



Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

www.wccm.org

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Haiti



In December 2008, Fr. Laurence led a pilgrimage to Haiti, presenting Christian meditation to a wide variety of audiences. As a result of his visit, a meditation group was formed in the small village of Fond des Blancs. This is the place where Dr Gene Bebeau, National Coordinator for the US Christian meditation community, spends time every year doing volunteer work as an anaesthetist. He is dedicated to the spreading of Christian meditation in Haiti. To follow-up on Fr. Laurence's visit last year, I offered to Gene Bebeau and Dr. Pierre Inobert, the Haitian Coordinator, to continue supporting this emerging community by visiting for a week. We met with a wide variety of groups: community development workers and teachers at the Marianist Seminary in Port-au-Prince, two groups of 40 students, age 16-18 at the Junior seminary, novices and their teachers leaders at the Séminaire St-Vincent de Paul, a group of 80 student nurses, age 18 to 20 and a group of 20 hospital staff at Brenda Hospital, Les Cayes, two groups of 60 students, age 14 to 16 in Fond des Blancs and the meditation group there.

Contacts were made with priests and religious sisters who would be interested for the next visit. Dr. Pierre is looking forward to on-going support from the Canadian Community and we are planning a visit next year. Discovering another country is always a great joy, getting in contact with the soul of a people is a privilege. In the span of a short week, I was struck by the incredibly difficult living conditions which most Haitians endure, I marvelled at their resilience and I have been inspired by the dedication of the large numbers, from Haiti and abroad, who are committed to creating a better life for the children, the women and the men of this struggling country. I am filled with a sense of gratitude to have represented the Canadian Christian meditation community in offering spiritual support to a people so proud and full of hope. *Michel Legault*

In the last few days news of the terrible earthquake in Haiti has reached us. We hold the suffering of this noble people in our hearts. Please visit www.wccm.org for information about how to help the relief work through our Community there.

SOME MAJOR COMMUNITY DATES FOR 2010

* Opening of Christian Meditation Centre, Neptune Beach, FL, USA January 20-21

* French National Conference January 29-31: Mourir et Naitre. Lyons

* Holy Week Retreat March 29-April 4: Bere Island, Ireland

* USA National Retreat April 23-25: led by Laurence Freeman OSB, San Damiano, CA.

* German National retreat May 21-23. Würzburg

* Monte Oliveto Retreat June 5-12: *Return to the Centre* led by Laurence Freeman OSB and Giovanni Felicioni www.wccm.org

Enquiries: monteoliveto@wccm.org

* Laurence Freeman talks and retreats Netherlands and Belgium: 15-20 June

* John Main Seminar (Aug 5-8): *Basic Christianity, Exploring the Shape of God's Affection* led by James Alison, and Retreat (Aug 2-5): *Practice Makes Perfect*, led by Laurence Freeman OSB. Canterbury England www.wccm.org Enquiries: Philip.kitchen@yahoo.co.uk

* Canadian Retreats September 17-23 French and English retreats led by Laurence Freeman OSB



A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Dearest friends,

*January 6th 2010
Feast of the Epiphany*

Three of us went walking across the frozen fields and through the bare woods of the English countryside a few days after Christmas. Our Type A guide strode ahead swinging his machete at every piece of bramble he could reach. Eight-year-old Marco, my cousin's son, and I followed at a safe distance. We began to invent a story in which we were all characters. The journey we were on was not less than a quest for a secret potion which, at one moment, was the cure for all diseases including death and later the solution to global warming. Marco's imagination soared and pirouetted far beyond my reach though my role, as 'scientist number two', was to be a necessary foil and consultant. At one point I proposed some new twist to the story based on a rather outlandish proposition. He surprised me by asking 'is that true?' And I had to think quickly what truth meant, without tying down the life of the story with a blind slavery to factuality but also without leading him into a false belief that he would later have to be told was untrue. So I said 'it's true in the story'. He processed this at the speed of thought and, with the smile of sweet reason, drew a conclusion that shows how easily the mysteries are revealed to the simple – 'yes, that's right, just like some things in real life are true there but not in other places'. I tried to remember which Upanishad this reminded me of.

Marco is also coming out of his Father Christmas phase and his parents are monitoring the stress of his transition from the mythical to the rational world which some of his friends have already negotiated. My own memory of this disillusionment is that I was not only hurt and angry but also greatly relieved. I knew it already but needed and asked for a clear reassurance. It was given me bluntly ('no, there isn't a Father Christmas, Laurence'). I knew immediately I was in a new phase of life. I had lost something and yet found the beginning of something else whose promise outweighed that loss by far. The nostalgia for childhood which exists in every adult consciousness had perhaps begun but also a dawning sense of the wonder of human destiny.

Christmas and Epiphany sit on the tipping-point of the year, barely understood amid the frenzy of shopping and cooking and visiting. But they are well situated in the solar cycle where the darkest and shortest tunnel of time plunges to its nadir point before the great comeback of nature swings into action. This of course is a Eurocentric symbolism that makes less sense elsewhere. It needs to be synchronised with the seasons of the southern hemisphere, just as the patriarchy of the Bible needs to be adjusted to the modern recognition of the equality of women and men. Nevertheless these stories have universal meaning and, like Marco's imagination, take in everything. Myths should not be deconstructed by science; but they need regular updating with the input of new knowledge that the myths themselves have helped us to attain.

From any perspective, though, the religious meaning of a season tells a story that, like Marco's we have to believe for it to be true but also not cling to it in a way that arrests our development. Every story of this kind – perhaps every story we can tell – reflects the nature of the individual human life-cycle as a setting out and a return. Adam and Eve set the pattern after their liberating disobedience had led to their expulsion from the security of their first home. At first their long trek into a post-Edenic world seems like a merciless exile. Their first cruel discovery is of sin itself, made possible by the very freedom they had claimed by their necessary disobedience. The sin of violence that did not exist in Paradise begins with their children and corrupts every subsequent attempt at establishing civilised human relations. What society has not been built in some way upon the fear or threat of violence that Cain could not master?

When, in our individual lives, we discover this same capacity in ourselves it is also a sad and hard awakening, a fall from innocence and a confrontation with shame. The cosmic and ancestral myths are made flesh in every unique human story. Meaning emerges from experience as life and myth consciously reflect each other – when we separate from the myth sufficiently to feel our own uniqueness but do not cut ourselves off from it so much as to be left adrift in our own experience without the wisdom it can teach. In the great religions the long journey into the harsh realities of life is recognised and accepted. It is not airbrushed away because the purpose of religion is not to console, not to construct a fantasy world of wish-fulfilment and unearned happiness, but to help us to see the nature of the journey. The spiritual awakening, and the turning-point of any life, is to understand that the journey into the wilderness is also a return. A long

loop, in fact, such as we made on our afternoon walk with Marco. But as we swing round we integrate and process all that has happened to us. In the Kingdom there is no waste.

So, earlier levels of awareness should not be crudely rejected or looked down on. They should be respectfully led onwards to their next watershed and stage of development. We should not forget what we have once learned. Otherwise there would be no teaching and learning but only the instilling of facts for the sake of economic usefulness – how much of modern education is in fact described and understood both by teachers and students in this way. A right understanding of the meaning of education and the training of the young – and how this work of teaching instructs the old in the same process – is the heart of any sane and just society. Integration is the journey and wholeness is the goal.

For the Christian the great symbol illustrating this enlightened return of humanity and cosmos to its source is the personal embodiment of the Word of God. It takes place historically in a shift of gears from the abstract and remote to the incarnate and intimate. Other religions have their own ways to express this sense of a turning-point in personal and collective development. We can recognise this common sense in each other's stories only if we are actually implementing its practical wisdom in our lives. Without a personal praxis however there is little possibility of such empathy. Otherwise, the differences seem absolute and the sense of a common ground is lost in an over-fixation on our own perspective.

I felt strongly the importance of common practice during the Parliament of World Religions in December. 230 or so religions gathered to talk about themselves, display their amazing cultural diversity, explore ways of collaborating and raising consciousness about the planetary crisis and, on a few occasions to practice together. The mystery of it all is not that the unity of the common source and goal is a reduction to bare essentials – a thumbnail only. The real mystery of integration is an infinite expansion that makes space for all expressions of truth and helps each to find its place next to its neighbour. From the Christian point of view this was expressed by Clement of Alexandria in the 2nd century when, resisting the fundamentalist's exclusivity, he declared that nothing that is not against nature can be against Christ.

All religions agree that it is practice not dogma that makes perfect. St Augustine made it clear that we are judged by how well we have loved rather than how well or what we have believed. And, as the Dalai Lama does not tire of saying, the purpose of all religious practice is simply to make us nicer and more compassionate people. Religious practices by themselves have only a limited effect on such a personal transformation. It is possible to be devout and fervent about religious ritual or private devotion and yet remain largely unchanged over the years. In fact by themselves these practices can even make us worse.

By developing certain habits of pleasant feeling to which

we become attached the external practices can become addictive. Then, just as an alcoholic will resent and resist anything that threatens his habit, the religious practitioner may build walls of self-protection and condemnation around himself and his religious world. I do not mean that all external religious practice leads to this. Clearly not. But there is a tendency for any external practice that is not connected to an interior dimension to take us on this slippery slope. Religion without serious contemplative practice is sadly defective.

The effects of keeping the commandments are not sufficient to heal the powers of the soul completely. They must be complemented by a contemplative activity appropriate to these faculties and this activity must penetrate the spirit unless the contemplation that relates to them is practised in the deep part of the soul. (*Evagrius Ponticus, Praktikos* 79)

We make our spiritual journey, this 'contemplative activity', in a real not virtual world. The difference between the two is incarnation, the embodied and responsive, unpredictable, imperfect and unclassifiable human being that each of us is. The principles of probability and variability prevail in all aspects of the human condition including in our spiritual practices. Nothing is guaranteed and this morning's success can crumble

"WE ARE JUDGED BY HOW WELL
WE HAVE LOVED."

in personal failure by this evening. Buddhists have a word to describe this – *dukkha* – which is as difficult to translate as the Brazilian use of *saudades*. *Dukkha* can mean suffering or unsatisfactoriness, or even at times it describes our conditions of stress, fear, dread, ageing, senility or the feeling of friendlessness and isolation – the hard fact that life does not ultimately or even reliably fulfil our hopes and expectations. If you are hoping to get a free seat next to you on a plane and someone unpleasant comes to sit next to you that is a manifestation of *dukkha*, which you only make worse by fighting for territory on the arm rest, or feeling inner resentment or self-pity.

When Jesus called his first disciples to follow him they were at work on repairing their nets. I imagine this was a routine daily work because every time they went out fishing some of the nets were damaged. They had to live with it as part of the ordinary imperfection of life. It was in the midst of this *dukkha*, however, that the summons to their new life and work came. Their inner practice and discipleship began from that moment. But *dukkha* did not cease then for them. In fact one might argue it increased because the higher the degree of fulfilment and satisfaction the more intensely one feels the way *dukkha* happens.

A contemplative understanding of sin further illuminates this idea of inherent imperfection, the cosmos bound to its own frustrating limits and refusing to adjust to our idea of how things should be. Seeing this is an experiential insight and like all insights it changes the way we understand spiritual practice and how 'practice makes perfect'. Shortly after his description of God as the 'sun that shines on good and bad alike, who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked' (not a profile of God many Christians have espoused in history), he

tells us 'be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect'. In the context it is clear that the perfection he means is the divine nature of unconditional love. 'There must be no limit to your goodness as your heavenly father's goodness knows no limits'. Yet the word 'perfection' is a dangerous and deceptive one. For many it condemned them to permanent failure on the spiritual path and to a kind of neurotic appeal for forgiveness and need for reassurance.

Perfectionism is the enemy of true religion. Yet religions everywhere, maybe all 230 of them, construct rules and external practices that pretend to be the absolute test of perfection. It can seem simpler that way for everyone. St Paul was both a victim and perpetrator of this kind of false religion until the forces of repression necessary to maintain his feeling of righteous superiority exploded. At which point the redemptive insight into compassionate grace took the place of the cold legalism that had hitherto controlled him. Perfectionism blocks spiritual practice at any of the deeper levels where transformation happens and it maintains religious power structures against the work of the Holy Spirit. The tragedy and scandal of the child abuse cases in the Church have often been paired with an institutional refusal to put the victim's well-being before the just treatment of the perpetrator of the abuse in order to defend the reputation of institution. The church, they too often felt, needed to be perceived as perfect. But in sustaining this deception they threatened the very foundations of the institution.

It's always easy to point the finger at others especially when all other fingers are accusing them too. We need also to see how the same faults operate in ourselves. Perfectionism is not only learned and imbibed from others who set the learning examples of our early life. It is inherent in the psyche through the ego's default response always to place itself first and see itself as the centre of every operation. In secular terminology perfectionism is 'success'. Our culture recognises success as the best sure test of value and merit. What fails, what is imperfect, should be rejected; and the ruthless myopic logic of this characterises much of modern corporate culture and ethics.

Does this mean we should perversely court failure? Or, as St Paul asked, does it mean we should sin in order to get grace? Obviously these quibbles miss the point of the insight. The point is that we are all inherently imperfect – *dukkha* is in our bones – and success is a sweet occurrence that comes rarely and lasts briefly. We do not often know what we really want and even when we do obtain something that looked as if it would bring true happiness we soon realize it is only a flake of the wholeness we had been seeking.

Recognising *dukkha* is just the first insight that has to lead on to a braver moral self-acceptance of our imperfection. St John's insight into this was that *If we claim to be sinless, we are deceiving ourselves but if we confess we discover forgiveness and deep cleansing (1 Jn 1:8)*. This honesty is the basis of all therapy as the way to self-knowledge and self-acceptance.

Perfection then does not consist in obedience to external rules but in the attainment of wholeness through the healing arts, of which religion, properly exercised, is one. Perfection is seen in forgiveness, in peaceful tolerance and just acceptance, in attention to the needs of others, in the gradual training of our own restless ego. The extraordinary thing is that this insight, at the heart of all authentic spiritual traditions, which promises liberation from the compulsive fears and insecurities, violence and defensiveness of the ego should be so very hard to accept and even so instinctively rejected by religious perfectionists.

The contemplative wisdom that we see in the words of Jesus is not easy on this kind of religious hardness of heart. He gives a critique of his own religious tradition that applies everywhere and to all. But then one might ask where does this leave external religious practices with all their inherent danger of perfectionism? Is meditation all you need?

Well, first we will never get far with the practice of meditation if we don't learn how to identify and separate our perfectionist tendencies from it. Otherwise we dismiss ourselves as failures at the first distraction or after the first break in the daily discipline. We usually give up just because we think we can never be

perfect meditators. You can hear this already in the first questions people ask after starting to meditate. *How can I blank out my mind? I can't get rid of thoughts and problems. Can I do it just for five minutes to begin with...?*

Meditation is not about being perfect in these senses. Each time we meditate we begin from exactly where we are and the self-acceptance we exercise - just by sitting for the time of silence - is itself a growth towards wholeness. Where we begin today may be with a hardened or broken heart, with turbulent thoughts and feelings, anger and desire or just plain indifference and lethargy. It may help to recognise and name these states of mind but it does little good to judge them. Their meaning is not that we are unworthy or incapable of making progress but that by accepting ourselves in this state we do move on and progress follows. At the place where we accept our imperfection – and only there - grace comes to our aid. It is as natural as a dog running to its master and indeed, in this sense only, God is at our beck and call. God cannot resist humility.

Meditation cannot be separated from ordinary life and still remain a practice that leads to wholeness. But life has many dimensions and there are different practices that are appropriate to each of them. In its radical simplicity, though, meditation does have an effect upon our religious mentality and the practices that flow from it. It will reduce the level of superstition and the guilt-atonement complex. It will raise the level of awareness of the divine presence to include many aspects of life that we thought of before as secular or profane. As the knowledge of God strengthens in tune with our deepening self-knowledge, so our dependence on the 'supernatural' declines.

There seem to me five essential aspects of the spiritual life which for convenience I would describe briefly as these:

"MEDITATION IS NOT ABOUT BEING PERFECT."

1. Understanding the scriptures. The rejection of the sacred scriptures of humanity by the closed rationalist mind is one of the worst self-inflicted wounds of our culture. It is equalled only by the contemporary heresy of literalism, as stupid in its way as the rationalist approach is blind. Recovering the spiritual taste and sense of scripture is a priority for all our educational programmes but it requires a re-stimulation of the perceptive powers needed to awaken us to them.

2. Participating in the Eucharist. Not just 'going to church' but *sharing* in the *koinonia* and fellowship of the mystical ritual that is performed there. Different churches have varying approaches to the Eucharist. And many today see all religious ritual except those that have the benefit of being novel and exotic as meaningless. But again, before the sacramental sense can be restored some interior wakening of the spiritual senses has to begin.

3. Mindfulness of death. Every wisdom tradition sees this as a valuable practice. It challenges our culture's endemic denial of death. This denial explains the ways that we both entertain ourselves with violence in the media and find it so hard to recognise that drawing our last breath – the final sign of *dukkha* – is not failure but may be welcomed and embraced at the right moment in our life.

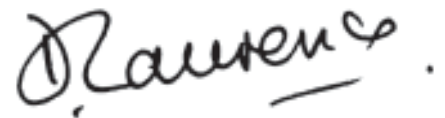
4. Small acts of kindness. When John Main was once asked what was the best way to prepare for meditation this was what he replied. A smile or polite gesture that we offer as we turn our attention away from ourselves to others can transform us and them in the moment. On a different scale it applies to all our work for justice and peace, for the relief of suffering or the education of the young. Whatever we do remains 'small'. We

cannot save the whole world by anything we do. But everything we do makes a difference.

5. Saying the mantra. This, as Cassian says, collects all the emotions of human nature and helps us adjust to every situation. It is a Eucharistic act because, like the Eucharist it reveals and celebrates the real presence. It awakens a taste for scripture that can highlight the significance of any experience we are undergoing. It gets to the root of all fear, including the fear of death, because it helps us to live in the present moment that includes the continuous mindfulness of death. Death and resurrection are of the moment. Finally, it is an act of the purest kindness to ourselves and by making us feel better about ourselves it frees and fuels us to love others.

Perhaps it is stories rather than the more prosaic kind of statements of this letter which instruct us most usefully. Marco and his love of story-making might be the best kind of teacher for our time. But tradition is also composed both of story and the endless reflection and commentary on the narrative. And we need tradition to give context and assistance for the long spiritual journey that is each life. When the Magi came with their gifts to the newborn messiah and fell on their knees they represent the beginning of the slow subjection of magic to wisdom in human culture. But in the same story we can see ourselves as travellers from afar and return to the path we have found with greater gratitude and wonder.

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



UKRAINE

We want to thank Fr. Laurence for the retreat in Wroclaw, Poland. His presence, sermons, and brilliant mystic humour has helped us to deepen our meditative experience and brought us the answers to many important spiritual questions, both theoretical and practical. At the moment, we are translating recordings of his lectures into the Russian language. We think it will be very important material for readers of our site. Many people in our country are interested in deepening their contemplative level of Christian spirituality, and now they will have the opportunity to take direction from the WCCM and join the experience of meditating Christians around the world. Also, we invite everyone to experience the atmosphere of the Polish retreat and look at the "Meditatio' 09 photo set (www.wccm.org.ua/gallery/thumbnails.php?album=14)

at our WCCM-Ukraine site at wccm.org.ua. We have plans for the further development of Christian meditation in Ukraine. Recently, the Dominicans in Kiev offered to publish our translation of Fr Laurence's book *Light Within* and to help us to organize several conferences and retreats on meditation in the Kiev Dominican Center. We would like to try to organize two events in 2010. First, in early spring, a series of introductory lectures for a wide audience on Christian meditation and contemplative patristic tradition in the Church, with guests from Poland and a visit by Fr Laurence with lectures at the Kiev Dominican Theological Institute of St. Thomas Aquinas. In the event associated with the visit we can make a presentation of *Light Within* in Russian as well as the "Pilgrimage" DVD with Russian subtitles. Pax Christi. *Website: www.wccm.org.ua*

Maria and Albert Zakharova, info@wccm.org.ua

AUSTRALIA NATIONAL RETREAT



In October, Fr Laurence led 228 people on a 6 day silent retreat at Riverview College in Sydney. With so many people coming together and holding the silence,

the retreat was a profound experience. As we journeyed side by side in silence, we formed a community supporting each other in the silence. We also found that the silence was a powerful teacher.

Everyone enjoyed the venue which had beautiful grounds with rose gardens and walks, was located near the river and had playing fields, which gave space for walking meditation. This was a wonderful exercise in being mindful and with so many people participating it was a memorable way to prepare for meditation.

The theme of the retreat was “Practice makes perfect – or does it?” This is a theme which Fr Laurence is developing at present but which he first spoke on here. He gave deeply thoughtful talks, beginning with a warning against the dangers of perfectionism, and turning our minds towards understanding our spiritual journey at a deeper level. He warned that perfectionism separates us from the capacity for real love. In order to balance the drive which many of us experience for perfection, Fr Laurence reminded us that we need self acceptance, which is the first step towards love, and leads to self knowledge. As he often does, Fr Laurence challenged us, particularly when he suggested that forgiveness is closer to perfection than always doing the right thing in the right way.

He spoke of other spiritual practices complementing meditation. This was most helpful and practical, intertwining spiritual practice with everyday living. For example, he told us that when John Main was asked about what is the best way to prepare for meditation, his response was ‘small acts of kindness’. He also spoke about ways to practice mindfulness, and that we need to read and meditate on the Word of God in Scripture, so that we may be touched, nourished, corrected, informed, and inspired by Wisdom. Fr Laurence concluded the retreat by reminding us that spiritual practice is not so much about being better than I am, but about being who I am, which brought us full circle to where we began.

We were very grateful to Cardinal Pell from Sydney for opening the retreat, and Bishop Michael Putney, our Patron, for joining us during the retreat and celebrating and preaching at mass.

*Johanna Lawrence, National Coordinator, Australia
(johanna1@optusnet.com.au)*

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION BLOSSOMING IN SYDNEY SCHOOLS

The Spirit is working in wondrous ways in bringing Christian Meditation into the classrooms of Sydney. Since the Townsville Diocese in northern Australia pioneered the

introduction of Christian Meditation into their schools in 2006 there has been a growing awareness of bringing this way of prayer to children. In Sydney this year the interest of previous years has translated into much activity and joy. We have given introductory sessions to about ten schools and there are another twenty which are part of a pilot programme of our Catholic Education Office in bringing Christian Meditation to their teachers and students. In Sydney we are blessed in having a wonderful team; we work collaboratively and have found that having two of us dedicated to each school works well.

When planning our sessions we work with each school balancing pressing school timetables with time and space for our essential teachings and this is reflected in our sessions taking various forms; some on staff spirituality days or at staff meetings and others at set times over a number of weeks.

By giving the teachers the essential teachings and experience of meditation, they in turn bring meditation to their students who then tell their parents. So there is a strong sense of the Spirit at work here with the seed planted and God doing the work of God.

We are guided and supported by Ruth Fowler, the co-ordinator for teaching Christian Meditation in schools for the World Community.

*Dianne Burn, (dianne.burn@tpg.com.au)
Christian Meditation in Schools Team, Sydney*

SOUTH AMERICA: FIRST LATIN AMERICAN COORDINATORS MEETING



Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB recently visited Argentina for the fourth time. During the visit, the Christian Meditation community in Argentina organised a silent retreat Return to centre, the human journey. Their testimonies are

on the blog www.meditacioncristianagrupos.blogspot.com which is our national community site. After the retreat a meeting of Latin American WCCM coordinators gathered 28 people from 10 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, México, Paraguay, Perú, Uruguay, Venezuela. Several important issues for the development of the WCCM in the region were discussed and Fr. Laurence clarified many topics related to resources for the coordinators' formation. The meeting was very fruitful and gave great strength to the Community in this part of the world. Later Fr. Laurence gave a lecture meditation at El Salvador University. There he also gave a TV interview. Every event was filmed in order to make some DVDs subtitled in Spanish, to share with the Latin American coordinators of Christian Meditation groups. Editorial Bonum, the publisher of several books of Fr. Laurence, John Main and others related to Christian Meditation in

Spanish, are collaborating with the community for the wider distribution of the books in Latin America.

*Magdalena Puebla, Argentine Coordinator
(malen_puebla@hotmail.com)*

Fr Laurence, with Ana Fonseca, Vice-Chair of the Guiding Board and Brazil National Coordinator, then visited Uruguay and spoke in Montevideo. In Brazil he spoke in Porto Alegre and led a national retreat for 240 near São Paulo. In Rio de Janeiro he led two seminars at the Catholic University.

UK: LONDON CHRISTIAN MEDITATION CENTRE AT ST MARK'S

During the time that ideas on renewing the layout of the Centre were underway, the John Main Seminar changed its location to St Mark's. There is nothing like the thought of 200+ people visiting your centre, to bring the mind to sharp focus. A team was quickly pulled together whose enthusiasm and gifts drove the project. The Seminar was non residential, but people

needed accommodation advice and many other details. But what a perfect excuse for getting the decorators in and remodelling the space.

Well, we got there.

The intermediate result – I hope you will come and see. We haven't finished yet, but we have a beautifully redecorated meditation room, the hall and stairs leading to the first floor are now airy, clean and repainted, and we have a welcoming space for visitors and the bookshop. We still hope to furnish with sofas and more rugs but we think you will agree that there is now an actual "sense of home". We are open Tuesday to Friday and have meditation at 1pm and 6pm. We hope to see you!

*Jacqueline Russell, Coordinator St Mark's
(uk@wccm.org)*



IN FOCUS

Community of Love

I was searching for God in the silence of meditation in other traditions for a long time and in 1994, when I was 22 years old, I found the book *Christian Meditation* by Fr John Main and it was like a coming home for me. For one year I meditated alone and Sister Maria Emmanuel, OSB, who translated Fr John's books to Portuguese, was the only person that I could speak with about this way of meditation. We exchanged many letters and, in 1995, she asked me to help to organize the first visit of Fr Laurence to Brazil. It was a great happiness for me to meet Fr Laurence and I told him my interest in keeping a closer relationship with the Community and help in its work to restore this ancient teaching of Christian meditation, that can help modern people to find again their essential personal harmony.

Fr Laurence told me about the Oblate Community that exists all over the world, and said that if I wanted, I could join this spiritual family. But, on this occasion, he suggested that I should concentrate on my two daily periods of meditation and the next time he came to Brazil I could understand better the meaning of becoming an oblate in this Community. As John Main, he had a clear vision of the importance of always remembering that our goal is not to become a member of a religious group or monastery because they are not an end in themselves, but to be mature, committed Christians, with a single-minded pursuit of God.

In 1997, I had the opportunity to go to London to live for six months at the Community's International Centre. It was a very important experience of life in community, of friendship

and prayer. The meditation Centre was a very nice house and the people of the community were very attentive. Everyone who comes there, very soon feels at home.

At that time, soon after I became a father, I decided to become a Benedictine oblate of this community and Fr Laurence presided over a small ceremony of welcoming and prayer for the fruits of this new commitment that has different forms: being man or woman, single or married, living in your own house or in a community. Now, in Brazil, there are five Oblates and many are doing their period of Novitiate or beginning their Postulancy.

In London I also learned yoga with Giovanni Felicioni, a great teacher and friend that I keep in my heart. Through him I was inspired to become a yoga teacher and now I have a small Centre in Brazil where I teach yoga and Christian meditation. As I was a graphic designer before I became a yoga teacher, now I am doing the design and layout of the WCCM International Newsletter and I also keep the Brazilian WCCM website: www.wccm.com.br.

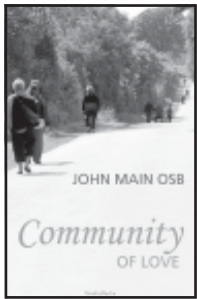
I feel in this Community a beautiful sense of unity and friendship. This is very important because every one of us needs mutual encouragement, support and inspiration. I am deeply grateful to Fr John Main and Fr Laurence because what I learned from them changed my life and filled it with love.

*Carlos Siqueira Oblate Coordinator, Jacareí, SP, Brazil
(carlos@wccm.com.br)*





Christian Meditation Bookstore - NEW ITEMS!



COMMUNITY OF LOVE

John Main OSB

John Main's rich vision continues to inspire the growth and deepening of his teaching in fresh ways. This book brings together many insights into the experience of wholeness, in ourselves, with others, and with the society in which we live. John Main's deepest vision of life was that of a

community of love.

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Words by John Main....

*In the superabundance of love we become the person we are called to be.
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