progress waiting for her on her desk each morning. In

all these varied media she learned to teach what she had acquired in the cell of her self-knowledge.

THE MEANING OF GOD

I would like to take two areas of her teaching and try to see where she had reached in each of them by the end of her life: before she entered into that full personal union with Truth itself that she longed and thirsted for all her life. From that union in which she is complete and silent now I am sure she will continue to teach us through the Holy Spirit of Truth that Jesus breathes into us.

Firstly, she was gripped passionately by the essential religious question, the meaning of God and the nature of our experience of God. Her journey in this field of enquiry, of basic theology, shows her as a child of her time. It began in the old dramatic, dualism of God. Pre-Conciliar Catholicism sharply drew a picture of God as outside and above us, a God with whom we communicated primarily through the intermediaries of sacraments and clergy – or the occasional exceptional religious. She arrived by the end of her life at a very different sense of God shaped by a perception and by her own experience of mystical union. This different sense of who God is had been formed by several influences, her own inner journey, her grasp and understanding of the divine feminine, her research into the Christian contemplative tradition and her dialog with other religions. She began like most of us with a dominant *mental* image of God, patriarchal, judgmental, frightening, yet, for all that, not *all* bad. It was also awesome, transcendent and loving. I guess that her rebellious personality – that many of you knew well and which was manifested very early when she defiantly dated the Italian boys that her father declared unsuitable for a good Irish girl, or indeed any Irish girl – derived from these contradictory images of God in conflict within her. The dualistic God, the split personality of the Divine could never have made sense to her. She rejected it while of course being influenced by it. The true, living image of God was so deeply and consciously alive in her deep self, however, that it meant everything to her to get it right, to understand and relate to it clearly and truthfully. This was a struggle for her.

"She was set free for the deeper explorations of God."

She achieved it – not in the realm of abstract theology or God-talk, but of human psychology. The connexion between the image of God and the relationship of a person with herself was central to her wisdom as a teacher. She and I had many conversations over 24 years of friendship about the role of therapy in the spiritual journey. We explored and argued about the relation between psychology, theology and meditation. They were conversations which often challenged me and taught me much.

She believed, empirically, that you had to get down into the deep operating system of the person, into the very nature of Mind and consciousness, before the right idea – the right *ikon* – of God could be realized. This turned the old pre-conciliar idea of sin on its head. Once you take the actual and whole human person as the starting-point to God, sin could no longer be seen in the old dualistic model. It is not just a simple, willful disobedience of Divine or Ecclesiastical commandments, a breaking of rules for which we will be punished or reprieved. Goodness too, therefore, is not a conformist law-abidingness which the Father will reward. The legalization of sin which Christianity exposes as the great religious illusion and supposedly replaces with the law of grace was a clear personal discovery for Eileen through her work as a therapist. It set her free for the deeper explorations of God she made.

She saw, in herself and in those she worked with, that the nature of sin is illusion and that it is the cause of suffering and psychological dysfunction. It is also the root of our inability to love.

Our wounds, those unhealed parts of the self – the afflicted ego – keep us from truly realizing what is always there. Love, pure love. If we knew at the deepest level the experience of this love, our wounds – that is, our self-doubt, confusion, guilt, fears, our being not enough – would all be absorbed in love and we would know freedom, peace, joy. Most of us are not there yet. But we are on the way.

THERE IS NO SEPARATION

We live our lives (she wrote towards the end of her life) as if separation is real rather than an illusion. She wondered why we all fall under the sway of this illusion and concluded that it is simply because that is what we feel we are like in ourselves. What creates this all-powerful feeling? In her later teaching she identified it as a thought pattern that resulted from bad teaching – the mis-information about our very selves, the de-formation that we suffer at the hands of parents, church, culture and society.

In religious terms this pattern of thought leads us to believe that we have to earn God's love by doing good things and by avoiding bad things. Good and Bad are culturally relative ideas but we ingest them as absolute standards identified with particular ways of behaving along with absolute sanctions,

rewards and punishments. It is hard, she said, for most people so culturally conditioned and religiously trained to take in the real truth of the Gospel: that there is *no* separation between us and God; and that we don't have to earn God's love, because it *is* our very being.

The fact is that we are loved unsurpassably at every moment no matter what condition we are in, good or bad.

In this we can hear the echo of the true Christian tradition, the voice for example of Mother Julian of Norwich for whom sin has only the reality and influence of an illusion and which is utterly evaporated upon contact with the love of God.

The false belief system denies this fact. It constructs an essentially fantasy world of punishment, reward, self-deception and pious role-playing as well, more ominously, an often repressed, self-tormenting hatred of the very God who loves us and whom we are created to love. This premise became more and more essential to her teaching throughout her life. The great Christian mystics reassured her that she was on the right track. She loved Meister Eckart for this reason, who said that 'between me and God there is no between'. But so also did Rumi and the Hindu scriptures and the teachings of the Buddha.

"We are loved no matter what condition we are in."

Because she was rooted in these great spiritual and philosophical traditions she did not succumb to a facile optimism or a New Age denial of evil. She encountered it in her work and saw it at work in the world. People do terrible things, to themselves, to those they love, to their enemies and also to innocent defenseless strangers. She recognized that evil is part of the world we inhabit. The old dualism explained it away conveniently just as "the work of the devil". Her contemplative, psychological perspective confronted it more honestly. Evil, she said, is the projection of our own self-hatred, the negative and false conceptions of self. It is also the attempt to impose on others the creedal belief systems formed in this negative and arrested stage of human development. This was her way of understanding evil in both personal and social terms.

THE MEANING OF EVIL

Feeling separate ourselves, we see others as separate: the environment, immigrants, other races or faiths, the poor. What we see as separate we feel all right about rejecting and destroying. Any belief, she thought, whether religious or political or personal, that reinforces the experience of separation from ourselves or others, helps to promote if not to actually cause evil in our world.

This was her final diagnosis of the human problem of suffering and evil, sin, shame, guilt alienation and violence. In her discovery of meditation in the Christian tradition she understood and went on to teach the response to it. She saw that the cure is not an ideology but a *practice*. Even when she understood the compulsive, pathological root of sin and evil, she saw we are not totally relieved of all responsibility. We are responsible in part for our own cure. In collaboration with the Spirit we are our own therapists. Meditation is a discipline, a responsible response to the fact of our own woundedness. In John Main, whose tapes she often used to listen to at breakfast, she recognized an authority she could trust. Through his teaching she found a connexion to the greater contemplative tradition which nourished her ever after.

Eileen understood that the false belief system that creates a false God is resilient to ideas. The cure is the way of self-knowledge and self-knowledge cannot be given. It is an experience to be broken into, through the cooperation of faith and grace. But you "gotta do the work yourself". The illusions that "we adhere to like glue" get undone through the practice of meditation.

The repetition of the mantra helps us collect our scattered energy and detach from the ego mind which holds us prisoner in our old thought patterns.

A zen saying that she chewed on for many years invites us to find the "original face we had before our parents were born". For her, this meant the way meditation restores us to our initial state of creation – she remained within the Biblical myth – which is the experience of "knowing oneness of being with divine being".

MEDITATION CONNECTS

For Eileen, therefore, meditation has meaning and is effective at the spiritual, psychological and social levels. It is the essential therapy, the healing of the painful, core sense of separation and shame. It restores us from the fallen human condition. Her insight into the fundamental importance of contemplation' for all human situations and personalities; is very like that of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. For the Cloud, too, this 'work of contemplation dries up the root of sin within you'. Psychotherapy is an important preparation for the therapy of the prayer of the heart. And contemplation is the necessary therapy for the deformities of religion that false belief systems create.

Eileen was a uniquely individual teacher of this tradition. She could not buy anything as a package that she did not make her own; but I knew that when she taught meditation we were operating on the same wavelength. She introduced her clients and directees to meditation when she felt they were ready and she had an intuitive gift for sensing the right moment. In her teaching within the World Community, especially on the retreats that we led together, and many of

you who followed her retreats here will recognize this, she was a strict enforcer of the silence and mindfulness which is the ideal context for the practice.

Meditation is a way of prayer that connects us to our true self and the expansion of consciousness that is synonymous with the deeper self.

The Christian contemplative tradition has always taught and she too saw that meditation is a way of self-knowledge: it helps us experientially to realize that "we are divine love manifesting". Hence, her insight into the nature of the Self as expanding consciousness, not a *thing* we find "inside us", a fixed point of ego-objectification. No one in whom this conscious experience of union was awakening could do harm or promote evil. We project onto others our own inner experience. Or, as Jesus said, it is what comes out of the heart of a person that matters. So, when we are one with our deepest self we project or emanate love. And, she insisted, this is the experience that coincides with the mind and heart of Christ. "Since we experience love we extend love," she said succinctly.

She took meditation seriously because she knew it was the real thing. She did not say, any more than John Main did, that meditation is the only way into the experience of what she called "living in love" but, she did say "it is a direct path to it".

Meditation is a way of opening ourselves to the experience of the Holy – of going beyond our finite concepts and realizing, experiencing oneness with the divine. Anyone who meditates expresses a willingness to go beyond form and therefore a willingness to suffer or die to the comfort they have grown accustomed to through a belief in form.

Not easy, because it involves a transcendence of the rational mind and the ego-centered self and an entry into a new kind of *knowing*. By knowing, here, she means something different from our habitual externally-oriented perception. The other type of knowing she was interested in is "participative knowing" which is an experience not of thought or feeling but of love itself. It is so important, so fundamental because "we were created to know and live from this experience of being in love". It is our very meaning as human beings.

THE EXPERIENCE OF DIVINE LOVE

People who have been meditating for some time often find this transition from objective to participative knowledge disorienting because images, beliefs and feelings about God and themselves lose their old relevance. Previously, they found comfort and solace in talking to God, thinking about God. Like St John of the Cross, Eileen knew as a contemplative teacher that she had to help people through this dark night of the senses and she knew the route well herself.

A real experience of loss and grief – a feeling that something is wrong with me spiritually because the old formulas are no longer working: the same comforts are no longer present. These things which helped to define one as a good spiritual person seem to dissolve.

That lack of sentimentality, that at times abrupt directness that were part of her way of being even with friends, *especially* with friends, was consistent with her relationship with God. She must have treated God the way she treated her friends! In someone who had not persevered with this journey this could have led to a bitterness or corrosive sadness. But she had discovered that

Gradually the presence of love in the experience of knowing becomes the experience of being and with it comes the experience of true faith – a leap that embraces the mystery of the divine rather than a grasping onto the consolation of prayer.

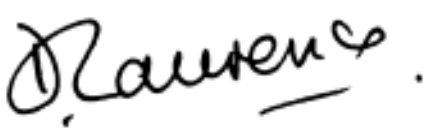
"Once the mind is still we experience divine love."

This is a major step in spiritual development. It requires faith and practice. It is the most complete of all the many deaths the ego has to undergo along the spiritual path. Yet it is worth the struggle because

Once the mind is still and ego is no longer dominating us, we find what we have always longed for – what we are constantly being drawn into – the experience of divine love.

This is a spiritual teacher at the height of her powers. I cannot understand why Eileen has been taken away from us and from the church when there is so great a need for women of her depth and wisdom. She could have had longer. And yet that is not for us to say. We can see that her work as a teacher made a profound, transformative impact on many, many lives and that it continues to ripple outwards as truth always does. We who have benefited from her wisdom and her friendship, her example and her faith – all of which manifested in the deep silent presence of the God who is love that pervaded her last days – it is *we* who will help her work and her vision to continue and to expand in this world of forms, just as she herself is now expanding and dancing her way in the world beyond form.

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***

THE WEB COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

The WCCM Web pages rely on the teamwork of many people around the world. One measure of their success can be found by "Googling" on "Christian meditation". We place 1st (and 2nd!) out of 38,500 sites. Search on "meditation" and we are 21st out of 8,590,000 sites. Not too shabby! One of our most popular features is Carla Cooper's selections for the Weekly Readings used by individual meditators and meditation groups. Carla also sends the readings to a team who translate them into French, Spanish, Japanese and most recently Chinese. (You may subscribe to the readings at www.MedioMedia.org.) We continue to post PDF versions of the International Newsletter (in both A4 and Letter format), thanks to Leon Milroy (Australia). Many visitors enjoy Fr Laurence's monthly Tablet column. We have added texts of his new "Meditatio" talks and FAQ's to help people with understanding their daily practice. Work has begun on a new Spanish Web site, joining the ranks of German, Portuguese, and other sites for non-English-speaking meditators. The Events and News pages carry reports and photos from around the world. On a recent day more than 300 visitors came from 22 countries including Brazil, Poland, New Zealand, Norway, France, Thailand, Ukraine and Japan. Those who contact us by e-mail tell how the daily practice of meditation and the Web site have touched their lives, especially during times of illness or dealing with the death of a loved one. To mark the 30th anniversary of our Community's first weekly meditation groups, you may visit and contribute to special pages on "John Main's Legacy" including a Web gallery of photos from various periods in his life, audio clips of his teaching on meditation, articles on the importance of meditation groups and John Main's unique place in the living tradition of contemplative prayer.

Gregory Ryan (gjryan@wccm.org)

NEW AND YOUNG MEDITATORS IN MALTA

Weekly meditation groups are becoming better known and more popular with Maltese. Many people are coming to learn more about Christian meditation and to experience meditation with one of our two groups. Occasionally we get meditators from overseas who are on holiday here meditating with us. How true that meditation creates communities! If we were to compare ourselves with a newly born baby, we would be expected then to resemble a toddler about to take its first hesitating steps forward! For the past nine months, a humble group of about 25 women and men have been regularly meeting every week to meditate and share together our personal experiences. Some members of the group had already experimented with other ways of meditation while others were completely new-comers. We can share two very meaningful experiences. The first came in the form of something very tangible. We were first meeting at a retreat centre and due to a refurbishing programme we were told that we could not continue to meet there. It happened that in that same week a Canadian couple who own a house in Malta offered us their premises. Sheer luck? Sheer coincidence? Call it whatever, but for us it was simply Providence! A second meaningful experience came in the form of a personal experience shared by one of the meditators who went to do missionary work in Peru. For some time, it seemed that he gave up meditating due to the new circumstances and cultural shock. Yet one particular morning he woke up, startled by the interior impulse of the mantra. From that morning his fear and doubts ebbed away and he found great peace in his new mission. Apart from our weekly meditation sessions, the group did a number of reaching-out experiments, introducing meditation to youth, seminarians, students of different Religious Orders and adolescents at a secondary school. So far, at this secondary school, we have completed the initial six-week introductory course (based on the book *The Pearl of Great Price*, which was attended by 35 students and 3 teachers. We will now be meditating together every Monday morning before school starts.

Tonio Caruana (toncar@waldonet.net.mt)

INTERFAITH COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE

On Sunday 13 February, at the House of Meditation at the Monastery of Christ the King, (Cockfosters, London), representatives of six faiths met for chanting, readings, prayers and meditation to commemorate the victims of the recent Tsunami disaster. ***David Rees (Dreeskon@aol.com)***

"AND BURY THE DEAD…" A CORPORAL WORK OF MERCY

Gilbert Lau is a forensic pathologist who participated in Singapore's initial disaster victim identification (DVI) response to Thailand after the Indian Ocean tsunami. He is married, with a son, and is a co-leader of the Christian meditation group at Holy Spirit Church, Singapore. This reflection was written after his visit to Thailand.

On New Year's Eve I left for the Thai island resort of Phuket, as part of the Singapore disaster victim identification (DVI) team formed after the tsunami of 26 December. My task, as a forensic pathologist, was to examine some of the thousands of decomposed bodies of the deceased victims for clues which might lead to their eventual positive identification. We were assigned to a disaster site in Khao Lak, north of Phuket, where we worked under difficult conditions. My first recollection is having to endure 2-3 hour-long drives (when no such distance exists in Singapore), to and from the site, in minibuses at speeds of up to 120 km/h, sometimes in the early hours of the morning or late into the night, often on narrow, two-lane, dual carriageways. The last experience evoked in me an intense devotion to St. Jude (the patron saint of desperate causes) that has, interestingly, persisted to this day. The destruction was focal (Phuket was actually largely intact), but severe where it occurred. I beheld death with a poignancy and intimacy I had never known before. There was huge physical destruction, carnage and massive loss of lives. The attempt to identify thousands of deceased persons from all over the world in just one of the affected countries would itself have been quite unprecedented in the international history of DVI. Yet in this overwhelming devastation, I witnessed an immense, spontaneous outpouring of human generosity and goodwill. There was no shortage of volunteers who were evidently unrelated to the victims. Massive donations of cash, supplies and equipment materialised quickly. Many acts of human kindness, expressed the zeal, dedication and commitment of so many who were involved in the humanitarian relief efforts, and extended even to the identification of the dead and their proper disposal. While the recent tsunami disaster has emphasised for me

the brevity of human life and the precariousness of human existence in a most stark manner, it has also taught me the importance of living my life a day, a moment at a time. Before I made this journey I guessed it would be life-changing for me. I was not wrong. I realise more deeply now what it means to "trust in the Lord". The past five years have been a particularly difficult time in my life. For a long time I felt as if God had unjustly been holding me in abeyance, denying me the satisfaction of success (as I had conceived and desired it). I now know that much of this resentment was unfounded because I have been blessed with the sure knowledge of his presence in my life and his profound love for me. I have encountered him in the midst of suffering, death and disaster, and have allowed him to hold me in his warm embrace. I now see that joy and peace, pain and sorrow, success and failure, suffering in all its forms, and even death, must be embraced whole-heartedly and without reserve. [Full report and photos at ***http://www.wccm.org/item.asp?recordid=tsunami&pagestyle=default***]

NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIA

This is an important year for the New Zealand community particularly with Fr Laurence's visit to Auckland, Wellington and Christ Church in April. But we also have a number of community days and silent retreats including the annual seminar retreat, "Christian Meditation in the Context of the 21st Century," 9th –11th September, in Auckland, led by Dr Eric Ryan. Eric is a philosopher who taught for many years in the US and is now a farmer who also runs a spiritual centre near Whangarei. This weekend is important for our development as a community understanding ourselves in the context of a church in crisis, a society becoming increasingly secular and a planet in ecological emergency. Peter Murphy (petermurphy54@hotmail.com)

In Australia, in April, Fr Laurence will lead a six-day silent retreat in Sydney and teach in Melbourne. Full details from Paul and Judi Taylor. (palmy@ozemail.com.au)

EAST TIMOR UPDATE

Paul and Judi Taylor and the Australian meditation community ask for our continued prayerful support for their project to bring meditation to East Timor. Progress has continued since the July 2004 visit. Four Sydney groups have paired up with contact people and parishes in East Timor, and other sponsorships and relationships are forming. Susan Connelly went to East Timor at the end of January hoping to meditate with those who received the teaching in July. She took a supply of the meditation cards in Tetum produced last year. She hopes to produce a CD in Tetum, which could reach beyond those who can read. Richard Cogswell and Michael Kelly OSB, who participated in the visit last year, think a follow-up trip is needed to reinforce the first and prepare for a visit by Father Laurence in 2006. There will also be a visit later this year. To fund this year's endeavor, the Australian National Coordinators will write to each group leader asking for help. If there is widespread support among the 310 groups nationally, the project can be funded without detriment to the other activities of our meditation community. Keeping this outreach in our awareness and holding the people of East Timor in the silence, we go forward in trust. Contact Paul Taylor (palmy@ozemail.com.au)

ONLINE BOOKSTORE

The new Web site for the Community's Book Store is now online. Browse the complete catalog and get the "Weekly Readings" delivered to you by e-mail every week. Subscribe at www.mediomedia.org. Also find information about the John Main Seminar 2005 with Richard Rohr OFM to be held in Thousand Oaks, California, August 11-14 with a pre-seminar retreat led by Laurence Freeman OSB. Online registration is available. A PDF brochure is also available for those who prefer to print it out and register by postal mail. Check out the NEWS, EVENTS and PEACE AND JUSTICE pages to learn more about the latest happenings around The World Community.

IN FOCUS

A LETTER FROM A CHINESE SEMINARIAN TO FR LAURENCE AFTER HIS TALKS AT THE SEMINARY:

Dear Fr. Laurence,

May God be with you always! I do not have any insightful questions to ask about prayer. Perhaps I am still very young and immature and am still seeking. I just want to write about how I see this form of prayer, the prayer of the heart, from my personal point of view. I love to use the relationship between me and my parents to exemplify our relationship with God, although the latter is on a much higher plane. I feel that my everyday oral prayer, like the different forms of mental prayer, is my unceasing calling for my parents at home. Even though I repeatedly call out their names, I don't feel tired or bored. When my mom and dad hear me calling, they are not bothered and do not get tired of my petitions. I need them and their love. When I have done something terribly wrong, yet no sooner do I return to their bosom and call them by name, I am made whole. That, to me, is a most beautiful and precious moment. The more I call on them, the deeper is my bond with them. In a similar way, the more we pray, our relationship with our God is intensified. Father, the precious gift you brought to us today is a mystery, yet it is for everyone and it is something everyone can accept. Meditation gives me the same feeling of 'homecoming.' It is wonderful: it warms my heart and fills me with excitement, love and hope. Each time I return home, I am almost beyond myself: I never tire of the long train ride, nor am I bothered by time. And when I reach home and see my parents, I embrace them, as if we are never to part. All the words I have rehearsed to say to them beforehand are forgotten ? I can't say them. As my parents hurry to the kitchen to prepare a good meal for me, I sit and wait by myself on the sofa. Even though no words have passed between us, that is still a very precious and beautiful moment in my life. This form of pure prayer gives me exactly the same feeling of coming home, like hugging and holding Jesus ever so closely. There is no need for words, since He reads our minds and hearts, and knows what we need and want. Thank you again, Father, for bringing us this precious gift. It is like a train that leads to heaven and we are all invited to get on. Lastly, as a child of God, I can say without hesitation, "I know and feel that God is here in China and that He is filled with hope for China." So, I pray that your trip and stay in China will give you a good impression so that you can grow to understand and love her. Please introduce China to others, so they can also learn to love her, too. Dear Father, I implore you to continue praying for China, especially for the Church in China. May God grant you His peace.

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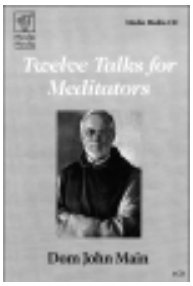

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WORDS BY JOHN MAIN....

In saying the mantra we lay down our life for the sake of Him we have not yet seen. The stillness of mind and body to which the mantra guides us is a preparation for entering silence and for our progression through the spheres of silence. Then we see with wonder the light of our own spirit and know that light as something beyond our spirit and yet the source of it. (Word into Silence)

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