



# Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

www.wccm.org

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## Being still when the earth quakes

*After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a sound of sheer silence (1 Kings 19:12)*

Suffering and disruption caused by earthquakes marked the beginning of the year for New Zealand and Japan. On February 22, Christchurch, New Zealand, was rocked by a tremor of magnitude 6.3. On 11th March, a greater tragedy struck Japan: a tremor magnitude 9, followed by a tsunami caused massive destruction and death. The drama increased with the leak of radioactive material at the plant in Fukushima.

Members of The World Community in New Zealand and Japan, report how they faced such difficult circumstances:

### NEW ZEALAND - COMMUNITY OF LOVE UNDER THE TABLE

By Jane Hole\* ([holejane66@hotmail.com](mailto:holejane66@hotmail.com))



Jane Hole

The Christchurch meditation community has a strong heart, but this earthquake has devastated many of our meeting places. Three groups have lost their homes, and are temporarily in recess. Meditators will find new gathering places, but must first deal with the disruption to their homes and jobs. My own home and therefore that of our northwest city group has been spared. Travel is difficult in the city, so there are several faces missing; others have left Christchurch.

One of our meditators, Brendan, who was without power and water for several weeks, comments only that he's glad he is so used to camping, and that he has a wife with a positive attitude. But we know just how tough it has been, and still is, for him and so many others.

After the earthquake, I first texted Sally, a meditator and postulant oblate who lives in a pole house in Lyttelton, at the epicentre of the quake. 'Fine' she replied 'I'm still under the table.' I checked

### JAPAN - "IT'S AN IDEAL TIME FOR MEDITATION"

By Brian Redmond\* ([bredmond69@yahoo.com](mailto:bredmond69@yahoo.com))



Liz King, Amada Bunji, Fr Laurence and Brian

I am situated a good way away from where the quake struck most strongly, about 500 kilometers. Even so, we were thrown about pretty vigorously, and it was very unpleasant. We lost some crockery and mirrors, but my wife and I suffered no physical injuries. What has been unpleasant, though, is that the aftershocks have continued for over a week, there's one going on now as I write this; makes me feel seasick. They keep everyone on edge.

On top of this, as you know, we are having to deal with the effects from the damaged nuclear reactors. They are about 300 kilometers from where I live, Saitama-ken. The Japanese Government says it is dangerous to be within 30 kilometers of them: the British Embassy says 80 kilometers. Either way, 300 kilometers seems a safe distance.

We are told that the amounts of radioactive material in the air are not near life-threatening levels, but if they are unable

with her again a little later. She texted back: 'I'm reading such a wonderful passage from "Community of Love", presumably still under the table.

On the Thursday two days after the earthquake, I didn't expect to see any of those who usually come to our group; they have a distance to travel and we'd been asked to leave the roads clear for essential services and emergency vehicles. So at our meeting time, I went instead to exchange stories and vegetables with a neighbour. When I arrived home, Margaret was sitting on my doorstep, waiting for our meeting to begin. She'd walked to my place—and we did together the work that we must do, earthquake or no earthquake.

Last week, I looked after my small Christchurch granddaughters while their parents went out for a well-earned break—the first time I'd put the children to bed in their home since it had taken on an earthquake lean. They and I often meditate together, sometimes peacefully, sometimes with sighs, wriggles and the occasional experimental whistle. That evening, they asked if we could meditate.

They sat cross-legged on their mattresses that are, for the present, on the floor beside their parents' bed, while the dog sat guarding them from her own bed.

We meditated together in surprising silence and stillness.

*\* New Zealand National Co-ordinator*

to cool the fuel rods, then it could become a life-threatening situation; at least in some areas. Meanwhile, everyone is being told to conserve electricity, which means periodic blackouts and trains running slow or not at all. Food deliveries to stores are also affected, and petrol hard to find.

The latest news is that progress is being made on the cooling front, so we relax, put our lives in God's hands, and carry on. It's an ideal time for meditation. Like the hangman's rope, it can really concentrate your mind. I find that meditation gives me strength.

Amada Bunji, his two sons, and his mother, are all well, Thank you. They live even further from the trouble than I do. They all remember Fr. Laurence with affection, and they are perfectly willing to join me in meditation sessions. They recite their Buddhist mantra, and I do mine.

*\* Brian Redmond is National Contact in Japan. Text written on March 18, a week after the earthquake in Japan.*

*\*\* You can read additional texts by meditators about the earthquakes in New Zealand and Japan at [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)*

*\*\*\* Send a message of support or a prayer for the communities of New Zealand and Japan: [inewsletter@wccm.org](mailto:inewsletter@wccm.org)*



JOHN MAIN SEMINAR 2011

## ALIVE IN CHRIST

11-14 August, Cork, Ireland

Led by Timothy Radcliffe OP

Pre Seminar Retreat: Fruits of Crisis

8-11 August

Led by Laurence Freeman OSB

More information: [www.jms11.com](http://www.jms11.com)

Tel: 353 66 7137484

E-mail: [sylviajms11@gmail.com](mailto:sylviajms11@gmail.com)



## 10-day meditation retreat

*Bere Island, Co. Cork, Ireland*

*14-24 September 2011*

*Led by Laurence Freeman OSB*

A 10-day meditation retreat will be held in the peace and beauty of Bere Island in the mellow month of September. Led by Fr Laurence it is an opportunity for meditators to go deeper and to share their journey with others on the same path. Community and solitude, silence and sharing will blend in quieter, calmer slower-moving days open to the presence of God in the beauty of nature and spiritual friendship.

*For more information visit the Retreats link on the [wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org) site.*



# A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

*Dearest friends,*

Even on meditation retreats and especially at conferences where there is a lot of talking it is important occasionally to get out and go for a walk just to avoid going stir-crazy.

Last fall during a retreat in Montreal it was very tempting to stay outdoors as the temperature and light were perfect. The retreat centre was situated in the middle of a large nature reserve beside a lake and the colours were at their most gorgeous. As I often do, I took my camera with me on the walk. I can't understand the attraction of listening to an iPod while walking but I do find taking pictures useful. It helps to take my mind quickly off whatever it was occupied with before and what it thinks it should be occupied with next – planning or problem solving. It is easy to spend an hour walking – at any time – stuck in your head as in a traffic jam, and remain unconscious of the beauty all around you.

When your eye is scanning for a good photo it takes your attention off your thoughts and helps you to be in your “present location”, as the GPS systems say. Like breathing or mindful body awareness it can – just as a simple form of attention - be a good preparation for the deeper, more transformative work of meditation. The viewfinder (I prefer this to the screen in smaller digital cameras) is a natural stimulus to focusing. If you went no further than this preparatory method of awareness you could become compulsively fixed on the methodology and so get stuck half way between distraction and true attention. Holding a camera, you could get greedily attached to what is external, as objects of your perception, trying to capture everything by “capturing the moment” with a click of the shutter. With physical or mental methods of calming the mind in preparation for meditation you might fall into the opposite trap of never really taking the attention off your own self- awareness. Either way you remain the observer. Reality remains objectified and so separate from you.

I find that after some time with the camera, though, the photographic urge diminishes. Paying attention to interesting details or angles helps dispel distraction but then the whole picture which the camera can never capture emerges in much

more vivid perception. We have to do something to break the web of distraction and objectification that covers true sight like an obscuring film. But at the right moment you should drop it so that you can move from *looking at* to *seeing*.

Another, more human side of taking pictures struck me recently when I took a break from a quite intense inter-religious conference in Marrakesh. Walking round the teeming market square with its avalanche of colours and scents I knew I had to be a little more careful where I aimed my lens. Trees and lakes don't object to being objectified but people sometimes do. I couldn't resist trying to photograph two old men wearing their zaytunas and fez as they sat in the shade of their shop doorway. But when one of them noticed me he raised his hand to hide his face. I felt slightly shamed and realized painfully how many kinds of distance there are between human beings and how many different worlds we inhabit on the same planet. And how the way we see affects everything.

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By the time you read this I will have taken part in a conference called by environmental experts and social and physical scientists. A fascinating and rather overwhelming array of research is being presented but the main concern is the way we understand and perceive the crisis we are in. The metaphor of *tipping points* is the theme. It is a constructive metaphor because a tipping point is defined as the place in a process where a small difference makes a big change. Also, as when you see something tipping on a knife-edge, it reminds us that there can be benign as well as malign outcomes of any situation.

The intelligence and altruistic concern of the scientists is reflected in their attempt to bring another approach into play alongside their scientific method. They realize that even the vast amounts of data amassed do not make it possible to construct models which can accurately predict the future. Clearly change is happening, faster than ever before, but the complexity of the inter-locking tipping-points is beyond our capacity to understand fully. As always with change it may be possible to reverse a process and go back to a previous system, but even then we never go back to it in the same way. There is really no going back. Trying to model and predict the future is the work for science. But scientists are increasingly aware that over-simplifying the situation, while it may be attractive for newspaper headlines, can also make the situation worse because it obscures our perception.

We have to take snapshots of a crisis but they are short-term solutions, quick glimpses rather than gaze of truth. A fuller resolution of crisis requires a more radical change of perception and this involves putting away the camera altogether.

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There is no doubt the global crisis clock has started to tick. The planet is warming, we are losing species, disturbing life-support functions and we are failing to feed, house and educate expanding populations and to care for those who cannot care for themselves. To the extent that this is the result of human activity it is a man-made problem. Therefore, if there is a solution, it is in our reach. We don't have to escape into the supernatural, as is always the temptation when we confront something bigger than we think can handle. We cannot negotiate with nature any more than we can rewrite the human psyche. Both need to be accepted as they are and then worked on. Then the problems we think we can't handle help us to evolve and become bigger than we were.

The sensationalist doom-mongers among the media, who tell us the worst is bound to happen, are examples of the deadly fault of despair – one of the seven that the desert fathers identified. It is in fact both a self-indulgence and an evasion of the larger truth. The media likes to over-dramatise, even to dumb down the truth as the ego likes to do with our personal stories. To surrender the self-dramatising ego is a necessary step on the spiritual path, one we have to take early on the journey and repeat at critical points. But if this does not happen, we lose the powers of reason and compassion which ensure that the point we tip towards is one of growth rather than catastrophe. Every crisis is an opportunity once we see its nature and embrace it with all its consequences even when we can't see what lies around the corner of the future. If we could see round the corner it would not be a crisis.

The contemplative tradition says that morality is not adequate to help us realize the full potential of consciousness. It is not

“EVERY CRISIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY  
EVEN WHEN WE CAN'T SEE WHAT LIES  
AROUND THE CORNER OF THE FUTURE.”

enough to do good, to keep the commandments and avoid doing harm to others. “Don't be evil,” is a good precept, as the founders of Google believed, but it is elementary. We have to ‘be good’ which involves discovering what *being* really means and that the experience of being is the only natural way to know that we are good. Unless we experience it we have little idea of what good and evil mean and so we readily denounce as evil whatever doesn't correspond to our parochial view of goodness. This is the special trap waiting for religious people to fall in. Pascal thought “men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from a religious conviction”. In another famous aphorism he said what any meditator knows the sense of, that all human evil comes from a single cause which is ‘our incapacity to sit still in a room.’

If moral activity were enough to solve our problems then the scientists would be more confident than they are about the model of mass action. No model, however, shows that if enough people change their behaviour – reducing carbon emissions, turning off lights and the standby mode on television sets, using less water – that a predictable outcome would follow. Doing these things may

be important and necessary but more as a preparation for a more radical change at the level of consciousness.

In the same way, when we pray for peace in the world we do not expect that when we wake up the next morning the headlines will declare that all violent conflict has ended overnight. The spoken prayer is an enacted good thought and intention. But it points towards something deeper and more personally transformative. If we really want the prayer to be answered we have first to allow ourselves to be changed. Then we have to be at peace with ourselves and the people we live and work with, including the customer service agent who treats us rudely or the mysterious cosmic force that makes our computer crash in the middle of an important document.

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Great changes have occurred before on the planet. In the past however it had ten million years to adapt to times of mass extinctions. Our crisis today is that we have learned to speed

everything up so much that the forces of changes outstrip even our imagination. Environmentally – as we see in the strong possibility of the collapsing West Arctic ice sheet in the next few decades - and socially - as we see in the unpredictable ‘Arab Spring’ that burst upon the geo-political world – change now is running ahead of us. We live in an age of revolution that is more global than earlier revolutions we study and try to learn from. It is the equivalent of a sudden personal crisis, such as the loss of a child or our good name or our economic security.

All this triggers another process of change at a more subtle level, deeper than the physical or the psychological.



Many ancient cultures did not believe in change at all – or they said they didn't because change terrified them. Modern cultures came to accept change but saw it as generally smooth and predictable. Today the pace, uncertainty and huge interconnectedness of the global tipping points – from food, soil and water to biodiversity and financial systems – confront us with the need for what Simone Weil called 'a new holiness' as necessary to the world today as 'a plague-stricken town needs doctors'. She believed that 'it is almost equivalent to a new revelation of the universe and of human destiny. It is the exposure of a large portion of truth and beauty hitherto concealed under a thick layer of dust.'

Her use of the word *holiness* might turn off many today. Yet it shows how the old familiar words of our religious vocabulary – covered in dust for a long time – can be rehabilitated, recharged with their original power to break up the ice floes of our minds and open new ways of perception. Her 'new holiness' is the integration of an explicit insight into policies and actions – the universality and inclusiveness of the world and all its inhabitants. It is new and yet it has been around a long time trying fully to break through:

There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

"CHRIST CANNOT BE GRASPED AS AN OBJECT OR MERELY LOOKED AT."

This characteristically Pauline insight throws the social and the mystical into the same pot. Like Jesus himself, it undermines every power structure by which the distinctions between people are elevated to an absolute level – the caste, class, religious, economic or cultural systems in which we live locally. It confronts the safe environments of the local with the disturbing, heady vistas of the global where horizons collapse inwards. As they fall the universal emerges – always more as a way of perception than an object of perception.

When power structures are shaken – we see it happening in North Africa and the Middle East these days – those who were oppressed feel exhilarated and empowered. The oppressors retreat into bunkers to protect their self-deception. And the world waits to see which way the new tipping point will fall. At this stage in the process of change – personal or global – the way we see things and the levels of hope, trust and wisdom we can draw on make the important difference. At a tipping point the spiritual dimension becomes palpable.

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Biodiversity loss means that we are losing the basis of our physical existence. It is a confrontation with death on a scale far more terrible even than that faced by our individual self or even that undergone by the victims of ethnic or ideological genocide. The human being is the animal who is aware that it is going to die. St Anthony of the desert addressed this in his *saying* that one thing alone is not possible for Man, to be deathless. But, he went on, we can achieve union with God provided we realise we can do so. This can only be understood from within the crisis, by seeing rather than looking at. The awareness of death is a simple result of elementary mindfulness. In itself it does not lead to

transformation of consciousness. It is merely an awareness of the obvious – recognizing one of the universal tipping points of our existence. But we decide which side we fall off this knife-edge, into despair and fear or into a quite new way of being human.

As we enter the cyclical Easter mysteries of Christian faith we get another chance to focus attention on their inner truths. These are rare opportunities and so we get forty days to prepare for and make the most of them. It is not just that Jesus died that makes Good Friday good but how he died – the consciousness with which he fell over the tipping-point of mortality. Easter – the English word for 'Easter' comes from estrogen, the female hormone for reproduction – is about resurrection – not in another world but a transformed way of seeing and living in this world, which is the only one we know. Whatever we know about the next or another world is known through experience in this one. Early Christianity refused to be drawn back into the old Gnostic dualism that saw the material world and the body as mere vehicles of consciousness to be discarded when 'pure knowledge' was achieved. Consciousness is embodied. If we imagine any kind that is not it is just imagination.

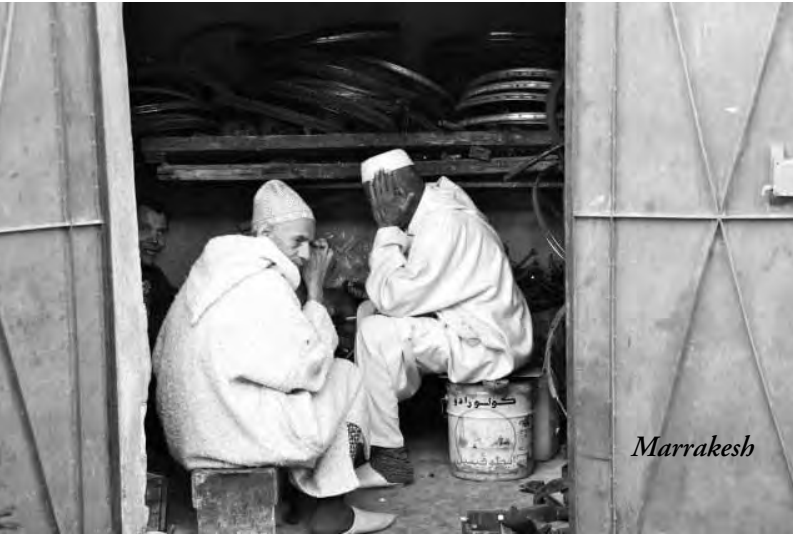
No human person is without a body by which – at evolving levels – we participate in the forces and processes of the planet and the cosmos.

To meet the risen, cosmic Christ is to be 'in Christ'. As is made clear from the resurrection stories, he cannot be grasped as an object or merely *looked at*. As soon as we try to do this he disappears. He needs to be seen and we can only see him from that level of consciousness that the phrase 'in Christ' tries to describe. It is easier to describe the effects of this experience than how it happens. So, Paul who knew the experience first hand and was, by his own account, transformed by it, tells us that

If anyone is in Christ the new creation has come. The old has gone and the new is here. (2 Cor 5:17)

The Resurrection sends us back to this world in a new way with renewed vision and understanding. The new creation is a way of living in the world, freed from the old compulsions, from addiction to violence as a way of resolving conflict and from the repeated patterns of oppression and exploitation that have culminated in our present crisis.

The challenge to a contemporary Christian is that identifying our crisis with the Christian mystery does not mean that we solve the problem by baptizing everyone. Or, if we want to take the words literally, 'go forth and baptise all nations', this refers to an induction into a way of seeing that comes to those who are 'in Christ' in the most universal and inclusive sense of the new holiness. The meaning of mission has changed for the modern Christian because of the ways the world has changed and the way it is heading. Whoever takes their part in resolving a crisis emerges from it changed. Christian identity also evolves – is enriched and elevated in fact – when we risk our faith in a real encounter with the problems of the world. To stand above the fray, judging from a position of superiority is to end with a fortress mentality,



a fundamentalism and exclusivism which eventually destroys faith because it erodes compassion. To believe in a *new* creation rather than *another* creation, however, means that we can help to tip the collective crisis towards hope and positive change rather than into despair and catastrophe.

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The best scientists are well aware that the scientific method alone can't resolve a crisis that affects so many, indeed all, aspects of the human situation today. We also need contemplative consciousness. Building bridges between them means to communicate and that means using words that make sense to people who aren't familiar with our vocabulary. In finding the words that convey spiritual truth in a secular context we refresh our understanding of the truths themselves. The book of Genesis sets the precedent by offering us two versions of the story of Creation.

Falling on the right side of the tipping point is not just science but also politics, economics, medicine and religion. It involves new kinds of social imagining and experimental kinds of leadership. The traditional virtues, neglected in a greed culture, once again illuminate the best actions and sustainable development. Radical questions about quality of life and a just sharing of natural resources are as much part of the environmental crisis as the science of carbon reduction or alternative forms of energy.

For a peaceful survival and a later flourishing for us all new forms of learning and understanding, of communication and wealth production are demanded. It would be painfully absurd to be so locked into our own religious crises and divisions that we cannot contribute to these questions. Yet, however strange it might sound today, the concept of the church needs to be set alongside the ideologies of capitalism and the old communism, which in their own ways became secular, non-transcendent religions. However far they fall short of their ideals these materialistic systems aimed initially at the well-being of humanity. The church and other forms of life inspired by religious ideals, no less flawed, are not opposed to these ideals as our best social teaching proves. For the Christian, 'nothing that is not against nature is against Christ'.

All religious traditions offer older and more integrated models of how to live in justice and peace, collectively and communally. Religion, when it does not tip in the wrong direction, assists social institutions to stay focused on the meaning of human existence and avoid the short-term, grab and run profiteering that underlie the global crisis. To balance the strengths of science, politics and religion would be to negotiate the crisis with wisdom.

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The scientists are also reflecting on the role of metaphors and story-telling in their approach to global crisis. They see how ways of perception shape our practical ways of responding. Perception comes before action, even if we don't always see it.

Stories as we usually like to hear them told to us – as we go to sleep at night as children or as movies and soap operas - have a comforting beginning, middle and end. Often there is a crisis that is resolved and Hollywood cashes in on our preference for happy outcomes that reinforce our moral assumptions and romantic expectations. But the story-telling need of the human family goes deeper than that.

A spiritual story is a parable. It presents ordinary situations and feelings that we all can identify with in a vivid, simplified way. They *feel* significant even before we start to think about what they mean. If we get the full meaning immediately they are really moral lessons rather than parables. The end of the story makes a point but also leaves us facing a question that hasn't been fully articulated. If we watch a film or read a novel that leaves us in suspense we feel a bit disappointed. With a parable, or a very great work of art, it's the open-endedness that is exciting and inspiring. We don't know what happens next because it is we who happen next. The story is not meant to be looked at and forgotten but entered into and raise us to a higher self-knowledge.

The story of Easter, too, is a parable as are all the great tipping points of our personal or global histories. They tell us who we really are and why we are here.

*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](http://www.wccm.org)

### BOSTON: MEDITATION IS FOR EVERYONE

Tim Casey ([tocasey@gmail.com](mailto:tocasey@gmail.com))



*“Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle... But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.”*

*St. Paul's 1st Letter to the Corinthians 15: 8-10*

At St. Paul's Cathedral on the Common of the City on a Hill I came across what could be said to be an apparition. A man named Paul. Paul was a man of faith and devotion. Paul lived a life of simplicity and prayer. Paul was a homeless meditator.

Paul was a member of a group of meditators who meet once a week to pray in silence in central Boston. Outside they were the rejected; the neglected. In this room they were family; members of a Church. The room was a humble hall beneath the diocesan office, a few feet above the subway. The room was so close that every three or four minutes the building would shake and rattle with ferocity during our time together. But the noise did not distract this community of marginalized from the prayer.

I was invited, along with Gene Bebeau (US National Coordinator), by the leader and founder of this group - the Rev. Cristina Rathbone, an Episcopal priest with a ministry to the homeless. We had come to run a series of workshops on Christian Meditation. However, as is often the case, we learned more than we taught.

It was my first address traveling as director at the John Main Center. It was a short trip to Boston, Massachusetts. I was to assist with Gene's talk to the homeless meditators in Boston and speak the next day to a group of about 25 Relational Evangelicals placed throughout the greater Boston area. RE's, as they were known, were young college graduates who were committed to an 11-month program of prayer and community service associated

with the Episcopal Church.

And so it was by grace, that my journey came to Paul. Paul, who chose to come to our meditation workshop instead of checking in at the homeless shelter that night. Paul, who chose to sleep outside in below zero temperatures, for the opportunity to meditate with us. Paul, who chose to spend time with the Lord. How often do we miss our time in meditation, our time with the Lord, for lesser reasons? Paul would do no such thing. His priorities were simple and pure. He and the other fellow homeless meditators inspired me. They taught me the meaning of St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians.

*Tim Casey is director of The John Main Centre Georgetown*

30 JANUARY - 3 FEBRUARY 2011

### NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL RETREAT: MEDITATION AND A NEW VISION ON THE WORLD

The New Zealand National retreat was led by Father Laurence in January at Waikato University outside term time. About 60 people attended and the meeting was conducted in the student village, a suitable place for silence. His theme was a contemplative approach to our environmental crisis and a new understanding of our place in creation:

Fr Laurence said that “we cannot negotiate with nature”, we have to accept that we have limits. Accepting these limits increases our self-knowledge. We see ourselves in a different light.

Also we need a new understanding of... human community beyond differences, and both social and personal conversion are needed. As Simone Weil wrote ‘we need a new holiness’ appropriate to our time, a radical new way of seeing and understanding ourselves within the human family and our environment.

### ECUMENICAL MEDITATION RETREAT FOR CLERGY

Fr Laurence will lead an international ecumenical retreat for ordained Priests, Ministers and Pastors (and those in training for ordained ministry): Ministry in the Priesthood of Christ Monday 26 to Friday 30 September 2011. The retreat is at Ammerdown Retreat Centre, near Bath.

*More information at*  
[www.christianmeditationforpriests.blogspot.com](http://www.christianmeditationforpriests.blogspot.com).

### MEDITATION BLOG IN ARGENTINA

We invite you to visit our blog where we have links to many sites of the WCCM in English, Spanish and Portuguese.

[www.meditacioncristianagrupos.blogspot.com](http://www.meditacioncristianagrupos.blogspot.com)

## MUMBAI: LEARNING TO CONTEMPLATE\*



Fr Laurence Freeman's lucid presentation on the art of contemplation got the rapt attention of the priest participants last March, at St. Pius X College, Mumbai, India. He began by reminding

us that contemplation is not a technique, but a way of love, with particular relevance for priests, since priests need to remain human, open and young at heart. In fact our lives are shaped by love, Jesus' greatest commandment is to love God, love one's neighbour and love oneself. All these are, in fact, three aspects of love, since in loving God, our neighbour and ourselves, we are fulfilling our human destiny.

Furthermore, said Fr. Laurence, unless we truly love ourselves, we cannot love our neighbour. This would imply that we seek to love the 'shadow side' of ourselves. Hence through an authentic love of self, we begin to love our neighbour, and eventually love God. Now, the word Jesus used is the Greek word 'agape' which translates as 'boundless love' or an 'all inclusive love'. In fact, a Catholic celibate priest needs to experience love authentically, so as to serve generously. And it is through contemplative prayer that we learn that love, as its essence, implies discipline.

Fr Freeman pointed out that contemplation has an exterior and an interior dimension to it. Exteriorly, we need to practise it at certain times, perhaps in the early morning and in the evening. Through the regular practice of contemplation, we can even experience physical and psychological good. For instance, it helps reduce blood pressure, cholesterol, strengthens the immune system and enables us to control anger. At the same time, we also receive the fruits of the spirit. Hence, we need to open ourselves to the spirit to experience the 'spring of love' in our heart.

Fr. Laurence diagrammatically presented the 'heart of contemplation' in the form of a wheel. He said, if the circumference of the wheel is prayer, then the spokes of the wheel may be compared to forms of prayer. While the hub of the wheel represents the mind of Christ who prays in us! As Paul says, "it is no longer I, but it is Christ in me." In fact, the person who does not know he is praying is paradoxically truly praying! Hence, we need to take attention at the centre. This daily contemplation of Christ will enable us to gradually grow in our recognition of Christ's love for us. Hence what is needed in contemplation is fidelity.

Meditation leads one to gradually experience a poverty of spirit, as well as a freedom from fears and desires. After his presentation, which was followed by a short exercise to lead us into meditation, Fr. Laurence fielded questions. This brief exchange with the master left all of us thirsting for more.

\* Taken from an article by Fr. Gilbert De Lima in *THE EXAMINER* (March 19, 2011)

## PORTUGAL: YOUNGSTERS' INTEREST IN

## MEDITATION

\* *Cristina de Sousa*  
([mcristinags@netcabo.pt](mailto:mcristinags@netcabo.pt))



Fr Laurence visited the Portuguese Christian meditation community in February for talks and conferences. The first talk for

about 70 young students, averaging 16 years was at Sacred Heart of Mary College, Lisbon. Fr Laurence spoke about meditation, and then meditated with the group. At the end, when it was opened for questions, silence. Immediately after this session, however, the group of youths rushed on stage and "surrounded" him, asking questions and eager to learn more.

Laurence's other events in his short visit to Portugal were the launch of John Main's book "Word Into Silence" (A Palavra que leva ao Silêncio) and a talk to 200 people, aged 20 to 40 years in the University Center Padre Antonio Vieira, and a morning conference for students of the Faculty of Theology before leaving for an Inter-Religious conference in Morocco.

\* *National Co-ordinator Portugal*

## NORTHERN IRELAND: ELIMINATING ANGER

By *Philomena McQuillan*

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Pauline Boyle is a teacher in a Primary school in North Belfast and has a particular love of children with special needs. She started to teach her children to meditate and have seen changes in many of them. One troublesome little boy in particular had been causing her concern for some time. When she asked the class about their time of meditation he replied with sweeping gestures down his body that "The anger just flows out of me". What an amazing thing for him.

## WCCM GUIDING BOARD MEETING



By *Clem Sauvé\**

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The WCCM Guiding Board held its spring meeting March 17-20 at the Kairos Centre in London. Fourteen of the seventeen members of the Board were in attendance.

In the course of the meeting all activity areas of the Community were addressed at one point or other. Some of the more significant discussions centered on Amendments to the WCCM Constitution, the Meditatio Programme and Planning for the future.

*Amendments to the WCCM Constitution*

Every decade or so the Constitution is updated to ensure that the governance structure of the Community properly reflects current realities and practices. The principal changes being proposed are:

- Formalizing the role and structure of the Executive Committee so that the affairs of the Community can be tended to in a timely fashion in between meetings of the Board.

- Creation of an Advisory Council to advise and assist the Board and the Executive Committee on various projects and initiatives intended to advance the mission and work of the Community.

- Changes to the composition of the Board, including the appointment of four National Coordinators to represent the main geographical areas of the Community

- Asia/Pacific, South America, North America and Europe.

Final approval of these changes will be sought at the 2011 AGM in Cork, Ireland, this coming August.

### *Meditatio Programme*

This initiative is at the center of the Community's direction and vision for the current decade to enable the Community to enter into contact and dialogue with the secular world. For this, a series of seminars are planned. The first, on Education was successfully held in London in December and the second, also in London, on Mental Health is in May. The seminars face the need for a new vocabulary to express the teaching beyond sectarian boundaries.

### *Planning for the future*

This was discussed in strategic terms. We need to consolidate our structures and expand our pool of committed people. Placing greater reliance on the National Coordinators and National Councils to maintain and further the Community's work and mission is one way forward although it was felt there remains a need for a strong centre.

We also discussed plans for the John Main Seminars 2012 and 2013 scheduled in Sao Paulo, Brazil and Hong Kong respectively.

### *\* Chair, Guiding Board*

## NATIONAL CO-ORDINATORS MEETINGS 2011

*\* Pauline Peters (paulinepeters2@gmail.com)*

As 2011 is the 20th anniversary year of the founding of WCCM Fr Laurence will meet with National Co-ordinators and key members of their communities in 7 regions- Asia-Pacific, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Central Europe, US-Caribbean, Northern and Southern Latin America.

The first three meetings have been in very different settings showing the diversity of the community from a retreat centre surrounded by lush jungle in Malaysia, a centre overlooking Richmond Park in suburban London and a chalet-type centre surrounded by fields and forests in Switzerland.

Nineteen Coordinators and thirty-six key members of their communities have participated so far at the meetings from Australia, Belgium, Fiji, France, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Ireland,

### *Kuala Lumpur*



Italy, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Philippines, Portugal, Singapore, South Africa, Spain-Catalonia, Switzerland, UK



Opening the meetings Fr Laurence used the metaphors of ants working together and bees forming new hives as contemporary spiritual models of teams and decision-making for the community. Coordinators shared their experiences, needs and initiatives, found support and linked with others in their regions, and planned for the future locally, nationally and globally. They received input and assistance from Fr Laurence and other community leaders on a wide range of topics and will share these with their own communities.

The role of the Meditatio programme was explained by Fr Laurence and was embraced by the participants as a way to present the teaching in new ways to the secular world and to show not only the benefits of meditation but the spiritual fruits as well. The programmes, DVDs and journals from the Meditatio Seminars will be given to coordinators to share with their own communities. There were presentations by Fr Laurence and other community leaders on meditation with children, the School of Meditation, and discussions on groups, resources, meditation and the marginalized, meditation and inter-faith dialogue, newsletter, the website, Friends and Oblates and ways to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the community.

The meetings were joyful gatherings, very much a community of love united in silence and in a commitment to share the vision and teaching in new ways in order to bring meditation to the wider world.



## **NATIONAL CO-ORDINATORS MEETINGS 2011**

*February 10-13:*

*Asia-Pacific Regional Co-ordinators' meeting,*

*Kuala Lumpur*

*March 11-13: Northern Europe meeting, London*

*April 1-3: Central and S Europe meeting, Geneva*

*May 15-16: Latin American Meeting, Caracas*

*October 14-16: Eastern European meeting, Poland*

*October 28-30: America and Caribbean meeting, Jacksonville*

*November: Latin American meeting*

*\* Pauline is International Liaison to the WCCM National Co-ordinators*

## MEDITATIO NEWS



Hello, everyone. I am Leonardo Corrêa, a journalist, oblate novice, from Brazil, and I'm living in Meditatio House since February. In this column, are some highlights of the Meditatio community in recent months.

### BYE, MAXI!

The Australian Maxi finished his period living in Meditatio House at the end of March. We wish all the best for him still united by the bonds of a silence loving Community.

*"Perhaps the most important thing to me about the past year in the monastic community is that I have discovered a strange new sense of true stability and obedience which have offered me a certain passport to the freedom of real quality and worth that is both natural and simple"*  
(By Felix Hogel Maxi).



### JESUIT AND ZEN

Fr Robert Kennedy, a Jesuit and zen master gave a talk at Meditatio House in London at the evening meditation in March. In 2009 he led the John Main Seminar "When God Disappears".  
(Listen to his talk at [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org))



### MEDITATION WITH CHILDREN

Last year's seminar about children and meditation continues to give good results: the DVD Christian Meditation With Children - An Introduction was released last month and a Meditatio Journal will appear soon.

*More information:*

+ 44 (0) 20 7602 8098 or  
[meditatioresources@wccm.org](mailto:meditatioresources@wccm.org)



### MEDITATION WITH CHILDREN II

Charles and Patricia Posnett are coordinating the outreach for children's meditation in the UK since the seminar and a hundred schools have asked for follow-up projects or presentations.

### MEDITATION AND MENTAL HEALTH



The next Meditatio seminar will address the issue of Meditation and Mental Health. It will be held in Regents College, London on 4 and 5 May 2011. Full seminar programme and registration form can be found in [www.wccmmeditatio.org/Events.html](http://www.wccmmeditatio.org/Events.html)

### 11TH STEP RETREAT

In November a Christian Meditation 11th Step Retreat led by Linda Kaye, director of the Neptune Beach Centre in Florida, was held in London. A new weekly group for meditators in recovery has since started.

### INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN SINGAPORE

In January 2012 the 1st Meditatio Seminar on Inter-Religious dialogue will be hosted by the Singapore WCCM, the Catholic Diocese, and the National Inter-Religious Organization.



## Words by John Main....

*"Meditation is so important for each one of us because we live in a society that is really in danger of losing its sanity. A human spirit that is healthy demands expansion. We all need room to breath and to expand and to fill our lungs with, with love"* (From Fully Alive).

## BOOK REVIEW



## BORN CONTEMPLATIVE

By *Dianne Burn* ([dianne.burn@tpg.com.au](mailto:dianne.burn@tpg.com.au))

for God.

Of its nine chapters my favourite is chapter five 'The Fostering of Wonder' which reflects on our ability to ponder the essential question of Who am I? Small children have all the time in the world to contemplate the Who am I? question at their own level; examining their toes, hands and later their immediate environment as they experience water, sunlight, grass, flowers and all the other things which make up their universe. This chapter brings together some of the glory of our world: cosmology, art, poetry. As Madeleine Simon tells us 'wonder is meditation in embryo'.

Here is a book for our time. With this century called the 'century of crisis' what better gift to give our children than for us to foster and nurture their innate wonder and the knowledge and experience of attending to the presence of God at the silent centre of their being.

Madeleine Simon's book 'Born Contemplative' is again in print. This re-published edition has been edited by Penny Sturrock who has enriched the book with an invitation at the end of each chapter offering encouragement on how to share the prayer of Christian meditation with children.

Madeleine Simon (1912-2003), a Religious of the Society of the Sacred Heart (RSCJ) 'caught' Christian meditation in 1975 when attending the weekly meditation group at Ealing Abbey lead by John Main. From that time onwards she committed herself to spreading Christian meditation. She started the first resident community of meditators in London and later co-ordinated the UK National Community.

Part of her great legacy is the book Born Contemplative published in 1993. A book for our times, it is for all the children in the world and for adults, especially those involved with the spiritual education of children. Recognising that children are born contemplative, the book shows the way that those caring for even the youngest children can foster and nurture their innate interiority. The book is written by one involved with the education of children for many years; it draws on a deep knowledge of theology and psychology and the wisdom of a life-long search

## IN FOCUS

## On the way - My path to community

By *Mathias Beißwenger\**  
[mathias.beisswenger@wccm.de](mailto:mathias.beisswenger@wccm.de)

During my university years on an around the world trip I got in touch with meditation for the first time. Although I had travelled through India and Nepal it was in New York, where I met a scholar of an Indian guru. His statement "People travel the whole globe to search for fulfilment in the outer world rather than in the interior, where it truly can be found" caught my attention.

He taught me a simple meditation technique that I followed for a few months. But being raised Catholic and being firmly rooted in my belief in Jesus Christ it did just not feel right after some time to follow a meditation practice of an Indian guru without being able to share my experience in my community or relate it to my faith. So I stopped.

Several years later I was introduced through a friend to a method of meditation for the improvement of creative thinking. I liked this approach but it instantly reminded me of my former experience and the need to share it based on my own belief system. So this time I ventured out by googling "catholic & meditation". And there I found the leads to The World Community in the

form of an article about the John Main Seminar in Mainz. It caught my interest straight away. A few weeks later I joined the Bere Island retreat where I had a wonderful time meeting and sharing with the other participants and listening to Father Laurence's talks.

It felt like home immediately and gave me the confidence to start out on the path of silence: a path, which took me further into the depths of my faith and closer to my own self than I ever expected it to be possible. I am very thankful to the whole community and hope that through my own work I can contribute to the spiritual growth of others.

*\* Mathias Beißwenger is the WCCM National Co-ordinator in Germany and member of the Root & Branch Committee of Meditatio. He is Managing Partner of a investment company.*





# MEDIO MEDIA - NEW TITLES

## Return to the Centre

### *Silent retreat at Monte Oliveto, Italy 2010*

What knocks us off-centre is often what re-centres us more deeply than before. What uncentres us is a crisis of some kind. Nobody wants to be in crisis. However, it is often the means by which renewal takes place. In these talks, Laurence Freeman explores the rich metaphors that are generated by different aspects of the symbol of the Centre. Giving balance, it is the symbol of wholeness, a place of convergence, a place of peace. A centre is relational; it cannot exist outside of what it is the centre of. It is a moving point within a dynamic system. A sailor will tell you that navigation involves the daily discipline of checking a number of points in order to safely reach the destination. Our practice of twice-daily meditation is a discipline that acts as a "beacon" that directs us, and keeps us centred within ourselves - within the universe - within God.



4-CD set Cat No: 6020 Prices: US\$30.00, Pds18.00



## The Shape of God's Affection

At the John Main Seminar in August 2010, James Alison reflected on the experience of God's presence in the Bible with scholarship, contemporary relevance and humour. He also discusses 'the gay thing' in Christianity today. Sections make for easy personal selection and group listening.

6-CD set Cat No: 6206 US\$40.95, Pds24.50

## Taste and See the Goodness of the Lord (Chinese edition)

This is the Chinese translation of Frans De Ridder's talks that were recently published in English. Fr Frans says what people need today is "not more theories about God, but rather the experience of God - to become deeply aware of God's real presence." Fr Frans' simple approach will encourage newcomers to meditation throughout the Chinese-speaking world.

2-CD set Cat No: 8064 US\$11.95, Pds7.90



**TO ORDER:** Please contact your resource center or supplier for the price in your local currency



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## Remember the Future

*Please, remember the Community When You make your Will.*

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.

[www.friendsinmeditation.com](http://www.friendsinmeditation.com)



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