



Nurturing peace in the Post-Truth World

Laurence Freeman reflects on how a contemplative life can be an antidote for the contemporary global crisis



Message in a wall in a street in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Photo by Laurence Freeman)

The new Bonnevaux website



The website describes the vision with a gallery of images to convey something of its beauty, development plans, news, comments on the project from meditators around the world - and the easy to use donation page. On the homepage you can also follow the progress of the Bonnevaux fund. (p.7)

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Dear Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

A top diplomat recently wrote a kind note of support for Bonnevaux and began by saying in a rather undiplomatic way, 'the world is in a mess'. He added that the need has never been greater for centres of clarity, inclusivity and peace such as we pray Bonnevaux will be with God's help (and yours). The contemplative life has often been misrepresented down the centuries. It has been presented as an option, often a very selfish choice, for a private peace and seclusion, an escape from the world and its problems. Many people, avoiding the work of silence for themselves but caught up in the affrays of the world saw centres of contemplation as dream get-aways.

But, if we see contemplation as a way of living in the present, with minds and hearts wide-open in rationality and compassion, the truth is very different. The contemplative life is ordinary, as ordinary as our own frequent faults and failings, and as our innate commitment to hope and to a more peaceful and fairer world. As ordinary, in other words, when all the layers of sentimentality and commercialism have been extracted from our understanding of its radical, universal meaning, as the birth of Jesus.

The incarnation is the greatest of revelations wrapped up in the simplest of packaging. It illuminates not the institutional, but the heart's meaning of contemplation, the vision of God rather than the observation of God, seeing not looking at. It shows anyone who beholds it that the human journey is the evolution of each person, whatever their gifts or background, towards a state that is, simply, divine. 'God became human so that human beings might become God' sang all the major Christian teachers before the caste-system returned and power-structures obscured the truth that blazed out in Bethlehem.

Not only diplomats today feel the

world is in trouble. 'Democracy ha-ha-ha' as the hurting graffiti in a Brazilian subway, pictured on the cover, declared, is hard to define and today harder for many to believe in. It depends on a deli-



cate balance of force. It requires levels of self-restraint and civility that make it is easy to hijack by populists, cynics and fools. A referendum today, therefore, seems a particularly volatile cocktail for democratic process. To redress a balance that is so imperilled we need more than platitudes and surface change. A more radical and costly change of attitude, such as Pope Francis has initiated in the Catholic Church is demanded by our times.

A friend in the financial world wrote to me after the election, reflecting on all the instability and sadness in the world, that 'there are simply too many people that have not participated in the brave new world we have created'. By 'we' I think he meant all of us who have a degree of comfort and privilege compared with those struggling to survive war and emigration or to feed their families in the dismal parts of our cities. In particular, I think he meant those charged with responsibility for the big decisions

about money and power. Their decisions have doubtlessly made the world a wealthier place. But they are also driving an ever widening wedge between those who have absurdly too much and

those who have barely enough. Jesus said the 'poor you will always have with you'. It is the gap between the poor and the rich, above all, that makes for the tragic mess.

How does contemplation, awakened through meditation, the work of silence, help us redress the balance that is the foundation of the virtues, of justice, peace, health and happiness? How can we teach and share this gift that is free and must remain as free as a bridge of impeccable trust?

Meditation is the simplest and most universal means of awakening the contemplative mind and thus raising the level of wisdom in the world. Acting with an unbalanced view of things, however, we can turn an ancient source of wisdom into just another component, a fad or a product, of our technoculture. However many the miracles and conveniences that science has showered on us and even though it can crudely devalue the human and blur the

identity of the human and the machine, it cannot replace the human. The human is the process of change through which the divine most fully incarnates. God becomes human, not a system or a computer. Meditation, then, is always better understood as relationship not as technique. It is more like marriage or monastic vows or any sincere way of life than a course or an app.

After the novelty of the practice has worn off, and if the discipline begins to take root, the times of meditation become naturally woven into daily life. It all becomes natural and ordinary. But it also becomes transfiguring, a constant agent of change that reveals the depth dimension in everything as soon as it opens and integrates the subtler levels of our selves. As one begins this journey a hard but necessary thing to be reminded of is that it is not like any other experience we are familiar with. It is in about letting go rather than grasping – something particularly hard and counter-cultural today for the busy malls of our minds to see. At the end of his life, the Buddha was asked what he had got out of meditation. He replied ‘Nothing... But I have lost a lot.’ Jesus too emphasized that we cannot find without losing and that discipleship, the most fully incarnate form of the human relationship with the divine, requires that we abandon ‘all your possessions’.

If only it were an experience like others. It would be easier to sell and to master. But then it would not propel us forwards in the direction that our lives naturally seek and need to follow. The experience of meditation is that of an ever deepening, self-renewing relationship. When one thinks it is exhausted it turns and takes on a new lease of life.

John Main famously said, ‘nothing happens in meditation and if it does, ignore it.’ Perhaps not the best way to sell something, but the truest way to lead people to start and continue on

this way of grace. What he means, of course, is what the contemplative wisdom has always taught. Experience, as we usually understand it, is already something past, a snapshot or concept of something we underwent without knowing what it was just because we were so fully involved in it. There was no bit of us standing on the sideline recording and evaluating. We were, it is true, in the experience, but the experience was not compartmentalized in us. The description, even the meaning, comes later because experience is only a vestige in memory. Our hunger for ex-

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perience and of course for novelty and the prestige related to it, runs counter to the whole meaning of contemplation. Understanding this, John Main said that the ‘most important meaning for modern people to rediscover is that of silence’.

Sadly, this is not what the church has taught in recent times. It has marketed the supernatural, the extraordinary and ‘experiences of grace’ because there will always be a market for this kind of thing and for other less service-oriented reasons. But this exhausts the genuine religious spirit and leaves it dependent on images not reality, on the surface not the real depths of God. It is also abstract, intangible except in the imagination, and falsely incarnational.

If, in the early days of meditating, we can find the help we need to strengthen our practice to withstand these initial

challenges and to control our craving for experience, we will soon discover the real work and the wonder of silence.

Silence is creative, refreshing, healing and de-toxifying. It can seem at first, however, as if it were negative and so frightening. To be truly silent, it seems, must mean to disappear altogether. But when we see that silence is reached through the work of pure attention, not on an object of attention, we have breakthrough. We fall into seeing how contemplation is indeed the expanding experience of love. Everything we have called love before is re-mapped. In this we are swept above our small self-consciousness and increasingly, in the bigger picture, the truth appears.

Silence is truthful. Nothing is more important for us in our post-truth world of ‘fake news’ and manipulative mass deception than to remember what truth really is. Merton once said that ‘I make monastic silence a protest against the lies of politicians, propagandists and agitators’. This is true and Bonnevaux will be part of this ancient monastic protest of truth. But today we have to see that the monastic is related not only to monasteries but to the monk within all of us, that part of us which ‘truly seeks God’ and knows that solitude is the condition of real relationship. A community, familial, monastic or global, is as strong as all the solitudes which compose it.

To the mind addicted to noise and novelty, silence will seem like a negative emptiness. In truth it is an emptiness filled with the degree of potential that matches the level of silence attained. Ultimately, until we fall beyond boundaries, into an ‘order without order’, into the freedom that is the life of Spirit, the silence that is God. Meister Eckhart describes this, in the mystical language of paradox, when he said.

In contemplation we become pregnant with nothing and in the nothing

God is born. God begets His Son in our soul. God begets me as His Son.

To be human is to change. As contemplative consciousness grows it is our very way of perception that changes. It is not that we become 'better at meditation' but that we see that real 'experience' unfolds not merely as something we observe or feel during the meditation but through all the dimensions and in every nook and cranny of life. In everything, we become more committed, less doubtful. Faith, not will-power, takes over and surprises us by the way it moves mountains, often at first by reducing them to little hills. Mystery then emerges from the ordinary rather than dramatically descending from the rafters above. Our idea of God (whether we are believers or agnostics) will also change and with it our whole set of our beliefs and values. God becomes more manifested by our discovering meaning through an expanding sense of connection to those around us, including those opposing us and those who live in other worlds, off the radar of our comfortable zones. In all these ways contemplation grows into action and political courage.

Today we feel understandably frightened by the speed of change. We can hardly adapt to the new before it is superseded by the arrival of next disruptive thing. We feel we are losing control and swayed by fear we rashly run after those we wrongly think can control things better. The catalyst of good change – change that moves us towards the human goal – is in fact at first interior not external. External changes are passing states. Interior change happens definitively as self-knowledge develops. As with the meaning of 'experience', the contemplative understanding of self-knowledge sees important distinctions regarding self-knowledge. It is not essentially just what we know about ourselves or how we think of ourselves – self-confidence or self-doubt, for example – but that we are ourselves in the deepest and non-self-reflective silence. It is not what we learn about ourselves

through magazines. It is what we lose and find in our solitude.

This kind of self-knowledge cannot be put into ordinary words or concepts. It is seen at work in its effects, the changes it works on our lives. When we are truly still and the grip of the ego is loosened, things change as they are meant to change. A kind of knowledge that we have never perhaps known before rises up gently, and yet, as in the story of Elijah's encounter with divinity on the mountain, with a quietness and modesty stronger than the earthquake or the storm.

Discovering this kind of knowledge as true power, this kind of change as the healthiest, we reclaim one of the casualties of modernity, the wisdom of stillness. Hesychia. St John Climacus almost sounds like a modern business consultant selling mindfulness when he speaks about 'hesychia (as) accurate knowledge and management of one's

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thoughts. Stillness of soul is science of thought and a pure mind. Brave and determined thinking is a friend of stillness. It keeps constant vigil at the door of the heart.' Clearly, then, meditation has benefits for the mind. There is nothing anti-intellectual about laying aside one's thoughts or leading the mind into or enter the heart through the path of stillness. The fear that stillness spells death soon evaporates and we discover instead a whole new range and brilliance of life. All organisations, democracy included, work better when people have clearer and calmer minds and are able to tell the difference between fake news and the simple truth.

Walking Jesus' 'narrow little path that leads to life', the Buddha's 'middle way'

or St Benedict's 'nothing in excess', requires balance. The balance of moderation demands vigilance to avoid falling into extremism. Moderation may make for less exciting news items, but it is in fact more thrilling because it awakens the senses and the intelligence on higher levels. It avoids dullness and enhances enjoyment of the truth. In the business world, 'stability' is seen as necessary for investment and productivity. Usually this means no more than 'peace as the world gives it', provisional and easily upset short-term solutions. The peace of Christ, however, arises from the heart of reality not from its surface weather patterns. A conscious contact (not just a self-conscious experience) is necessary to transmit this peace into the human, from the heart itself. Politics, business or religion, without heart are unable to make the world a better place.

We all desire change, but on our own terms. Our image of what we want to change is limited by what we desire. We become no more than creatures of desire. And so, it binds us to suffering, sadness and suffering, products of the cycle of desire, satisfaction and disappointment. It traps us in a realm of images and abstractions. The problem, in restricting change to what we desire, is desire itself. We never desire enough. The feast of the Epiphany reminds us how the whole potential, the glory of human destiny, is manifested in the person of Jesus and now through the cosmos in the body of Christ. Glory is always eager to burst through the ordinary things of life and allow us, even within our present limitations, to see the world as a paradise.

Meditation works by transfiguring desire: at first through those twice-daily periods where we commit ourselves wholeheartedly to poverty of spirit in the renunciation of desire. Increasingly, as change takes deeper root in us, we see how desire is changed in all areas. What and how we desire are no longer blindly controlled by illusion. Eventu-

ally we come to understand what the mystics really meant when they said we should desire only God. At first this might seem an embittered rejection of the world and all its beautiful ways of manifesting the divine. Religious people who lack heart jump onto this language and twist it in order to repress and control the natural desires and joy of life. But once the process of transfiguration is underway we see what it truly means. To desire only God means to resonate in harmony with everything that is real.

Change is the only thing that doesn't change. In the heart of God we find our deepest sense of belonging and transcend our self-consciousness. This is eternal change (the meaning of 'eternal life') and becomes the eternal now, the stillness in which the divine self-knowledge of love emerges and changes us. In the I Ching, the Chinese 'Book of Changes', wisdom is the ability to recognise where at any one moment we are in the perpetual cycle of change. In hexagram 20 on contemplation this is shown leading cyclically into the mystery of reality, just as every birth leads to an endless series of changes and experiences. In this Chinese wisdom text, contemplation is described as the space 'between the ablution and the offering'. Similarly in the Latin word *contemplatio*, *templum* refers not to the building structure but to the space in which it is erected. I think this is why when people come to Bonnevaux it is not just the building but the space in which it floats that reveals itself to them as an entry into contemplation and peace.

If the way home in this space is so simple and evident, why do so few seem to choose it? Life is continuous choice, often between the lesser of two evils as in democratic elections. But we are always facing a choice between right and wrong, the best life-partner, a new password or career. Too many choices create anxiety. Choices that only we can make often make us feel lonely. No doubt this is why, as our world fills up with choice

and complexity, a complementary hunger for simplicity arises. We look instead for an economy of effort, the place of the choiceless choice where we give our assent rather than pick one option. But why do some people want to meditate and others don't? Why do those



who want to meditate have to compete with part of themselves that resists it?

Maybe it is because we assume that it is only, or even primarily, about ourselves choosing. Yet: 'you did not choose me. I chose you', Jesus tells us. He adds that his choice is so that we can go out and bear lasting fruit – not just experiences that come and go but a continuous transfiguration that truly begins when we ourselves have begun to incarnate. The knowledge of being chosen unsettles us. It threatens our ego-control and often forces us into a combative relationship with whoever we feel is doing the choosing. But by learning (through discipline) and allowing (through letting go) the contemplative way of seeing we realise that to be chosen and to consent to it is the greatest freedom.

Aquinas said that what is new about the New Testament is the grace of the Holy Spirit operating in the heart. We don't choose this but we say yes to it.

To say yes is partly a choice but mainly an act of faith in which we surrender ourselves into an absolute equality. Isn't this what we celebrate God doing with us in Bethlehem? If we see it in a contemplative light we have found the key to our present dilemma. We have found

the wisdom way of radical simplicity. We learn over time how to celebrate diversity rather than fear strangers and how to mingle rather than separate. Contemplation is necessary for our next step of evolution.

All of us who serve the community on our international team join me in wishing you, and all those you serve, a happy and holy season of the Lord's birth and epiphany. Please keep Bonnevaux in your heart in a special way as a future place of contemplation and unity to serve what I have been trying to describe in this letter; we pray we will be able to welcome you there one day.

With much love

Laurence Freeman OSB

Special

25 years of the WCCM The vital role of weekly groups

By Paul Harris



Paul Harris at the London Centre in 1989 with Sr Madeleine Simon RCSJ, founder of the centre, oblates Thom Powys and Polly Schofield and Fr Laurence.

The John Main seminar which was held in the idyllic village of New Harmony, Indiana, USA, from August 28th to September 1st, 1991, in retrospect confirms the great turning point in the world wide expansion and practice of Christian Meditation. It was a personal joy to meet the 125 meditators at the conference from various countries including the USA, Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, Italy, India, Australia, Singapore and Thailand.

The seminar was led by the venerated Benedictine monk, Bede Griffiths, on the theme: "The New Creation in Christ". Laurence Freeman commenting on these seminar talks has said: "Bede manifested a radiant strength of vision and authority. He also showed a startling balance as he walked a razor's edge between radical prophecy and a deep respect for Christian tradition. He used John Main's teaching to crystallize his own vision of meditation and contempla-

tive spirituality and particularly the need for community".

In fact many of us who attended the seminar were impressed by Bede's remarks on spirituality with its roots in a human community. His insights about community beautifully paved the way for the subsequent dialogue to discuss Laurence Freeman's vision of a global inclusive family to shape the future direction and organization of the Christian Meditation community.

The discussion at the seminar on the possible birth of an International organization was lively, vibrant and sometimes chaotic. But with the assistance of Bede Griffiths, as well as the consensus built by Laurence Freeman, and the deft handling of divergent views by the Canadian chairman, Balfour Mount, the baby (WCCM) was delivered joyfully and peacefully.

From a personal viewpoint one of the most important aspects of the seminar discussions was the unanim-

ity regarding the vital role that weekly Christian Meditation groups would continue to play in the new WCCM entity. The participants in the discussion were well aware that Jesus formed the core of his ministry with a small group of twelve, and that the early Christians met in homes in small groups for mutual support and to affirm their common faith. It was understood at the John Main seminar that the weekly meditation group would be an essential pre-condition of the new World Community for Christian Meditation.

With my own 33 years involvement in the practice of Christian Meditation and the starting of new weekly groups, I am delighted at the importance the WCCM gave, and continues to give to John Main's insight about the vital role of groups. We now know that groups are the primary means of sharing the teaching. Around the world small groups are redefining religion, and spirituality is once again becoming alive in the humble meeting places of the weekly group meetings.

The prayer that leads from the head to the heart, from fragmentation to unity, from isolation to caring, grows in the fertile ground of the weekly meditation group meeting. This is the spiritual revolution taking place around the world today.

Paul Harris is a WCCM Patron, former director of the first Christian Meditation Centre in London, a National Co-ordinator of WCCM Canada Christian Meditation Coordinator, and author of eight books on Christian Meditation and John Main.

News

Bonnevaux

Website shows the vision of our new home: www.bonnevauxwccm.org



The Community is working globally to make Bonnevaux possible - the new International and Meditation Retreat Centre in Poitiers, France. In November a new website was launched to inform and engage people around the world towards the same goal.

The website describes the vision, with a gallery of images to convey

something of its beauty, development plans, news, comments on the project from meditators around the world - and the easy to use donation page. On the homepage you can also follow the progress of the Bonnevaux fund.

There is a short video about the vision of Bonnevaux: watch here:

<http://tiny.cc/bonnevauxvid>

What people think about Bonnevaux

MARY MCALEESE (President of Ireland from 1997 to 2011)

It is past time for the World Community to have a permanent home, a centre of deep peace and an invitation to reconciliation in our troubled and troubling age but also our age of educated young problem solvers and consciences formed by equality, democracy, compassion and courage. (...) It is a venture worth encouraging and supporting, another light in

the darkness, another heart that welcomes all, another home for the soul.

DIEGO M ROSA (Abbot General of the Olivetan Benedictine Congregation)

I am now delighted to learn of the Bonnevaux project. Its ancient monastic roots and spirit of tranquillity make it an ideal place for stabilising the centre of the World Community. It has a very great potential. It is inspiring and I pray new forms of our life

may flourish there.

RICHARD ROHR OFM (Founder of Center for Action and Contemplation)

I fully congratulate the World Community for embarking on the project of this new center for its whole community and for all who are seeking depth and peace. It is a truly beautiful place and I am sure it will communicate the beauty of the peace of contemplation. Having an ancient monastic origin adds a whole other dimension to the spirit of this unique place.

REV'D SARAH BACHELARD (Anglican Priest and theologian from WCCM Australia)

I believe that Bonnevaux will be a place of refreshment and hospitality, one that will enable all who come to deepen their own pilgrimage to the heart of God, and so to bear the fruits of this journey in their lives and communities at home.

ŁUKASZ TOMBOREK (Poland)

For us, young students and people in Poland the vision of the living Christ must be renewed. So many of us feel the lack of his presence and are seeking substitute pleasures. They feel 'Who wants to be in a church that is just a piece of stone without any life-giving presence?' I hope the Bonnevaux centre will become a home for our lost selves and the wounded hearts of our friends. I really desire to participate and help in this work.

(...) through our union with Christ we are connected, not just with the source of our own being, but we are connected to the source of all being, and all beings. (John Main)

News

Laurence Freeman in the Caribbean (11- 26 October)

By Sr. Ruth Montrichard



Group photo at the retreat in Tobago

Fr. Laurence arrived in Trinidad from Miami and started his visit meeting with our leadership team. This was followed by 120 instructors working with at-risk young people. Later that evening we headed for San Fernando where many had been enquiring about Christian Meditation. About 80 attended the session. On the next day Laurence was hosted by the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business where 75 persons attended a Meditation and Leadership session.

In Tobago, Laurence spoke and led a weekend retreat. The 43 participants included Meditators and Group Leaders from Trinidad, Tobago, Barbados, St.

Lucia, St. Vincent, Jamaica and Grenada. We used some time to show the WCCM 25th Anniversary Video and share information on the New International Home in Bonnevaux. We were privileged to have with us Bishop Jason Gordon, Patron of WCCM-Caribbean.

These islands are small but have nourished the seeds of Christian Meditation in many ways. Fr. Laurence's visit nurtured what was already there on each island, encouraged the leadership and re-emphasized the importance of Christian Meditation in the lives of people.

On the island of St. Vincent, the visit

began with dinner with Bishop Gerard County, who is very keen on promoting Christian Meditation. We had an early interview with Radio NICE and our first session was with a group of teachers who have adopted Christian Meditation and with Sister Martha who is coordinating Meditation in the Schools.

On St. Lucia we were interviewed by the local TV before meeting over 100 teachers from five secondary schools.

On Barbados we were greeted by our Patron Bishop Jason Gordon who organized dinner for priests and religious; Fr. Laurence gave a talk and meditated with the group.

Our final session was held on Sunday morning for all interested in starting Meditation groups. The head of Codrington, the Anglican Theological University was interested in introducing Meditation to the students and Bishop Jason promised to work with him to this end. Back on Trinidad we spent the last three days sharing meditation and Mass and meeting to plan the way forward for WCCM- Caribbean.

Visit to Venezuela 28 October - 2 November

By Susana Ortega

On 28 October Fr. Pepe Martínez greeted Laurence with a late lunch in his Parish of Manzanares. Later in the afternoon there was a meeting with the National Council Team. On the next day we had a meeting with about 70 people from meditation groups. Fr. Laurence delivered a conference on peace and justice: "The meaning of peace and justice cannot be found in words but in the silence of our temple within." In the

afternoon, he met oblates.

On 30 November we had a one-day retreat with the participation of 126 laypeople and consecrated. The theme was "Be Calm: Finding peace in the storm, Jesus calmed the storm around him and in the hearts of those with him in the boat." At the end of the retreat, there was the profession of one oblate, one novice and three new postulants. As a fruit of the retreat a new meditation group was formed.

The following days we had two visits to "Fe y Alegría schools", "Jesús Maestro" in Petare, and "Las Mayas" in Co-

che, both located in very poor barrios. These started with meditation with a group of children followed by a talk to an audience of pastoralists, teachers and parents from various schools.

We had two events focused on the topic of Christian Meditation and violence. One was a forum with two panelists who addressed the increasing violence in Venezuela at macro and micro levels and then Fr. Laurence talked about "Breaking the cycle of violence. The courage to love your enemy and change the world is found in the depth of our own heart." Next day Fr. Lau- ▶▶

News

rence gave a conference at the Universidad Central de Venezuela: "Breaking the cycle of violence. The courage to love your enemy and change the world is found in the depth of our own heart and in the community that contemplation creates."

On the last day Fr. Laurence delivered a conference to consecrated people: "The love of God flooding our inmost heart: For St. Paul this is the essential Christian experience. For us it is the fruit of contemplation as the source of our vocation." During his visit, Fr. Laurence did interviews for local TV and radio stations and SIC Magazine.

It was a very fruitful visit. On one hand there was a strengthening of our Community in Venezuela and on



the other hand, given the increasing political tension and social violence, Christian Meditation is becoming a means to inner peace, dialogue and reconciliation. The visits to Fe y Alegría schools was a boost to our alliance with them and a wonderful platform

to teach children to meditate, and have an incidence in reducing violence in the poorest neighbourhoods.

ONLINE: Watch a video of a visit to a school in Venezuela here: <http://tiny.cc/vnz2016>

Meditation and Ageing Seminar in Sydney



Photo of the second day of the Seminar

Fr. Laurence Freeman led a two day seminar on Meditation and Ageing (19 - 20 November). He kicked off the seminar by reminding us that the word "Contemplation" is derived from the latin for "temple" and refers to the sacred space within the temple rather than the physical structure itself.

Neil Miller and Sarah Bachelard, Anglican priests, delivered a presentation on ageing and spirituality, highlighting

the benefits of "apprenticing oneself to one's own disappearance."

Neil and Sarah then emphasised two particular aspects of the letting go process – Lament, the process of suffering and complaining, and undergoing, a particular way of being in the world that becomes more relevant in old age, a practice of yielding oneself with passion, of letting go, but not of giving up.

Laurence invited three school chil-

dren aged 10 & 11 who had practiced meditation since kindergarten to share something about the role of meditation in their lives.

The afternoon also held a panel discussion based on pre-written questions from the participants. Finally Laurence spoke about Bonnevaux, a new contemplative and meditation retreat centre. A scholarship fund is being established to enable meditators from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend Bonnevaux.

On Sunday the seminar continued at the chapel of the Benedictine monastery in Arcadia, north-west Sydney. Laurence spoke of the value of monastic wisdom - Celtic and Roman - in developing meaning in modern lives emphasising the importance of 'coming home' to ourselves and the need for self-knowledge.

ONLINE - listen to all talks here: <http://tiny.cc/agesem2016>

News

Brazil

Fr. Laurence visited Brazil in December (1-11). He led retreats and gave talks in Vinhedo (São Paulo), Campina Grande (Paraíba), Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais) and Rio de Janeiro. He shared the vision of Bonnevaux. All the donations at the retreats went to the fund. The Brazilian community showed great generosity and enthusiasm about the idea.

The Philippines



The Community in the Philippines organized a Retreat Workshop from 11 to 13 November, with 27 participants at the Order of the Carmelites' Titus Brandsma Center in Quezon City.

Two children also took part in this event. It was an opportunity for them to go deeper into the essential teachings of Christian Meditation.

Leonard Cohen: You Want it Darker

Review by Jim Green



*I've seen you change
the water into wine
I've seen you change it
back to water, too*

So opens Treaty, the second track on what has turned out to be Leonard Cohen's final album, *You Want it Darker*. In all of the songs – and throughout his life – he picks a joyfully defeated route through painful oppositions: *so water and wine are joined by glory and shame, devil and angel, lost and found, don't and do*. The polarities get more detailed in another song (*Steer Your Way*) when the uniquely gravelled voice of sadness and joy steers between the ruins of the *Altar and*

the Mall, the fables of Creation and the Fall, as well as the Wisdom of the Way... and the women whom you bought.

In this album – his last imperfect offering – the prophet-poet is channelling St Augustine (*I was*

fighting with temptation, But I didn't want to win), St John of the Cross (*You want it darker, We kill the flame*), as well as speaking for *every hung-up person* in the whole wide universe, as his fellow poet-prophet and Nobel laureate would say.

Along the way there are the shifting moods and bleak epiphanies that Cohen-followers love him for. And now, because he knew it was almost closing-time, the tone is valedictory, regretful, affirming – all at once. There seems to be much here about the loss of faith, *the Truth that you believed in yesterday*, the constant shifting between water and wine... Yet my overwhelming sense in listening to these miraculous

creations is that loss, this passionately rendered, becomes indistinguishable from finding and being found.

Treaty is the stand-out song for me. In it he dares, yet again, to meditate on what can seem the most fundamental and intractable of polarities: *you and me*. As ever, it's not clear whether God or a lover is being addressed. By now, perhaps, it's simply the Other. The song is reprised in the final track as a string quartet, but Leonard suddenly speaks one last time at the end, in one of the most heart-felt and heart-breaking pleas I have ever heard:

*I wish there was a treaty
we could sign
It's over now, the water
and the wine
We were broken then
but now we're borderline
And I wish there was a treaty,
I wish there was a treaty between
your love and mine*

He makes me wonder, yet again, whether a wish so fully expressed is itself the very salvation he is seeking. May we share the peace in which he rests.

In Focus

Sicco Claus, from The Netherlands



My first encounter with meditation was when I started studying theology. I was taught Zen by a friendly, elderly priest from the student parish. It is hard to say why I was attracted to it. Was it the desire for experience alongside all the cognitive stimuli fired at me during classes? For a few years I kept on meditating with frequent infrequency. However, slowly my practice disappeared into the background of my life only to reappear for short periods once in a while.

About ten years later my father became seriously ill. He was diagnosed with cancer and passed away within a period of barely half a year. In this sad period my life shook to its foundations. In those days I went to the

gym regularly. Suddenly I asked myself the question whether the proportion of time between devoting myself to transitory matters, and my spiritual life, thus that which is enduring, was in balance. The answer was: 'no'. God received about one hour and a half a week; masses in my parish are quite extensive. My body received three times as much.

Precisely in these turbulent days Laurence Freeman appeared on the Dutch television in a series on Christian spiritual leaders. His teaching, but in fact even more his way of manifesting this teaching, struck me. I realized that Zen always had remained somewhat strange to my Christian identity and perhaps for that reason became central in my life. But here a way of meditating was presented that was fully integrated within a Christian spiritual discourse. Immediately after having seen the documentary about Freeman and Christian Meditation I started looking for a group in my residence The Hague.

During the almost six years that have passed since then, I became more and more fascinated by Christian meditation. First primarily in a practical sense. I managed to give meditation a central place in my life,

enriching it in a wonderful way. However, I also became increasingly interested in the intellectual background of the spiritual way John Main had introduced me to.

Notwithstanding Main's frequent warnings against reading too many books on meditation, I embarked on an intellectual journey into Christian meditation. Gradually I discovered that until now fairly little scholarly attention has been given to Main's small but rich spiritual oeuvre and that some aspects of his teaching perhaps remained somewhat underexposed.

These observations resulted in the development of a PhD proposal which in June of this year was rewarded with a scholarship for teachers (see picture). So for the next few years I have the privilege of being able to occupy myself with the reconstruction of Main's spiritual teaching, both in its theological and practical dimensions. However, I will not leave it at that and will explore what the relevance of his teaching might be for some hard problems that plague present day, North Atlantic 'secular' culture. Luckily I don't need to start from scratch and can take Charles Taylor's analyses as a starting point for this assessment.



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Graphic Design: Gerson Laureano
Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is **10 March**.

Events & Resources

Calendar 2017

19 April, Washington DC, USA
The Way of Peace

**HH The Dalai Lama and
Laurence Freeman OSB**



This year the Way of Peace will focus on the questions of spirituality, religion and education. Students from CUA and Georgetown University who belong to the Way of Peace Fellowship will also participate and Sean Hagan will be the moderator of the dialogue. More information:
meditatio@wccm.org

24 June - 1 July, Siena, Italy
Monte Oliveto Retreat: Silence

**Led by Laurence Freeman
and Giovanni Felicioni**



A thirst for silence characterises our un-silent culture of over- stimulation and continuous mental talk- show chatter. In a post-truth world where we believe less and less, silence performs a healing and restorative role - it restores meaning to words and ritual and reassures us that truth is really real.

More information:
monteoliveto@wccm.org

More important dates & events:

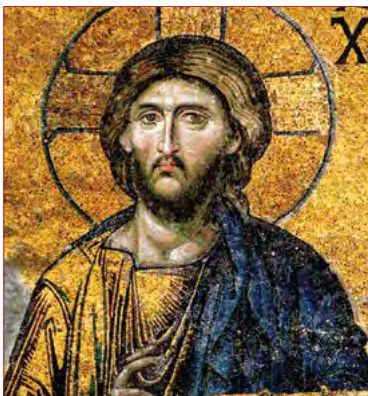
9-16 April
Bere Island Holy Week Retreat
Contact: theresawccm@gmail.com

8-25 July
**Pilgrimage to
Kashmir & Ladakh, India**
More info:
http://tiny.cc/wccm_india2017

15-22 September
Health & Meditation Retreat
Contact: theresawccm@gmail.com

22-24 September:
Bere Island Music Festival
Contact: theresawccm@gmail.com

1-8 October:
**Fara Sabina School Retreat, led by
Laurence Freeman**
Contact: som@wccm.org



John Main Seminar 2017

10-13 August, Houston, USA

Praying with the Masters Today, presented by Bernard McGinn

7-10 August, Pre-Seminar led by Laurence Freeman OSB

The John Main Seminar 2017 will explore the development of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition from the early to the contemporary mystics and show that these great mystics are not just historical monuments, but active resources for those drawn to the contemplative life. For more information and registration visit:

http://tiny.cc/JMS2017_RG

To order: contact the resource centre nearest to you. Our centres are listed below



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Australian Christian Meditation Community

International Website - www.wccm.org --- Australian Website - www.christianmeditationaustralia.org

Talk given by Archbishop Christopher Prowse Catholic Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn

Saturday 28th May 2016

St Peter Chanel's, Yarralumla

Thank you so much for inviting me to what you beautifully describe as a "sharing of stillness and silence."

I'm delighted to hear that over 25 Christian Meditation groups operate in Canberra and about 10 groups in nearby rural part of the Archdiocese. I am also pleased to see that many of these groups are Ecumenical and are conducted together with our Anglican and Uniting Church brothers and sisters in Christ.

In regards to Christian meditation, may I make the following seven points for your consideration?

First of all, I think human beings are born into silence. For nine months we silently grow in the womb of our mothers. We become lovers of silence. In our world there is so much noise and movement that we often become alienated from this primal identity as people of silence, so close to our dignity as human persons.

Despite all this noise and confusion, it is entirely natural for people to seek out silent points in their life and to remove themselves from the hustle and bustle of life. Jesus himself did this many times in the Scriptures. We follow Him to seek silent union with the Lord with "Abba", God the Father, in the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit.

I know in my own personal life, I've been particularly attracted to the silences of empty churches, the silence of the bush that is so present particularly in outback Australia... something that Aboriginal people teach us. And lastly, I've always felt

attracted to the silence of cemeteries. I hope you don't feel I'm a little bit mad!

Secondly, it's important to know that this Godly silence is in fact a fruit of grace. It is almost as if the grace of silence knocks at the door of our heart. As we open that door in faith, we open ourselves to the movement to God's grace present in us in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Australians are very practical people. It's important to note that the organising of groups and what happens and particularly the techniques when we do gather for prayer are significant, but not as significant as this grace of God coming towards us before we come towards Him in meditative prayer. It's almost like a great heavenly dance... the dance of grace and faith together drawing us to God's presence in Jesus. So let us always remember it is not so much our performance and techniques of prayer, but it is more just allowing ourselves come into the presence of God. It's "presence", not "performance".

Thirdly, another aspect of Christian meditation which I think is so beautiful is that it's so biblical. I'm thinking particularly of the biblical posture of Mary as articulated in Luke's Gospel in the early chapters. Mary is seen as "treasuring and pondering" all that God is doing in her life. Christian meditation can well be seen as Marian in posture. Mary's childlike docility to the Holy Spirit and attentiveness to treasuring and pondering is clearly the biblical posture of mediation. So we thank the Lord for giving us his own Mother as the great Patroness of all that it means in regard to Christian Meditation.

Fourthly, Christian meditation must always be Jesus-centered and Trinitarian. In quiet meditation we enter into the prayer of Jesus to the Father in the light of the Holy Spirit. It's not "something" that we are seeking, but it's "someone"... Jesus the Lord. In Christian meditation, we enter into the Community of Love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. True Christian meditation is always Trinitarian. We simply place ourselves in the presence of Jesus alive in the Trinity and rather than "do" we "be" in the presence of God, who calls us to listen to Him.

Fifthly, Christian meditation is richly present not only in the Scriptures, but also richly present in our Christian Tradition.

The World Community for Christian Meditation rightly focuses on the great contribution of John Cassian in the early centuries of the Church. The Desert Fathers and Mothers have so much to teach us about meditating and understanding what this means. Then from Eastern Monasticism comes Western monasticism, particularly in the person of St Benedict of the Fifth Century. He is very much aware of the contribution of John Cassian and popularises it for the Western Catholicism. The contribution is deep and profound in our Catholic history. So to be involved in Christian meditation actually draws us into the very heart of our long Christian Tradition. Whereas we might learn some techniques from other faiths, we must always be conscious of centering what we're doing in our own Christian Tradition.

Meditation is like an "electric current"

of grace running throughout our Tradition.

Sixthly, Christian Meditation has ecumenical and even interfaith dimensions.

Our oneness in silence is also a plea for the Christian Churches to come together more fully. This is the prayer of Jesus in John's Gospel that "we might all be one." An important aspect of coming together in unity as Christians is to meditate together in Godly silence. I'm so delighted that this is the case here today where there are representatives from different Christian denominations. This truly is an ecumenical adventure of faith.

My final and seventh point is that Christian meditation is of its essence, missionary. Having been refreshed in the silence of God's grace, we are sent out in all sorts of different ways to be the presence of God in our world. It

always strikes me that a very prayerful person is a very "beautiful" person. By that I am not referring to physical characteristics, but to the beauty a person centred on Christ and at peace with himself, herself or themselves. There is a certain "fragrance" in these people. Evangelisation and missionary work in the Catholic sense, opposes all forms of proselytism. We do not impose ourselves on anybody. But we never stop proposing Christ to the world. This might happen in words, but even more so, it is in the fragrance of persons deeply alive in Christ. There is a beauty here that is of a spiritual nature and in a wordless way, proposes Christ to whomsoever they meet.

Let us not forget our dear Aboriginal brothers and sisters in regard to our missionary outreach. We can learn much from them and they from us in regard to silent meditation. Indeed, I've met so many Aboriginal

people who are totally at peace with the silence deep within them of Christ's presence. We do think practically about how we can "help the Aborigines". But they can certainly, in this area, help us to move from an excessive activism to an experience of being present to God and in silence, and finding that presence particularly in the beauty of God's creation in the Australian bush.

Thank you so much for inviting me. Do feel in my presence here today, and in my humble little points that I have just raised, my encouragement of all that happens in the Archdiocese in Christian meditation. I am very happy to accept Fr Laurence Freeman's invitation to be a Patron of WCCM. I hope this means seeing in me an encouragement and a fellow traveller with you in the Emmaus walk of meditation in our world today.

Reflections on the Meditation and Ageing Meditatio Seminar -- "Transformation - the journey of life" 19th & 20th Nov in Sydney

By Beate and Derek Steller

We had the privilege to join with 270 other participants in this two day seminar led by Father Laurence Freeman. The aim of the seminar was to unpack contemplative spirituality in the context of responding to the challenges we face as we age. Father Laurence Freeman kicked off the seminar by reminding us that the word "Contemplation" is derived from the latin for "temple". It actually refers to the sacred space within the temple rather than the physical structure itself. Meditation is about going into the sacred space, and the experience of losing and then finding this sacredness again and again. The journey of ageing is also one of losing and finding. We need to go into ageing with curiosity and humour and with an acceptance to change and loss. We need to hold this process lightly, to laugh at our own "silliness" and decline.

Following Fr Laurence, Neil Miller

and Sarah Bachelard, both Anglican priests, presented a meaningful presentation on ageing and spirituality. They highlighted the benefits of "apprenticing oneself to one's own disappearance". The vocation of ageing involves two parallel movements – the movement towards wholeness and self-completion. Secondly, the movement towards letting go and surrender. In ageing these two movements converge and finally become unified.

Neil and Sarah then emphasised two particular aspects of the letting go process that are often paid little attention – "lament" and "undergoing". "Lament" is the process of suffering and complaining. True lament is cathartic and we need to allow older people to express their lament. The practice of "undergoing" is about the movement from 'doing' to 'being'. While 'doing' and 'being' are not separate stages of life (we can

'be' in the midst of our 'doing' and 'do' because of our 'being'), "undergoing" is a particular way of being in the world that becomes more relevant in old age. Its a practice of yielding oneself with passion, of letting go, but not of giving up. Sarah and Neil reminded us of Jesus' journey of accepting his suffering, his death. Ageing teaches us to listen, to have to wait for the smallest daily needs and to be the receiver of action rather than the initiator. There are many stories of these experiences in nursing homes.

Following Neil and Sarah's insightful presentation we were privileged by the attendance of three school children who were introduced by Penny Sturrock. The children were aged from 10 to 11 and had practiced meditation since kindergarten. Following a short meditation session Fr Laurence invited them to share something about the role of meditation in their

lives. They mentioned how important meditation was for them if they felt stress, particularly at the end of a bad day. In keeping with the theme of ageing, at the close of the questions Fr Laurence asked the children how old they thought he was. After studying him for a while one of the girls said that she thought he was 80! We all had a big laugh as Laurence pointed out he was only a modest 65 years of age. Nothing like a good reality check!

After lunch we had a Qigong session with Elena Cortez. It was wonderful to move and to connect to our bodies. We then watched a video of five people (Donna Mulhearn, Fr. Laurie Mooney, Betty Carmody, Sr. Marie Bernice Nash, and Isobel Marchment) talk about ageing and meditation. Key messages from the interviews were the importance of letting go, living simply and maintaining a regular meditation practice.

The afternoon also held a panel discussion (Laurence Freeman, Theresa Oo, a local meditator from Nth Sydney parish, Donna and Neil) based on pre-written questions from the participants. One question was about how to get clarity on what to give up in retirement. Theresa answered this beautifully by sharing her own journey into retirement and completed it with saying 'that meditation teaches you what to do and what to give up'. Also Neil was asked a question about how to respond to anger in older people in aged care. He talked about the importance of listening to them and that we should not try to cheer people up as a way of avoiding their losses.

On Sunday the seminar continued with a retreat day at the Benedictine monastery in Arcadia, north-west Sydney. Father Laurence spoke to us about the importance of having meaning in our lives. He also mentioned that as we age there is an increasing importance of connecting to ourselves. He stressed the importance of coming

home to ourselves and the need to develop self-knowledge to do that. Self-awareness grows through the cycle of loss and finding that we had discussed earlier. Jesus referred to these themes often in his parables - such as the story of the woman losing her coin and finding it again, the loss of the prodigal son and then being found again. If we see meditation in the context of life, of losing and finding ourselves, it becomes more meaningful and important to us. Through the process of losing and finding we grow in awareness.

Father Laurence concluded with a Prayer of St. Columba of Iona.

*Kindle in our hearts, O God,
The flame of that love which
never ceases,
That it may burn in us, giving
light to others.
May we shine forever in Thy holy
temple,
Set on fire with Thy eternal light,
Even Thy son, Jesus Christ,
Our Savior and Redeemer.*

NATIONAL COORDINATOR'S REPORT

As we come to the end of this year and I look back I am so encouraged by our wonderful community how we have supported each other and are working towards building a vital and exciting national community.

It has been a busy year with two visits from Fr Laurence, the Meditatio Seminar on "Meditation and the Environment" in April and the seminar on "Meditation and Ageing" in November. On both occasions Laurence included other events, the talks to the business community in Sydney were standout events.

I had the privilege to attend a conference in England for National Coordinators. As I mentioned it was

such a delight to meet and chat with other national coordinators to share our country's highlights and challenges.

It was at this conference Laurence spoke to us of the vision for The World Community to have a new home, one where we had space to grow. Since this was first mentioned we have seen this come to fruition, Bonnevaux, an old Benedictine Monastery in France. The meditation groups meeting weekly around Australia have agreed to contribute to a Scholarship Fund to assist community members and future community leaders to attend the Retreat Centre.

Fr Laurence will be back again next year to lead our Silent Retreat from 9th to 14th July 2017. Please put these dates in your diary now and plan to be there. Registration brochures will be available in February.

Next year we are planning to be a presence at two Christian gatherings for youth and young adults aged between 14 and 24 years. The first is in January at the Uniting Church Youth Convention, Yurora 17, to be held at Stanwell Tops south of Sydney. Those attending the event will be coming from all over Australia, and beyond, so its a wonderful opportunity for our Meditation with Children and

Young People and YCMers national coordinators, with their teams, to be involved. The second event is in December with youth from the Catholic Church.

My wishes and love to you, your families and friends for a wonderfully peace filled Christmas and to look forward to an exciting and hope filled New Year.

By persevering in meditation we find that peace is life finding its own inner coherence.

Door to Silence: John Main OSB

Jan Wylie National Coordinator

WA REPORT

In WA we have had 2 events in the last two months.

Last year the Floreat group offered to organize a retreat, and this was held in October, with 40 people attending. A different format to the usual one-day retreat was used. On Friday night a simple soup meal was shared, followed by an introduction to the topic: "Have we forgotten The Beatitudes?" This theme was followed the next day, when the connection between the Beatitudes and Christian meditation was discussed. The qualities expressed in the Beatitudes are those seen in Jesus and should also be seen in his followers. The Beatitudes can be seen as a roadmap for the inner journey to God. Feedback was that the retreat had a lovely community feeling to it and the meal was a special part of the weekend. The presentations were very well received. Thanks to Gerard and Stephanie for their contribution.

In November a community day was held with a focus on "Meditation and Creativity- Coming to our senses." This was a gentle, restful day in what can be the hectic time leading to Christmas. After a time of meditation and an introduction, participants were invited to "taste" a number of activities provided such as drawing, painting, collage, working with sand mandalas, reading or just enjoying the beautiful garden. We reflected on the text from Isaiah 48:6-7:

Now I am revealing new things to you
Things hidden and unknown to you
Created just now, this very moment.
Of these things you have heard
nothing until now.

So that you cannot say, "Oh yes, I knew this."

Thanks to Anne and Sue.

We are delighted that Michael Vickery has taken on the role of coordinator for Christian meditation in schools. This is an area we have been hoping

to develop for a long time and we look forward to new growth in the future.

From all of us here in WA, may God's rich blessings be with you through Advent into Christmas,

Jenni Berg

SA REPORT

The end of the year marks the time to "count our blessings"; and we as a community have much to be thankful for.

Our Discernment Day was held in October at Bev's house in Stirling and led by Kath Houston. Fifteen meditators from our Community spent the day reflecting on where we are at personally and as a Community. We could give thanks for committed members of our Community who attended this day; well attended and well-presented Community events; faithful group leaders and group members; and our state committee that works steadfastly to put together our Calendar of Events each year.

Meditation in Prisons began this year with a small team of our meditators who have been blessed and stretched by the many challenges that this ministry presents. One of the highlights for them was attending the Baptism service for four of their meditators.

The Two Doves is our new South Australian Community's newsletter. It contains news of our local and national Christian Meditation Communities. The newsletter is being sent out every three months and features a brief profile of one of our groups. You can find a copy of these newsletters on the ACMC's webpage.

SA now has a Facebook page. Please check us out and LIKE us. You can find us at <https://www.facebook.com/ACMCmeditation/>.

Finally we give thanks for our Calendar of Events for 2017. We will begin the year with a Lenten Community Day, in the Sebastian Room at The

Monastery, 15 Cross Road, Urrabree when Sr Joan Mary Topor cp will speak to us on the Stations of the Cross. We will have time for silent reflection at the beautiful statues in The Sacred Garden. This will take place on Saturday 25th March, from 11 am – 3.30 pm. Please bring lunch to share. Suggested donation is \$15.

With love and Christmas Blessings,
Dianne Schaefer. S.A State Coordinator

QLD REPORT

Recently I was part of the team at the ETW at Santa Teresa, Ormiston. You can check the website, but the photos can't do justice to the beauty and the peacefulness – those aspects of the place which bring just about everyone to a standstill. Some people have travelled quite a distance; others have hurried straight from work. Everyone has made arrangements at home for their absence. Most people are a little apprehensive about what this new experience will hold for them. They arrive with their baggage (both figurative and literal), are welcomed and receive their folder of ETW information from one of the team who then directs them to their room and it is then, as they look out across the lawns, past the glass fronted chapel to the bay beyond that most people stop and exclaim 'Isn't this wonderful?' Now they have really arrived and turn their attention to the present moment.

First on the timetable is meditation in the chapel as the evening falls on the bay and then we go to the dining room for dinner. What I particularly noticed this time was how the wonderful feeling of community is expressed. In the later session when we introduced ourselves and spoke of our journey of meditation, there was ample evidence of the variety of paths we had followed, (self-help programs, Eastern religions and different Christian denominations) but from the outset we were a community of people united by

the practice, prepared to enjoy each other's company and to learn from the teaching and each other's experiences.

* * * * *

Our last Community Day for the year had a different format in response to what we recognised as a call to 'new life and new beginnings', as Kath wrote in her advertising of the event. We trialled a half rather than a full day gathering with more time for sharing. Kath's topic was "The Reality that is Love". At several points in the presentation, she gave us a question to discuss with a partner and we valued the sharing. The feedback about the new format was overwhelmingly positive and we will take that to our committee meeting when we plan next year's calendar.

May your Advent preparations lead you to great joy at Christmas. Love

Gabby Nelson Qld Coordinator.

NT REPORT

Alice Springs – November, 2016.

As 2016 draws to a close it is good to take time to reflect on what has been a very full and blessed year. The ACMC groups in Alice Springs continue to meet regularly and hold our country and our world in prayer and in our hearts.

"In the silence of this group may all the suffering, violence and confusion of the world encounter the power that will console, renew and uplift the human spirit. May this silence be a power to open the hearts of men and women to the vision of God, and so to each other, in love and peace, justice and human dignity." (From: the prayer of the World Community for Christian Meditation)

Retreats hosted by David and myself at Campfire in the Heart include two Wide Skies Open Hearts Retreats, a Women's Retreat, the annual Quaker retreat. A Monks and Mystics Retreat, plus a Body and Soul Retreat, both facilitated by Susanna Pain, an

Anglican Priest.

In each of the retreats I give an introduction to Christian Meditation and lead times of silence each day. These times bring people into a deeper awareness of the importance of silence and solitude in everyday life. And many incorporate the practice in their busy lives.

The dates for retreats next year, at Campfire in the Heart, will be posted on our Website: www.campfireintheheart.com.au

One of the faithful meditators here in Alice Springs passed away in September very suddenly. Michelle Costagne, who inspired so many people in her life, is missed at our Thursday meditation group. Since the age of 7 she was confined to a wheelchair through polio. But it never stopped her from reaching her full potential. She had a voice and she used it fully to speak up for people with disability, the disadvantaged, and refugees. Over 600 people celebrated her life and letters from parliamentarians, bishops and people in public office were read at her funeral. I will miss her wisdom, her encouragement and her sense of humour. May she rest in peace.

I have just shared in the 6th National Schools Retreat held in Melbourne. Sharing the week with 18 Meditators from around Australia. What a blessed and challenging week it was for me. Affirming me on my meditation journey to 'Remain in God's Love' (John 15:9-11). And to continue to say, yes, to the call.

My love and blessings to each one as we enter this season of Advent. As we wait in hope for what is promised. God-with-us.

Sue Woods NT Co-ordinator

ACT REPORT

The community's annual silent retreat was held in late October at the beautiful Jamberoo Abbey where our hosts, the Benedictine nuns, were again most welcoming.

Despite the misty and sometimes very wet weather, the 'full house' of 27 meditators soaked up the silence and stillness interspersed with two inspirational teachings from Sr Hilda and Sr Magdalen, a walking meditation, an eating meditation, leadership in tai-chi from Geoff, attending Mass and the nuns' Divine Office. All summed up in the sharing(s): ".....we feel blessed for being present – a grace-filled time, away from life's busyness....with time to focus on things that matter....the nuns were truly inspiring....."

In mid November, 200+ friends from Canberra and nearby rural areas of NSW attended an afternoon at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture with Laurence Freeman who was welcomed to the Centre by Bishop Stephen Pickard (and later farewelled and thanked by Archbishop Christopher Prowse). Fr Laurence addressed the theme: "Putting on the Mind of Christ: How we can develop a contemplative consciousness to address the problems of our day", then led us in meditation, responded to a Q&A session, and at the end of the afternoon met with 14 of the 24 local meditation group leaders.

Over the next 5-6 days of mid November, Fr Laurence led a retreat at Galong for about 60 Catholic clergy of the Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese, and a couple of those participants will be reporting and sharing some of their experiences in the next ACMC Newsletter.

Susan and Rod Page

VIC REPORT

As 2016 draws to a close we celebrate, rejoice and give thanks for the growth and companionship in our meditation community in Victoria.

Our November Silent Retreat led by Fr. John Stuart was a time of spiritual renewal and deepening of our practice of meditation, entitled "Give me a Word"

Fr. John gave us four words from the Desert Tradition: Stop, Look, Listen and Pray. Throughout the weekend he gave us a teaching on each of the four words as he introduced us to the magic of Harry Potter and then led us deeper into the mysticism in the teachings of Jesus, the Desert Mothers and Fathers and Fr. John Main.

Everyone present hung on his every word. A great contemplative teacher in our midst and our community is most fortunate to have him.

Following this retreat we were blessed to host the National School Retreat at "Amberley" Templestowe. We welcomed meditators from around Australia coming together for this beautiful week of silent prayer and immersion in meditation. The retreat was facilitated Kath Houston, Penny Sturrock, Ruth Fowler and Evelyn Reinehr. It was a gift and a great blessing to all who attended.

As we reflect on the many special moments experienced at our community days and Quiet days in 2016, we are most grateful for the wonderful presenters and the opportunities shared that have enabled us to grow and to nurture the gift of meditation.

Our committee members visited groups during the year and this proved to be most gratifying and rewarding, both for the committee as well as the groups visited. We hope to continue this visitation through 2017 so if your group has not been visited as yet, a member of the committee will visit soon.

My grateful thanks to all our group leaders for the tremendous job they do in leading our meditation groups each week with such fidelity, commitment and dedication.

Thank-you all to our committee members for the fantastic job they do in organising and facilitating each monthly event.

To Faye Gravenall our Oblate

Coordinator and our Oblate Community thank you for your constant prayers and support.

May Emmanuel, God-is-with-us fill our Christmas with everlasting light so we may be bearers of love, hope and joy to others in the coming year.

Mirella Pace Vic State Coordinator

TAS REPORT

A few words from our little community down in Tasmania.

Yesterday our community in the south of the state met for meditation and our end of year gathering before Christmas, as usual enjoying the warm hospitality of Toosey Bannerman and a convivial shared lunch. Tasmania seems to have woken up to summer this weekend and after the abundant rains of spring all the gardens are in flower.

After absence in the UK for family reasons, Danielle is resuming the coordinator role, with many thanks to Vivienne for holding the space in the interval. During this time a new group has been started at the University site. Next year our annual retreat will be held in Launceston to be more accessible to meditators there and Penny Sturrock has agreed to lead us, much to everyone's delight.

We are also organising a day event on the 11th March on Meditation and the Environment, to be held in the beautiful native bush of Mount Nelson within Hobart. Our venue will be the Sustainability Learning Centre, 'Greenhub', a place that is inspiring itself as an example of sustainable architecture and a positive response to the challenges of climate change. Three speakers will present, each of whom see meditation as crucial to their listening to the call of the earth. Speakers are Susan Murphy, Zen teacher and author, and Reverend Linda Chapman of Open Sanctuary, who both presented at the meditation event earlier this year in Sydney. We are also delighted to have distinguished Professor Jamie Kirkpatrick join

us. See acmc Website at -- www.christianmeditationaustralia.org -- for brochure

The day event will be followed by a silent retreat at Mount Field National Park, to be led by Janet O'Sullivan. Numbers for the retreat are limited and it is almost fully booked, however there are also possibilities to stay locally in independently organised accommodation and join in each day's events. Do contact Danielle if you're if interested in participating. We look forward to more local gatherings in the New Year. We wish everyone a very blessed Christmas and a happy new year.

Danielle Pacaud Tas Coordinator.

NSW REPORT

Fr Laurence was with us for a few days in November speaking at the Meditatio Seminar, "Meditation and Ageing". We had over 300 people attend on Saturday as we gathered in the Ron Dyer Centre at North Sydney. Sarah Bachelard and Neil Millar also spoke sharing their thoughts on "Practising the Vocation of Ageing" and talked about their experiences of working in the area of ageing for several years. The following day we met at the Benedictine Monastery at Arcadia where Laurence spoke again on the topic "Meditation and Ageing". Thank you to the monks at Arcadia for welcoming us so warmly and for their wonderful hospitality.

Over the past few months several groups in our local Sydney community have held introductory courses. What a wonderful way to finish off the year having new people join the group and be ready to continue on next year. Many who meet regularly with these groups find it is a deepening experience for them too as they are reminded again about the tradition.

Penny Sturrock has been coordinating the Advent Lectio Divina at Kirribilli. Following meditation at 9.30 the group take turns to read slowly and

reflectively the gospel for the week. After the reading the group share insights about what has spoken to them during the reading. A beautiful lead in to the Christmas celebrations.

Dianne Burn has stepped down as deputy state coordinator for NSW. Dianne will be staying on the state committee and will remain the NSW Coordinator for Meditation with Children and Young People. My thanks to Dianne for her support over the past years and her ongoing commitment to our community.

I mentioned in my national report we have an opportunity to be involved in two gatherings next year with young people aged between 14 and 24 years. We have been a presence previously at these events and are finding them a wonderful outreach to the younger people in the Australia community.

As NSW has had the privilege to host several national events over the past few years my thanks go to all who have been involved generously giving their time and sharing their gifts. Next year we will be asking the community again for help with our national retreat.

With my love and wishes for you, your families and friends to experience the joy and blessings of Christmas.

Jan Wylie

EDITORIAL

In February last year the Catholic Archbishop of Canberra-Goulburn, Christopher Prowse, accepted an invitation to become a Patron of the World Community for Christian Meditation – in doing so he adds his support along with others including Archbishop Rowan Williams, Jean Vanier and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, to the work of our community. Included in this edition is a transcript of the talk Archbishop Prowse gave to the local Canberra and rural NSW meditation communities in May – reflections on what Christian Meditation means to him.

We have also been blessed to have Father Laurence here in Australia again; in Canberra giving a talk "Putting on the Mind of Christ – How we can develop a contemplative consciousness to address the problems of our day"; leading a 5 day meditation retreat for Catholic clergy of the Canberra – Goulburn Archdiocese; and conducting the Meditatio Seminar on Meditation and Aging in Sydney. Thanks to Beate and Derek Steller for sharing their reflections on the latter – and more information, links and reminiscences from the seminar can be found on the ACMC blog site agingmeditatio.blogspot.com.au

Other recent additions to the ACMC Blogsite include photos, reflections by Susie Hii and Ros Harris on a talk

given by Father Cyprian Consiglio and on the Website a flyer with more details about the Meditation and Environment event being held in Mount Nelson, Tasmania.

I will finish with repeating the words from Dianne's report "The end of the year marks the time to count our blessings, and we as a community have much to be thankful for".

With love and Christmas blessings

Vikki McDonough

*For your
Diary*

National Silent Retreat

with Fr Laurence Freeman

9th to 14th July at

Riverview, Sydney

More details next newsletter

HOW TO MEDITATE

Open to all ways of wisdom but drawing directly from the early Christian teaching John Main summarised the practice in this simple way:

Sit down. Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently begin to recite a single word – a prayer word or mantra. We recommend the ancient Christian prayer-word "Maranatha". Say it as four equal syllables. Breathe normally and give your full attention to the word as you say it, silently, gently, faithfully and above all - simply. The essence of meditation is simplicity. Stay with the same word during the whole meditation and from day to day. Don't visualise but listen to the word as you say it. Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images and other words. Don't fight your distractions but let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively and returning to it immediately that you realise you have stopped saying or it or when your attention is wandering.

Meditate each morning and evening for between 20 and 30 minutes.

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