



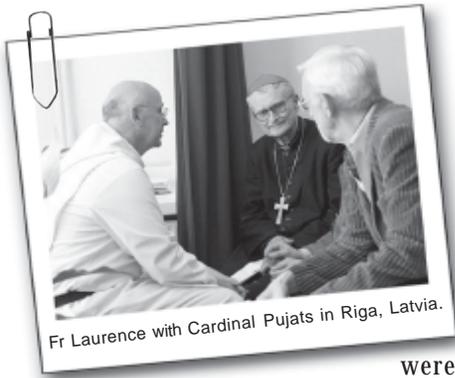
# Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

www.wccm.org

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## Christianity East and West *Meditation in Latvia*



Fr Laurence with Cardinal Pujats in Riga, Latvia.

The Jesus prayer, the mainstream of Orthodox mystical tradition, has fascinated me from the age of 16 (17 years ago). I was baptized Orthodox in early childhood as a gesture to tradition but my relatives

were not practicing believers.

When I returned to the church at 16 it was a conscious decision, part of my search for religion and truth. 1988 was a remarkable year in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church – the millennium of the baptism of Russia and the end of the Communist suppression of the Church. The revival was very enthusiastic – crowded churches, opening of Sunday schools, pilgrimages, opening of new monasteries and churches, ordination of priests, the appearance of religious literature. My spiritual father, Archimandrite Cyril, gave me his prayer beads and introduced me to the Jesus prayer. I was a zealous believer and spent a lot of time in prayer, moving through some of the stages of prayer life (actually without knowing them at that time). Father Cyril passed away a few years later and I was left to continue my prayer practice relying upon spiritual guidance from books often not so helpful as a live teacher.

My University studies in history gave me a broader view on Church history and I no longer felt I could reject the saints and tradition of the Latin West or other traditions of the universal (in Greek: *catholiki*) Church. At 19 I entered the Catholic Church and in doing so felt very Orthodox in the best sense of the word. I didn't need to reject anything from the Orthodox spiritual tradition but enriched my life with the wisdom of the universal church. Then came my studies of ancient Chinese Qigong practice. This art includes dynamic movement forms as well as static standing postures and sitting meditations. To my astonishment I found a similar pattern in some practices to Orthodox hesychastic tradition and stylites (pillar saints). This inspired me to search further in the Christian mystical tradition.

Two years ago I heard about the Christian meditation retreat led by Fr. Laurence Freeman in Poland. Christian meditation was a true discovery for my personal prayer life. It pointed directly to the things I was missing. And in deep prayer as in every spiritual practice the guidance of a live teacher and the fellowship of people going the same way are essential. So, with the blessing of Fr. Laurence and the permission and blessing of Latvian Cardinal Archbishop Janis Pujats I have started a Christian meditation weekly group meeting in the parish house of Riga's St. Jacob Cathedral. From the beginning it has been an ecumenical community – Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists and Orthodox come together, and everyone searching for a deeper prayer is welcome.

In May Fr Laurence visited Latvia – busy but rich days for us on the theme of "Christian Meditation: The Prayer of the Heart" with 8 events, 8 interviews and one press conference. He met with young people, seminarians, charismatics, Catholic and Lutheran leadership. The response has been very heartening and represents an important spiritual milestone in many personal lives here as well as for the Christian life in general.

*George Indulens (george@animalibra.lv)*

*Latvian website: www.jesus.lv*

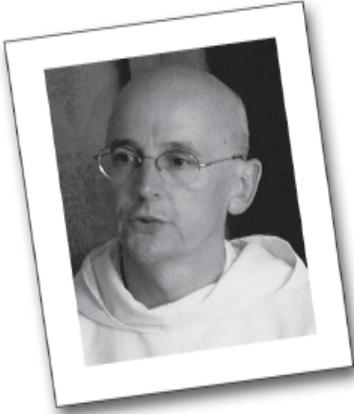


### JOHN MAIN SEMINAR 2007

**"Still Present: The Life and Legacy of John Main"**  
**"Le Rayonnement de l'Enseignement de John Main"**  
18-21 October 2007, Mt Orford, Quebec, Canada  
16-18, Pre-Seminar retreat led by Laurence Freeman  
12-14, Pre-Seminar French retreat led by Laurence Freeman



Speakers will include Laurence Freeman, Balfour Mount, Sarah Bachelard, Peter Ng and Yvon Théroux. They will lead a wide-ranging and in-depth exploration of the expansion of John Main's gift to the world over the past 25 years. The talks and workshops will lead to new ways of seeing the spiritual and social challenges of our time. For more information visit the WCCM webpage at [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org) or contact [jms2007@bellnet.ca](mailto:jms2007@bellnet.ca)



# A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

*Pentecost 2007*

*Dearest friends,*

Pentecost Sunday I celebrated at Dzochen Beara, a Tibetan Buddhist centre of outstanding beauty on the rugged cliffs of the Beara Peninsula in southern Ireland, overlooking a sea as changeable as the mind. As Christians and Buddhists we reflected on the meanings we give to the Spirit and the ways in which they should be lived today. In the silence of our shared meditation times, respecting the rituals proper to our traditions, we touched again a unity that respected difference without abandoning it. It is often exceptions – like Christians celebrating the descent of the Holy Spirit as the culmination of Christ's universal mission with Buddhists – that prove the rule: we begin where we are planted and, without losing our roots – in fact as the roots go deeper – spread branches 'in which the birds of the air can come to rest'. At first we see no further than our own part of the earth and its history. Then with greater clarity and perspective, as when the clouds clear over the sea revealing its immense beauty and elusive horizon, we see how great a picture we are standing in with others. To see the whole that we are

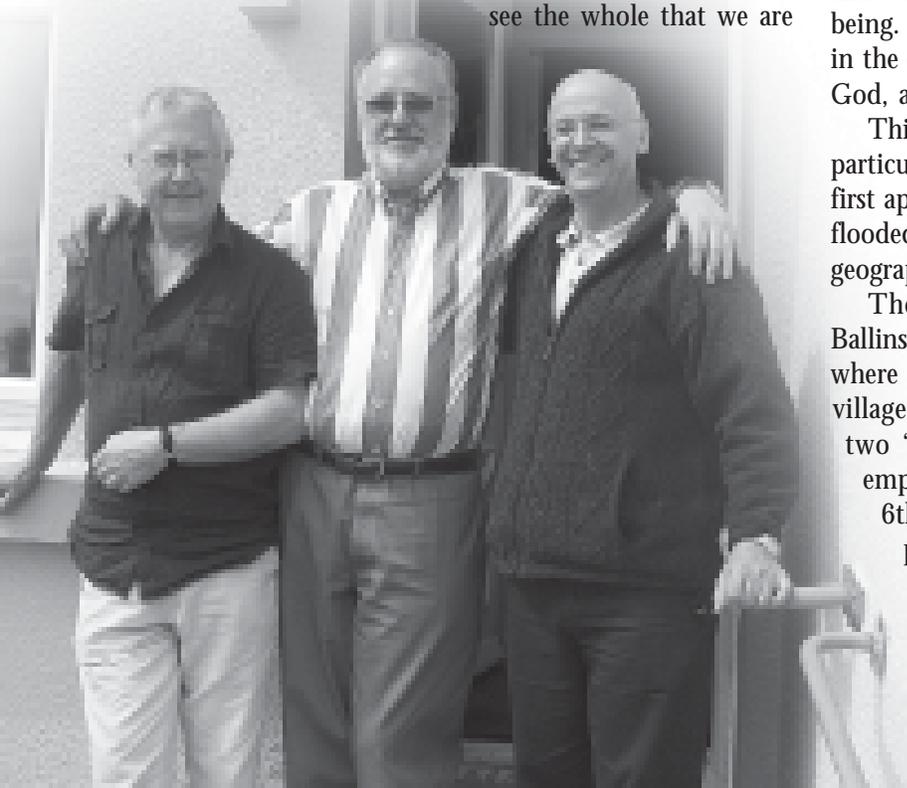
part of is spiritual vision, the Spirit's bestowal of wisdom. Compassion emerging from this ever new awareness is simply the result of living what we see.

As the early Fathers of the Church, like Gregory of Nyssa, taught us, to be rooted where you are planted is to grow beyond yourself into the experience of God that transcends yet permeates the human mind. The soul grows by its constant participation in what transcends it. Here we have a great paradox: motion and stability are the same. Our very stability becomes a wing in our flight towards heaven. The one who thinks that God can be known does not really have life, for he has been falsely divested from Being to something devised by his own imagination.

In the Christian view this extraordinary paradox now floods continuously into the ordinary. It is embodied in Christ, the portal to reality, the gate of the sheepfold, the paradox of the divinely yet absolutely human. To find how this Christian vision, which situates us in the church of Christ's mystical Body, also leads us to sit in the mystery of Being-as-Love with those of other faiths, defines the 'catholic mind'. To try to possess the gift of the spirit, to say 'OK this is enough, now I'll take my winnings and leave', stifles the spirit. It is an attitude – the opposite of what poverty of spirit means – that throws us back onto our own limited resources of consciousness and so, ultimately, into a defensive not expansive mode of being. God is more generous than that. The gift is boundless in the divine self-giving. And it is this boundless generosity of God, as John Main taught, that sustains our personal journey

This could sound like spiritual rhetoric. In fact it defines a particular way of life that is described as beginning when the first apostles went forth into the world to share a gift that had flooded their minds and that grew in significance and cultural geography even as they spread it.

The day after Pentecost we drove around the coast to Ballinskelligs to visit some meditators of our community there where John Main had his family roots. As you approach the village you see, about eight miles out towards the horizon, two 'skelligs' or steep rock-islands punctuating the great emptiness of the sea. The larger one was settled about the 6th century by Celtic monks who were part of the same phenomenon as the abbas and ammas of the Egyptian desert. It is, however, even more inaccessible and less hospitable than the desert. Even on good days, boats often have to turn back from the rock. If you can land, you face a hard climb up 600 feet of roughly



carved and slippery steps to the summit. Here you walk into another world, more still and silent and vaster than everything around it. In a small sheltered plateau the monastic settlement is made of a few stone beehive huts, a cemetery and a well where rainwater collected, a small garden with a few inches of soil on the windswept ground. When Bernard Shaw visited it he did not mince his words: 'an incredible, impossible, mad place.'

You have to ask seriously why on earth human beings would do such a thing. The question itself justifies the existence of the place because it leads us to seek what those early monks were seeking and which, one feels from the deep peace and composure of the wild place, they must also have found. Any visitor there is made into something more than the observer that they may have arrived as. Why has he or she gone there at all? Why not to DisneyWorld or the nearest five-star resort? Even though you don't stay, you have stepped into something that feels uncannily like home, where you find yourself, and you never forget it.

It is, of course, the fact of faith that makes Skellig Michael so powerful. The invisible and anonymous dwellers on these rocks were not mad, though certainly, like St Paul, their wisdom was not of this world. Who were they trying to convince or impress or convert? Perhaps they needed such extreme solitude just to establish in their own minds that their ego was not part of the journey they were making to the horizon of their being. No one was looking at them and they were ceasing to look at themselves. At times they must have found in themselves the freedom of the great sea gannets soaring around the rocks and over the waves, an inner liberty from self-consciousness and an expansion of being where mind and body and spirit became one. Nor should we think this experience was merely cosmic. It was from this extreme sanity of the Celtic faith that the great poems and hymns of the love of Christ flowed.

I had visited the Skelligs on an earlier occasion but seeing them from the coast on that day after Pentecost brought the experience back to me freshly and vividly. It led me to think of the tradition that had brought me here that day, to the small group of meditators following the path of meditation that John Main helped so powerfully and widely to restore to the Christian life. When he read Cassian again he was led back to a way into prayer that Cassian, writing in the fifth century, says had been delivered to him by the earliest of the desert teachers who themselves had received it from 'the apostolic fathers'. It was this too that led the Irish to the beehive huts on the rock that must have seemed to their inhabitants as the literal edge of the world. It also led, in time, to the small meditation groups that meet weekly around the world today. The small monastic settlement on top of Skellig is of the same order as the groups that many of you reading this attend and have perhaps started. The liminality – the being on the edge – is different in expression but in the heart where

all things meet and find their own truth, it is one. It is on this edge of silence and in the stillness where opposites meet that we find that the journey of life is not craziness but perfect sanity. It is not isolation and abandonment but communion and love, not only loss but also finding again with joy.

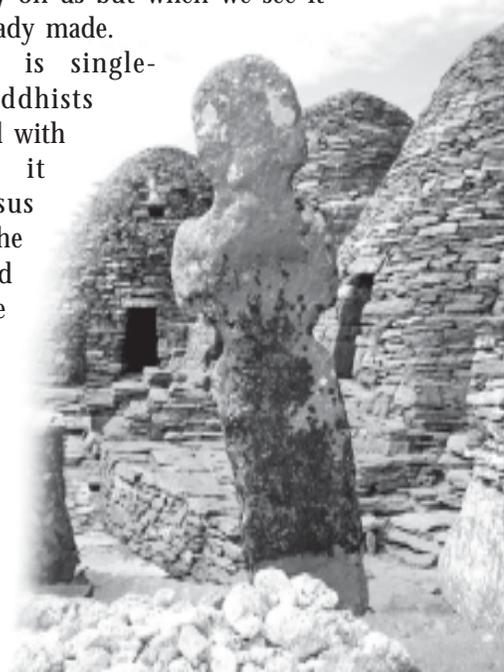
I thought there of the three aspects of John Main's immensely generous and powerful gift to us as modern people seeking God in our own ways as the monks of old did in theirs. Firstly, the deeply-rooted insertion in tradition. He taught that 'every time you sit to meditate you enter into the tradition' because he had discovered for himself that tradition is a living, ever-evolving spiritual transmission in which individual experience continually merges with everything that has been experienced authentically by others. The inauthentic dissolves. The real remains and forms a collective wisdom in the operation of the Spirit. We can say that we have, in his words, found a 'personal experience of the truths of our faith' when what transpires in us finds its completion and larger meaning in the catholic (universal) tradition.

I felt, too, how evidently the simplicity of his teaching on meditation resonates with the radical simplicity that Skellig manifested, that simplicity which

becomes an insatiable, almost mad, need of those seeking God. John Main's repeated reminders to those he teaches to keep it simple, not to succumb to the ego-temptation to complicate with self-analysis and evaluation, can be misunderstood. To some it seems too radical or too dismissive of 'all the riches of thought and imagination' that Cassian told his readers to abandon in the saying of the mantra. If it were a superficial simplicity, one that stopped halfway and rested on its attainments of temporary peace or tranquil states of mind, then this would be a fair criticism. But it is, in its way, as uncompromising as the steep steps to the summit of Skellig that one has to take one by one towards the beehive huts where the shelter one finds is the universe itself. No one can force such simplicity on us but when we see it clearly the choice is already made.

Radical simplicity is single-mindedness. The Buddhists whom we had meditated with the day before call it mindfulness. Yet Jesus taught the same when he told us to 'set your mind on God's kingdom before everything else' in the sure faith that 'everything else will come to you as well.' When we start to practice this we begin to be simplified, unified. Immediately –

## “FULL ATTENTION IS THE VISION OF GOD.”



as when we first sit to meditate – we find that there is only one root problem just as there is only one root reality. Distraction is the problem and attention is the reality. Extreme distraction leads to sin, is sin. Full attention is the vision of God. Radical simplicity, then, is not different from the poverty of spirit in which we let go of everything, good and bad, that we are attached to or that has attached itself involuntarily to us. Not everyone follows this by going to live on rocks in the ocean. But everyone is summoned by the call of Jesus – the call that is ultimately the irresistible and expansive attraction of his attention to God – to leave go of self and possessions. John Main taught us again what the masters of the tradition have always known, that stillness, silence and simplicity are found in the cave of the heart not just the monastic cell. Solitude is not isolation. Love can take every form. The cloister and the world meet in the sacred space of the profane.

The first aspect of John Main's legacy, then, that struck me was the tradition of radical simplicity. The second seems to me to be his understanding of community. What is perhaps most extraordinary about the Skellig monastic settlement is that they went so far away from the known world but still to live together. This paradox of solitude in community was also part of the wisdom – and realism – of the Christian desert. Solitude does not mean merely aloneness or isolation which result in loneliness, the very thing that God created human beings as companions to each other to avoid. How could we imitate God who is communion in isolation from others? Physical solitude reflects the paradox that we are unique yet no one exists in complete autonomy. Early Christian philosophers wrestled with this in the question of sameness and difference – our common nature and what makes us unique – because they saw how deeply this implicated us in the divine nature. How are we so alike and so different? Somehow this remote outpost of human habitation answers it. The Skellig solitaries lived and needed community. Maybe being so far from anyone else they got on better than they would have done on the mainland but one cannot imagine any communal life without conflict or irritations even in a place where there must have seemed so little distance between God and humanity. They must have been less lonely than many apartment dwellers in comfortable blocks in our big cities today who do not know their next door neighbours' names but pass each other daily with the silence of strangers in the elevators or are irritated by the sound of televisions on the other side of their walls.

John Main knew that when radical simplicity dives deeply and faithfully enough into the human heart it strikes the rich vein of communion. Living with that discovery in mind, recognising the same potential depth in everyone one meets, stranger or friend, is what gradually builds community. And, given time, the same contemplative work will always

community to the wholeness that conflict and misunderstanding disrupts. It redeems us continuously from the unreality of disconnection – the hell, as Benedict XVI put it, which is the loneliness into which, it seems, love can no longer reach.

There is a pragmatism to this too. Once one has felt the pull into this radical simplicity it is not long before one realises it is rarely an easy work. Acedia, the feeling of discouragement and depression, comes in cycles. Until it yields to a new depth of apatheia, health and vigour of soul, we need the support, example and fidelity of others, just as they need ours in their turn. The meditation group is the local expression of this characteristically Christian insight into the nature of enlightenment and the fact that we are not 'saved' in isolation but only as part of the Body we belong to. People often wonder whether it is better to meditate alone or in a group. At different times we may be drawn more to one than another. There are remains of some cells on the Skellig rock away from the central settlement. Even in a family everyone needs their own space to some degree. But overall, both aloneness and being together form the spiritual journey. When meditating alone we are less alone than we seem to be. In a group we feel an additional energy of love and sense of unity but still no one can do the work of the heart for us.

As they saw the light appear over the ocean each morning the Skellig monks must have felt the same as Gregory of Nyssa, the great mystic of Cappadocia who was also a busy bishop running his diocese and fighting the theological controversies of his day. Gregory was fascinated by St Paul's use of the concept of 'epektasis', the continuous straining forward of the spiritual journey, the finding in the seeking, the letting go of what is now behind us. Community strengthens us to face this ever-receding horizon and perpetual creation. Though not always. Sometimes communities fail because they lose the balance between stability and conversion and seek to settle down and protect themselves from outsiders. Then they lose what a healthy community or weekly group, open to hospitality (the word *hospes* means both host and guest) discovers – the fact that God is an absolute beginning and that we share in this by always being beginners.

John Main knew from experience that the boundlessness of God can terrify and we can be tempted to domesticate it. For him, community is the space of loving relationships where we learn to turn to each other in all our daily encounters with small acts of kindness and in so doing open our hearts continuously to the spirit. It is this that strengthens us to transcend the ego's demands and expectations in the work of meditation. Our expectations are not only surpassed by what we find in the further reaches of radical simplicity. They are transcended. And from the

first real step we take on this path we are of use to others.

The universal usefulness of meditation – as of all spiritual work – suggests the third aspect of John Main's legacy that I thought of this Pentecost.

At this year's John Main Seminar in October in Montreal we will be exploring the continuing expansion of his work in the 21st century. As they do this from different directions – from the worlds of business, theology, education – the speakers will open up perspectives of the evolving spiritual consciousness of our time and of our own participation in it. If we are to some degree looking back in gratitude it is really only to help us look further ahead with hope and wisdom for our interconnected and interdependent world. The same radical simplicity that expresses itself at the local level in the meditation group raises our consciousness to the global level.

The Skellig monk of the fifth century or the busy city-dwelling meditator of today, beginning and ending his day in the solitude and stillness of the heart, each discover that simplicity is more than one approach to prayer. It becomes a way of life and shapes the particular vocation that each of us needs to be true in order to find our unique and unrepeatable work. The early Christians expressed this by saying that 'the way you pray is the way you live'. Today we speak of 'spirituality', meaning a consistent application of our deepest values and experience to every aspect of life.

I was recently visiting Latvia, a small Baltic country emerging from half a century of Communist repression and occupation. It has a history and culture that is still active in the minds and daily life of its people. Three major Christian traditions, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant co-exist there in ecumenical friendship. I began to think it was an entirely religious country. But when I spoke to a class of young students at the University of Riga I asked how many were religious. None put up their hand. One cheekily confessed to being anti-religious, but most were happy to say they were spiritual. Religion and spirituality are not necessarily in opposition as much as people imagine but they are strongly distinct ways of self-perception today. Yet there is common ground between them, not only in the intra-religious dialogue (meeting of differences within the same religion) that is often more difficult than inter-religious meeting; but also in the meeting of the religious and the secular spirituality. We meditated with each of these groups in Latvia and I sensed on each occasion that we were meeting at a level of awareness that is simultaneously local and universal.

Karl Rahner spoke of the three ages of the church. Beginning in the small Palestinian world of Judaeo-Christianity, it soon expanded beyond itself, eventually to form what we call Christendom. Today that Eurocentric form of the Church is evolving into a genuinely catholic Christianity, a 'world church' whose form or forms it is still difficult to imagine. There are many tides and currents in this new ocean. Perhaps the World Community as it has developed in the past

30 years is, in its own way, one expression of this new era of the Gospel. We have seen how the same teaching of radical simplicity strikes deep and responsive chords in people of all cultures. Furthermore, the way they respond to this contemplative tradition takes similar forms and has the same needs. Whatever language you teach it in, the work of silence creates community.

Perhaps the remote Celtic monastic settlement on the edge of the world is closer to us than we think at first. It represented, in an age of gathering darkness and disintegration, a vision of the true basis of civilisation. Even there the random violence of the day struck when the Norsemen attacked and killed the monks. In our globalised world with its increasingly explicit sense of universality, a new kind of monastery without walls makes a new kind of sense to complement the perennial value of being local and small.

In many ways, John Main can be seen as a bridge between the old and new, one of those conduits of tradition by which

## “THE WORK OF SILENCE CREATES COMMUNITY.”

the living transmission happens to good and lasting effect. His vision of radical simplicity communicates the heart of the Gospel and his insertion in the contemplative tradition of

Christianity offers a deep root of identity for our dialogue with other faiths. His insight into the dynamic of contemplative community has a universal significance in a world seeking to respect the balance between the global and the local. The clarity of his own single-mindedness drew on his deep love and union with Christ in whose heart John Main knew the local and global meet in the Spirit's unity.

These enduring gifts of his teaching and life continue to expand and take new forms which we will explore and celebrate as a community more closely at the Seminar in October. As always, all are welcome to come, to learn and to share what he, the monks of Skellig and our meditation groups are all irrepressibly drawn towards.

*With much love,*



*Laurence Freeman, OSB*

## iTunes Podcasts



You may hear or download the latest series of "*Meditatio Talks 2007*" by *Bede Griffiths*, and talks by *Gerry Pierce* from the [wccm.org](http://wccm.org) site or as a podcast from iTunes. The full series of talk by Fr Bede is published in the new *Spiritual Masters* series published by Medio Media.

## 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)

### SOUTHAMERICA

#### ARGENTINA



At its recent Book Fair, Bonum Publishers launched *Meditación Cristiana: Tu Práctica Diaria* by Laurence Freeman, OSB which will also be distributed in Chile and Paraguay. Adam Eleod, a Christian meditator, will distribute it in all Caritas offices throughout the

Church in Argentina. In November, Bonum will also launch Paul Harris' *Silence and Stillness for Every Season*, and *Nueva Creación en Cristo* by Bede Griffiths, OSB. Fr Laurence's *Light Within* will follow. His book, *Jesus el Maestro interior*, is having a second edition and we feel this is a real success in Argentina. We have also had a wonderful meditation retreat led by Fr Brian Pierce OP for about 70 people; many from our weekly meditation groups in Buenos Aires attended and many of whom travelled long distances. Since Fr Laurence's visit last November, we now have more than 10 meditation groups meeting in Argentina, most of them in Buenos Aires. We have already had a Coordinator's meeting, and there are more scheduled for the near future. Ana Fonseca, along with Lucia Gayon from Mexico and Javier Cosp from Paraguay, Antonio Sosa from Venezuela and Maria Rosa Gonzalez from Chile, is organizing a translation team for Latin America.

#### PERU

Sr Justin Wallace, a Franciscan missionary sister in Piura, Peru, leads two Christian meditation groups there.

Sister Justin says that though the groups are new, they are very faithful to their daily practice. Many of the meditators are teachers in the catechetical classes in the local parishes.

### ASIA

#### SINGAPORE

The Singapore community held its first Meditation Retreat for young people (defined as between 18 and 35). Organised at the request of two of our younger members, there were initial difficulties, as young people in Singapore seem to perceive meditation as something for the older generation! Eventually, almost 50 people came on 6 May, to the Catholic Archdiocesan Youth Centre. Fr Laurence, on his way home from New Zealand and Australia, conducted the retreat which was billed as "The Pursuit of Happiness". It was a happy and fruitful day and the participants shared in lively discussions which illustrated the different concerns of the different age groups represented. Of course, there were meditation sessions, including a walking meditation. Since the retreat, a youth meditation group has been formed.

### HONG KONG

On April 26 a Christian meditation presentation was given at St Jude's Church for an audience of about 45. I think everyone went home feeling contentment and joy. This was reflected in the sharing during the "Q & A" session and from some members who had dinner later. Towards the end, I also announced about the two open talks by Fr Laurence to be held respectively at St. Margaret's Church and St Thomas the Apostle Church respectively, on 18th August and 19th August during our visit to China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Sr Cheung Ngan Shan of the Precious Blood Convent is a faithful supporter of WCCM(HK). Once again, she helped with our sharing part. This time, she brought out the issue of 'distractions.' She recommended treating distraction as a kind of phenomenon rather than a problem; something we just 'go through.' She used the example of her arriving at the Fortress Hill Station. As she went past the shops she recalled that years ago her convent was located there. But her destination now is St Jude's Church so she went right past the 'memories' and scene and came to her destination. For the Q & A session, Fr Sean Burke, our Hong Kong spiritual director, an American Maryknoll priest and provincial for this Asian region did very well answering the questions in Cantonese. Fr Vincent Corbelli MM, the new Assistant Parish Priest at St Jude's, also said it was his parish's good fortune to have us meeting there and that he encourages his parishioners to take a more active part. We hope to encourage more parishioners to join the weekly group. **Lina Lee, Hong Kong coordinator.**



### INDONESIA

Indonesian translations of books by John Main and Laurence Freeman are planned and as the groups are spreading a School is scheduled for early next year.

### EUROPE

#### IRELAND

Kim Nataraja led a retreat in Newry on the theme "Roots in the Desert". Kim is the International Coordinator for the WCCM School and recent author of the very popular book, *Dancing With Your Shadow*. Fergal McLoughlin (National coordinator in Ireland) and Susan Spence (coordinator of the International Office in London) from the Guiding Board joined Fr Laurence for the retreat at Dzochen Beara on the theme of 'Aspects of Love'. Later they visited William Main and the Christian Meditation centre in Ballinskelligs where Fr Paul Geraghty from Montreal had recently led a seminar.

### GERMANY

The community is slowly expanding in Germany. Our annual retreat in Wurzburg with Fr Laurence is growing in depth and numbers and there were significantly more young people this year. He spoke at a Jesuit centre, St Michael's Theological College in Munich to

a large and receptive audience on “Saved By Simplicity: The Meaning of Prayer in the Modern Age”. *Mariya Plotski*

## MALTA



A three-hour morning seminar for children was held at the meditation centre in Dingli, Malta in May. The theme of “Peace and Prayer” followed up to Fr Laurence’s meeting with children during his recent visit to Malta. Before meditating with the children, Fr Laurence spoke about peace

and how we can promote peace wherever we are. After an ice-breaker and self-introductions the children were asked to answer the question: what are the tools that we can employ to promote peace? Then they wrote a message that they can share with their schoolmates during assembly time. The second session was entirely dedicated to meditation. We first shared our common experience of meditation, then silently we listened to a hymn, walked in silence towards the chapel and there we all meditated for ten minutes. What is really interesting about these meetings, is that the children respond so positively and they always ask when our next meditation seminar is going to be held.

*Tonio Caruana, www.wccmalta.org*

## AUSTRALIA

In Sydney Fr Laurence met with Cardinal George Pell to discuss the work of the WCCM in his archdiocese and beyond. He led a day for young Christian Meditators who plan to be involved in the World Youth Day next August. He gave a series of talks in Adelaide preceding the ACMC National Conference and then left for Hobart in Tasmania for a retreat and talks. On his way home he stopped in Perth to celebrate their twenty-first anniversary marked in a new book “Silent Seeding: The Story of Christian Meditation in WA (1986-2007)” and to thank Sam and Vesta Gamalatge for their long service as coordinators, a role now passed to John Auer and Anne Zevis. At the Eucharistic Celebration of the anniversary Marie O’Leary made her final oblation.



## INFOCUS

# Oblation: A Path within a Path

On April 30, following the silent retreat in Hobart, Tasmania, with Fr Laurence, I made my Final Oblation as a Benedictine Oblate of the World Community. It was a simple ceremony that took place in the presence of my husband, Des (right), and friends. Beforehand, I had taken a period of six months’ discernment and two years as a novice oblate. Many people have asked me to explain what an oblate is and why I took this journey...I discovered the Rule of Benedict about 11 years ago through the writings of Joan Chittister and Esther de Waal. From the first encounter, I felt that something was speaking to me directly. It was a time of deep distress and turmoil in my life and I heard Benedict’s call to balance, to prayer and to community. At the time I could not see a way of living this out, so I set it all aside. Four years ago, during another period of turmoil I was introduced to Christian meditation and soon discovered that the community also had a path for Oblates. The joy that flowed from that discovery still rests in my heart and was brought to fruition on April 30. The WCCM offers a way of living out John Main’s “monastery without walls”. He believed that the Benedictine life can be lived by ordinary men and women, married or single, wherever they live and gave equal value to the commitment made by monks and oblates. He believed that the practice of meditation is central in the building of community. Oblate comes from the Latin *oblatus*, meaning “offered”. In becoming an Oblate, I made three promises and I live these out to the best of my very

fallible human ability in the context of prayer and community. *Stability* is a call to a commitment to the community and to a deeper stability of my inner being, hopefully becoming more calm and more peaceful. It is a call away from restlessness and superficiality. *Conversion* is the Christian call to be always a pilgrim in an ongoing conversion, which is lived out as a commitment to grow in peace, selflessness and justice. *Obedience* is a call to mutual obedience in community, but more deeply to be obedient to the Word of God in my life. What does this all mean in practical terms? It means I commit to: my twice-daily periods of meditation in the tradition passed on by John Main; praying some of the Divine Office each day, at least morning and evening prayer; some reflection time on the Rule of Benedict; daily lectio; and a sharing in passing on to others of the Christian tradition of meditation. All of this is about discipline; something I, like most others, find difficult. We all cling to our version of freedom – away from discipline. I like to think of it as not a ‘freedom from’ something but a freedom to become what I was created to be. For me, the journey is summed up in Psalm 4, prayed at Compline each night, *You have put into my heart a greater joy than they have from abundance of corn and new wine. And my heart cannot ask for more than that.*

*Vivienne Luke*

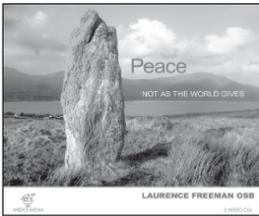




## *The Art of* HAPPINESS Laurence Freeman, OSB

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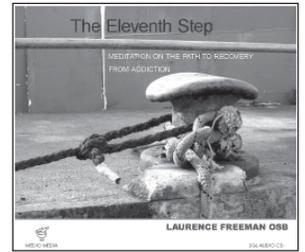
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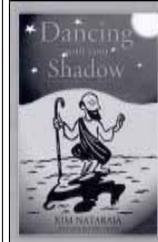
Laurence Freeman, OSB

We all have basic human needs. When a basic human need is not met we experience a wound. We then try to take the pain away by imagination or fantasy and soon we are indulging in distractions conjured up in our minds. These may temporarily take the pain away but the deeper unmet need that caused the pain stays unfulfilled. This, Fr Laurence suggests, is a way to understand the origin of addiction. We compulsively repeat what once brought us temporary relief from pain yet with addiction comes loss of freedom. Exploring this process and relating it to the wisdom of the 12 Steps, Fr Laurence shows how the simple practice of meditation offers a way to break this vicious cycle of addictive desire and regain wholeness.

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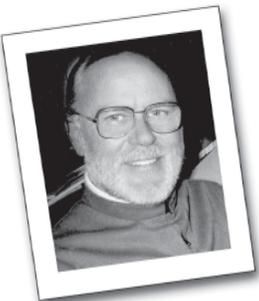
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## Words by John Main....

*If we Christians have a fault, it is that we are so blind to the extraordinary riches that are ours, achieved for us, given to us by Jesus. We possess the mind of Christ - Christ who knows the Father and who knows us. This is what each of us is invited to discover from our own experience.*  
**(Moment of Christ)**

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