



WCCM

Newsletter of The World Community for Christian Meditation

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The World will be Saved by Beauty

ADDRESSING THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS, LAURENCE FREEMAN SEES CONTEMPLATION AS THE SIMPLE PROCESS OF REPAIRING THE BROKEN CHAIN OF BEING



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Dear Friends

A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

By the age of eight, I had mastered the London Underground. As I grew older, I always felt confident exploring the concrete jungles of new cities I visited and felt at home in the fast, impersonal flow of urban life. Parks were great places to play and have picnics, but I could not name most of the things that grew there, however lovely they were. I did love hollyhocks that grew up to three metres tall, on construction sites, sidewalks and gardens. As a child they seemed to me beautiful and eccentric, with their long stalks and large scarlet, pink, white or deep purple blooms. I was told they were biennial, but I was not observant enough in the natural world to verify it; there was always so much to do and discover in the city. But in our garden at home, I took on a childish megalomaniac project to restore a pond that had been filled in with earth and where a small forest of plants had taken root. The first big impact of nature on me was my attempt at deforestation, but it thrilled me that so much diversity and activity was present in such a limited space. When I went into the country, however, I felt I was going into a new world whose language I barely understood. If I was with a country-dweller who could read the smells and colours of the flora and fauna, I recognised how great were the gaps in my education and yet still felt that I did really belong there somehow.

After meditation this morning, a beautiful September morning, I walked in the autumn of the life cycle around the lake of Bonnevaux. The pandemic anchored me here for the past two years and graced me with the opportunity to learn more about the extraordinary wonders of the natural world that is always around us yet often ignored. As the trees change colour and the days grow shorter and the nights chillier, a profusion of cyclamen covers the woods



Cyclamens at Bonnevaux

and pathways, week after week. This lovely flower with delicate upturned petals, pink, white and light purple, seems oddly out of season just because it is so springlike. Different varieties can appear in any month, I am told. Now they seem like Nature's way of reassuring us that the winter that is coming will be a dark night of sleep but not an extinction of life. Like love appearing when least expected or the release of creativity after depression, these flowers prove hope by their simple beauty and just by being there.

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In Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin says 'I believe that the world will be saved by beauty'. In Myshkin, Dostoevsky wanted to create a character, a 'positively beautiful man', Christlike in his purity. He comes from a noble family but is an outsider in his social world, often ridiculed for his naiveté and mistakes, yet never taking offence but instead joining in the laughter at himself.

The 20th century writer Alexandr Solzhenitsyn challenged Prince Myshkin's statement, asking 'when did beauty ever save anything' in this bloodthirsty

and corrupt world? As he thought more about it, however, he saw its hidden luminous truth, not as a platitude but a prophecy. He identified it only with the beauty of art. In our century, as we see how imminent is the long-foreseen, long-denied ecological breakdown, do we need to believe Prince Myshkin but to find beauty not only in art but in its source, nature itself? And, if so, how do we reawaken that childlike thrill in the wondrous, surprising beauty of the world? We will save the world only if we love it. We cannot help but love what we find beautiful.

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All healing involves self-healing. The present self-healing of humanity will lead us, we hope, to a new stage of our evolution: the first step is asking what has gone so badly wrong? Human beings have always been violent and self-centred, greedily running after short-term satisfaction. Yet, with the unleashed powers of nature that science has discovered, and technology put to work, our usual madness has become catastrophically off-scale. The self-hatred that has always characterised the social interactions of *homo sa-*

piens and which we see in the individual psyche is now spinning out of control. The death camps and killing fields of the last and bloodiest century of history reveal the same virus as the pollution and destruction of the earth's ecosystems. The divorce between the inner and the outer ecologies is putting us at war with all other species. With all our staggering medical, economic, and scientific advances, why have we become so dysfunctional, so mad?

Universal wisdom sees the world as a 'great chain of being', but humanity has become its weakest link. 'Meaning' means conscious connection, being linked. And so, if the chain breaks, meaning is lost. The simple question 'what is the purpose of human life?' has been answered in an enriching multitude of ways; but with the growing sense of disconnection today, much of humanity, especially the more affluent, are seeing the spectre of meaninglessness. The different answers and descriptions woven by spiritual traditions then seem like ropes swinging loose, disconnected and failing the search for purpose. This endemic confusion and break with wisdom as a living transmission is becoming an epidemic; the local becomes global. It leads on to a devaluation of the human, a dehumanising reduction of ourselves lower than artificial intelligence, or to a DNA thread we can tinker with to recreate our species. To dehumanise the human is to brutalise the human. In such an agitated and chaotic state of consciousness, we can hardly be expected to see the beauty of the natural world.

We have therefore, as a second step, to repair ourselves, to reconnect the links in the broken chain of being: to see the beauty of human nature itself. 'Man must first be restored to himself, making of himself a stepping-stone to rise thence to God', St Augustine wrote,

inspiring John Main to see how the recovery of the practice of meditation could be shared with the contemporary world. With his genius of simplicity, he said that to 'get in touch with ourselves first' triggers the healing of the whole.

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The Buddha once taught a student by asking a question, 'If sunlight enters a room through an East-facing window, where does the shaft of light fall?' 'On the Western wall,' the student replied. 'And if there is no west wall?' 'On the ground.' 'If there is no ground?' 'On wa-

the violent turmoil of clashing opinions and judgments, this vision of beauty and its joyfulness is lost. Then the contemplation of nature cannot link us to the contemplation of the source of consciousness and to the ground of being. We burn out in the attempt to solve the ever-growing mass of problems. When they seem insoluble, we lose hope. The shaft of sunlight landing nowhere describes contemplation itself: paying attention to the no-thingness of everything, emptiness and the first of the beatitudes, poverty of spirit. In contrast, when the heart is set free from attach-



The grounds of Bonnevaux are home to a rich diversity of species

ter.' 'And if there is no water?' 'Then, I suppose', the student answered, 'it will not land.' 'Exactly', said the Buddha.

Repairing the chain of being, reconnecting to the beauty of human nature, seeing the beauty that saves us, is a single, simple, unified process. It is not about analysis or solutions but seeing. Contemplation is the simple seeing and enjoyment of the truth. It sets the light-beam of consciousness free. This is essentially joyful. We enjoy the truth even when it is painful.

When consciousness is clouded by

ment, possessiveness and obsessive clinging, consciousness expands and soars like the expanding universe.

Here is an example of how the illusion of materialistic scientism that underlies our wrecking of the environment is being exposed and dismissed by science itself – a true science that is itself a form of contemplation: if the universe is expanding, what is it expanding into? The answers of physicists to this question read like sayings from the mystics. The universe is not expanding 'into' anything and does not need

'outside' space to expand. It is a matter of scale. The expansion of the universe is not measurable like the increases and decreases of everyday life. There is no 'outside' to observe the expansion of the universe. Does this sound familiar?

I wish I could understand it. I also wish I could understand how meditation expands, heals and integrates consciousness and makes me know I belong to the whole. We can 'understand' it, however, from *within*, by understanding that we are understood. At the top of the chain of consciousness, there is no inner and outer, no distance between us and God. Here and there, 'God will be all in all' (1 Cor 15:28).

How can this save the world?

First, by freeing us from the stranglehold of materialistic scientism. Science is essentially a contemplative practice. Materialism is a modern variant of true science that caused a divorce of the wisdom of religious traditions from science and broke the link between it and the institutions of society. To teach a spiritual practice today, for example in business, education or medicine, it is usually necessary to justify it by a reductionistic proof of its health and social benefits. The full meaning – the linking connection – between meditation and the whole of human life is officially ignored although, of course, it manifests in the personal experience of those learning to meditate.

It saves us by restoring us, despite all the evidence to the contrary, to the knowledge of the intrinsic beauty and goodness of human nature. From this we come to see the beauty of hollyhocks and cyclamen again, of trees, creepy crawlies and giraffes.

Beauty is the manifestation of the whole in each part. Only the eye of the beholder needs to be whole for this vision of God - as 'all in all' - to be regained. Then we see creation as ever new.

The light beam of the Buddha's parable lands nowhere. This means it is not absorbed by any concept or image. It is not tricked and trapped by the painful attachments of the individual ego.



Bonnevaux, Abbaye

Where the spirit is, there is liberty: the result, as St Paul describes it, is a 'peace beyond all understanding'. The Buddha says it is impossible to reach the end of the world by walking, but unless you reach there, you will not reach the end of suffering. Peace involves entering a paradox, a mystery.

COP26 will happen in an apocalyptic global mood. For many apocalypse means only the end of things. But apocalypse also means 'revealing'.

*

The end of the suffering of our era does not imply there will be no more suffering in human life - a fantasy idea fed by the illusions of consumerism. It means that we will arrive where we can see the purpose of suffering. Suffering and death as part of life can then be integrated into deep health. The 'world', as the Christian scriptures see it, is not the planet or the cosmos or all the foolish and corrupt things in society. It means the world we construct and proj-

ect in our minds. The end of apartheid in South Africa, of Nazism or Soviet communism, was the end of a world for those who had invested themselves in them.

Each time we meditate we let the light-beam of consciousness detach from thoughts and feelings so that it can lead us back to its source. It can be described as dying to self, 'cessation of consciousness', transfiguration. It is the end of the tyranny of divided consciousness and so also, of the dualistic, polarised, intolerant, brutal world it constructs. In recent weeks, with the return of the Taliban, Afghanistan reminds us of what every meditator learns. We should not become complacent or rely only on external supports, because old patterns we thought had ended can return unexpectedly. The light-beam free can become trapped again. 'Keep alert at all times.' (Lk 21:35)

What happens when our mentally, emotionally constructed world ends? The kingdom. When the reign of divided consciousness dissolves and the reign of God is seen, the cosmos becomes present, radiant in its beautiful wholeness. The contemplative person sees it with the eye of the heart, even

though the influence of the old world continues and its endless problems claim our attention. Jesus said he had 'overcome the world'.

The world can be overcome but not by creating an imaginary 'purely spiritual' reality which is what religions separated from their contemplative wisdom try to do. Meditation awakens us to the kingdom while keeping us connected to the harsh unrealities of the world – the injustices, violence and ignorance. If the contemplative were unable to continue to engage with these things, their meditation would itself be illusion.

*

How then do we save the world from the domination of the polarised mind? How to release the experience of beauty for the healing and renewing of humanity?

The Buddha's climactic moment was under the Bodhi tree when he was enlightened. The dark forces of desire and illusion attacked him as they tempted Jesus in the desert. The Buddhist scriptures say that the spears of the dark force thrown at him turned into beautiful flowers that fell to the ground as he saw through their illusion. He penetrated through the levels of consciousness and reconnected the great chain of being. He touched the earth with his hand and the mother goddess came to affirm his achievement. Jesus too saw through the tempter's seductions.

The climax for Jesus was on the Cross in a moment beyond time that we cannot separate from the Resurrection. But on the Cross, planted in the earth like a tree, he released the power of compassion towards his enemies, not by saying 'I forgive you' but by connecting them to the ground of being itself: 'Father forgive them because they are trapped, tricked in their ignorance and don't know what they are doing'. Their



Frog on the Bonnevaux lake

sin – our sin in polluting the Earth – is also ignorance. It does not exist except as an absence and through its effects. These effects are terrible, but they are healed by the expansion of consciousness. Mother Julian came to this insight by seeing the purpose of her suffering: 'I did not see sin because I believe that it has no substance and no real existence. It can only be known by the pain which it causes. This pain does exist, in my view, but only for a limited time. It purifies us, gives us self-knowledge and makes us beg for mercy.'

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From its beginning, humanity has been painfully learning how to live in the world. We need to learn better. There is no quick fix, but there is something that brings together the different approaches to the crisis we are in, each at their own level of consciousness. If only meditation was a magic pill or a six-week course or a chip that could be implanted. But if that worked, we wouldn't be human or images of God. As contemplatives, we have to do what we can and feel called to do. Meditation will support and clarify action of this selfless kind.

Yet we still need to ask what differ-

ence meditation makes – the meditation I am practising in the community which it creates. One quality of the contemplative mind is that it endures uncertainty better than the divided mind.

We don't know many things. Will the apocalypse be destruction or revelation? If global leaders fail us and things fall apart, will we who are left be ready to rebuild? Every wisdom tradition gives hope to a fearful world. For the little band of Christ's disciples, it is the hope of resurrection. Our present crisis is more than a cluster of big problems. It is a dark night of the human soul we are passing through, and dark nights lead us through death.

Christianity has this saving wisdom: that death is transformative and resurrection is real and certain. What we contribute to the environmental movement, as Christian meditators, is not anger and anxiety. It is a clarity, rooted in the earth, about the purpose of human existence and about faith in the healing power of transcendence.

With much love

Environment

Contemplating Earth: towards a shift of consciousness and behaviour

JIM GREEN PRESENTS THE NEW WCCM ONLINE COURSE

8th – 29th August 2021: another three weeks in the life of the Earth – its four-and-a-half billion years of existence extended by another twenty-one days. On the 8th of this month the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change issued its Sixth Assessment Report, confirming that unless unprecedented cuts are made in carbon emissions, the 21st century will see global warming in excess of 2°C, with catastrophic implications for all life on Earth. The next three weeks also saw the announcement that the previous month had been the hottest July globally since records began, that 2020 had been the hottest year ever recorded in Europe and that Madagascar was on the brink of the world's first climate-induced famine. And all through this period – as for every day now, in every year – the wildfires raged, floods surged, hurricanes left trails of destruction, habitats were relentlessly destroyed by human activity, and hundreds of species became extinct, never to be seen again on the face of the Earth.

It has also been the three-week period in which I have been writing an online course called *Contemplating Earth* that will be available on the WCCM website from October onwards. The opportunity to engage with the course is part of our community's contribution to the profound shift in consciousness and behaviour that now must happen if life on Earth is to flourish or even survive. In November, Glasgow hosts COP26 – the UN climate conference which many regard as the most important meeting that has yet taken place in the history of



humanity and of the Earth.

We could have called the course *Meditation and the Environment* or *Meditation and Climate Emergency*, but even those worthy titles wouldn't have opened up the perspectives that are carried by *Contemplating Earth*. The popular (mis) understanding of contemplation is that it involves paying targeted attention to a particular object or idea – a kind of patient and lovingly mystified scrutiny of something. The practice of contemplation itself teaches us that it is nothing like this. It has been described by some as the suspension of the distancing subject-object relationship in favour of a simple and silent participation in a loving “community of subjects.” It is the experience of wordless, open-hearted intimacy and presence. We can learn to contemplate from each other, from great teachers, from indigenous people, from children and from animals. The teachers of this life-as-prayer and prayer-as-life

are all around us. The greatest, though, might just be the Earth herself. The title of the course perhaps suggests that we start paying attention to our planet and to our relationship with it – and so we should, urgently. But as we deepen into our practice and our learning, perhaps we will realise that actually we are being invited to *join in* with what the Earth herself is constantly, effortlessly doing. The title of the course turns out to be a *description* of the planet and her ceaseless prayer: this is a *contemplating Earth*.

Writing the course brought the presence of questions – now much more urgent and vivid than ever before – that I and many meditators have long lived with: what is the relationship between contemplation and the need for direct action in the name of social justice? Is meditation a means to an identifiable end? Can it be instrumentalised in that way? What if all of our efforts are forlorn? Do we know what we want to

Environment

achieve? (Or is escaping from all ideas of ‘achievement’ the only goal we can allow ourselves? What if it’s already too late? For what? What is hope?)

As ever, many questions and – as ever – no readily available answers. We will, as Rilke says, have to *live* the answers ourselves. The chapter titles that emerged may give you a clue to the kind of territory the course journeys through: *Now/Apocalypse; Hope; Intimacy; Different Dreams; Transforming Consciousness...*

It has been a privilege to spend these weeks in the close company of many great teachers, all ablaze with the truth of their vision: people such as Pope Fran-

cis, Joanna Macy, Thomas Berry, Hildegard of Bingen, Father Charles Brandt, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, Sir David Attenborough and our own Linda Chapman (www.opensanctuarytilba.org/lindas-blog) whose words close the course and this article because they can never be spoken too often:

“Please engage in contemplative action in whatever way you can. Write to politicians, protest peacefully but with deep conviction, join climate and renewable energy groups. We cannot wait any longer.”

Here is the link to *Contemplating Earth*: <http://tiny.cc/ctearth>



COP26 inspires WCCM around the world



The United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) starting in Glasgow at the end of October has inspired a rich programme of reflection and activities within WCCM around the world. For details about the WCCM talks and gatherings taking place before, during and after COP26, please check our website: http://tiny.cc/wccm_cop26

Also available on our website are resources on Meditation and the Climate Crisis, including a dedicated leaflet to guide online meditation for the earth, and materials geared towards children.

All our online and in-person meditation groups around the world are invited to meditate for the earth, especially during the period 25-31 October and 1-12 November.

YOUNGER MEDITATORS

How do we develop the right state of heart and mind to deal with the emergency on our planet and how does meditation help us? The best way to prepare for meditation is through small acts of kindness. What small acts of kindness can each of us

do for our common home?

How about meditating together?

These questions formed an invitation by Taynā Malaspina (WCCM Director for Meditation with Young Adults) and Cristiana Coimbra (meditator from Brazil) to young people around the world to participate in a project that included 4 sessions focusing on reflections on COP26, the new online course *Contemplating Earth*, Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si*, and the documentary *Albatross*.

Ma Eliza Reyes from the Philippines who joined the first of these sessions commented, “Young people from WCCM are serious about promoting awareness of the environmental problems the world is facing today and about finding solutions to them. Practising meditation can result in us making more mindful choices about sustainable living and care for the environment.”

You can find the recordings of the sessions here: <http://tiny.cc/wccmenv21>

News

Bonnevaux: a new milestone

AS THE RETREAT CENTRE PREPARES TO OPEN, THE NEXT PHASE WILL BE THE CONTEMPLATIVE VILLAGE

The renovation work at the Bonnevaux Retreat Centre will be completed in November, and the official opening is planned for Spring 2022. This great achievement was made possible thanks to the generosity of many individuals from the community, foundations, and major donors - and the gracious leadership of Angelene Chan and her team at DP Architects. Angelene will be meeting online with WCCM national communities to describe the work done so far, as well as the next phase. We especially need donations for the Contemplative Village and landscaping. Sponsorship of cells or gardens in memory of loved ones or on behalf of national communities is sought. Angelene Chan is a new member of the Guiding Board and will be supported by Fr Laurence in the online sessions where she will bring the Bonnevaux vision to the national communities. For updates and further information, visit www.bonnevauxwccm.org.



On the left, the Conference Centre (Barn) and on the right, The Retreat Centre (Guesthouse)

A living faith - experience as a key element of spirituality

VLADIMÍR VOLRÁB CLOSES OUR SERIES ABOUT RESEARCH ON JOHN MAIN AND CHRISTIAN MEDITATION



As a priest, I often ask myself how to communicate the faith well to people. If we go back to the very beginning of the story of the birth of the Christian faith,

we see the great importance of direct experience. The apostles walked with Jesus and were drawn into the narrative from which faith flowed. Today, we seek to pass on the faith primarily through words of catechesis and education. However, we live in a time when words about Christian spirituality (among others) easily become shallow, and symbols are often misunderstood or misinterpreted. The natural environment of symbols and language is lost to the inevitable continuing secularization and cultural Christianity. Symbols are frequently misused for ideological and political ends that can go against the

spirit of the Gospel.

Thus, the question at the beginning of my dissertation is whether it would be better to put experience before words. To reverse the order and let the desire for words to bring answers flow out of direct experience. The dissertation is based on the person of John Main and his notion of spirituality in which experience plays a key role and from which we then come to know the truths of the Christian faith. He himself states that the path of meditation is primarily a path of faith not of thought. I believe this is a key understanding of spirituality mediating a deep and living faith.

JMS 2021

WCCM 30 years on: celebrating the unfolding pilgrimage

On September 4, 2021, meditators from all around the world gathered for an online John Main Seminar with the theme “Community of Love - Celebrating 30 years of the founding of WCCM”. It was a moment to share silence, teachings, memories, and also art and inspiration. Fr Laurence’s talk on “WCCM and the New Christianity” was followed by a series of short talks by 12 meditators on different aspects of the Community and their experiences within it. You can watch all videos here: <http://tiny.cc/jms21rec>

Laurence Freeman: “So, today, as we celebrate, remember, and reflect on the 30th anniversary of the naming of the WCCM, we can have this sense of the fullness of time unfolding and touching us with the *pleroma*, the fullness of Christ. (...) What kind of community have we become over the last 30 years? Rowan Williams said that the WCCM, for many, is a model of what a truly Contemplative Christianity may look like in the future: Christian, Christ-centred, inter-denominational, free from the history of denominational warfare that all religions experienced.

Peter Ng, Singapore: “The question is: What has the last 30 years of the development of WCCM been preparing us for? I think it has been preparing us to contribute to a transformation of consciousness in the post-pandemic world.”

Kath Houston, Australia: “In the face of great difficulties, the light shines brightly in the world. Our communities continue to be self-motivated, and a whole lot of new things are coming to life.”

Vladimír Volráb, Czech Republic: “I believe continuing education is key for us. It is important for us to try to put our experience of silence into the world responsibly.”

Sister Denise McMahon, Fiji: “One of the great joys of my life in which I have really experienced the grace of living out my missionary vocation has been to share the gift of meditation to the children in the schools of Fiji.”

The contemplative life lifts us up above that inter-denominational conflict without losing the richness of those traditions. We are also able, therefore, to welcome non-believers, and there are many of them in the world today. They come to our groups, to visit us at Bonnevaux. People seeking, and not really knowing what they are seeking, are reluctant to identify with any particular tradition or path, and yet, they are on a path: the path of seeking. We can welcome them. In this Contemplative Christianity, we can also be eager for dialogue, not frightened of it.”

Pascale Callec, France: “The context of the pandemic has placed us at the heart of the ecological crisis and the need to engage very important individual and collective changes.”

Josie von Zitzewitz, UK: “It’s the contact with this community, which has been very close at times and loose at others, that has enabled the teaching and the practice to become so deeply rooted in my life.”

Martin Malina, Canada: “Yes, in our places, we unite with those who gather with us there, but ultimately the grace, love and freedom come to us a second time in the Worldwide Community, where we unite in the holy space of meditation.”

Enrique Lavin, Mexico: “Through this pandemic, a loving and beautiful community emerged through Zoom with all the countries from Latin America.”

Magda Jass, Canada (about the early



Seminar also celebrated the life and legacy of John Main

days of the Community in Montreal):

“I came regularly and said my mantra, I learned to live with uncertainty. I knew meditation was what I needed to do without really understanding it. Meditating became a necessity.”

Taynā Malaspina, Brazil: “Young people need this space of just being, so that they can breathe and be in silence in a society that stresses the importance of having things and doing things.”

Nick Scrimenti, USA: “The John Main Center (at Georgetown) brings an ancient institution like the monastic cell in a conversation with, and sometimes in opposition to, a modern education.”

Jonathan Maresca, USA: “The contemplative wisdom at Bonnevaux transformed my faith and vocation, but I would be lying to you if I did not say that it was the relationships that keep Bonnevaux as a sacred memory and a spiritual well-spring for me.”

Books

Poetica Divina: Poems to Redeem a Prose World

SARAH BACHELARD INTRODUCES HER NEW BOOK



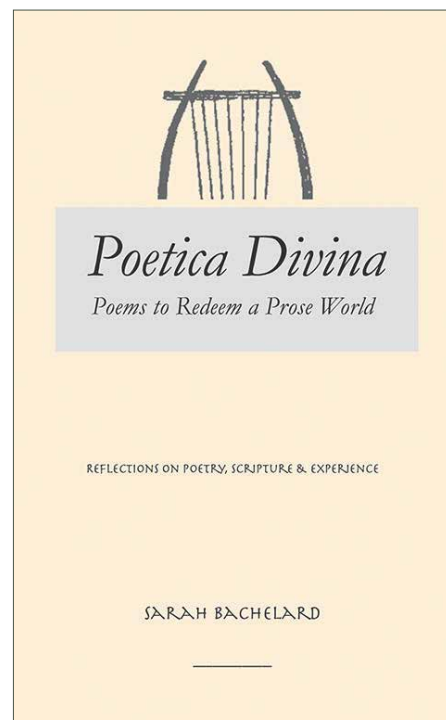
American poet Denise Levertov has said that, 'Insofar as poetry has a social function, it is to awaken sleepers by means other than shock'. It's this experience of poetry as revelation that has always drawn me. Good poetry opens our eyes to see the world more truly; it tunes us into the subtler frequencies of feeling and reality, helps us realise what in some sense we already know, but haven't fully recognised. Poetry is a form of wisdom literature and in that sense, says Australian poet Les Murray, it is inherently 'religious'. It's not that there is something called 'poetry', a subset of which has religious or devotional subject matter. Rather, good poetry is itself religious. It connects and reconnects us to the whole of ourselves and our knowing, and the whole of reality.

Poetica Divina emerged from a series of reflections that I shared at Benedictus Contemplative Church. Each

winter for three years, we explored four poems in conversation with a passage of scripture, discovering what the juxtaposition of sometimes unlikely texts opened up for us. The process of choosing each poem and its accompanying text was largely intuitive. As I prepared for each series, I let a poem 'choose' me – seeking to listen for what was energising and drawing me from poems I had recently read. And then, as the choice of poem became clear, I sought to allow a passage of Scripture to be given in a similar way – letting it come. Sometimes, I felt reasonably clear from the beginning about the connection between the two texts; at other times, the depth of their relationship began to show itself only as I sat with each one, and brought them into conversation with experience.

So the process of writing this book itself involved a kind of 'lectio' or 'poetica divina', by which I mean an attentive, reverential, non-grasping engagement. I was not trying to 'explain' poem, Scripture and experience, so much as to delight in how they illuminate each other and the meaning of things. And, like all 'lectio', I discov-

ered that such reflection leads always towards contemplation. Each poem and text touching into deep truths of reality, and, in the end, leading us to the edge of mystery – the point at which words run out, and what's left is wonder, unknowing, silence ...



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Hold the Rope, Carry Your Cross - Christianity and the Ten Bull Pictures of Zen

By Andrew McAlister

This book uses a re-imagining of Zen's Ten Bull (or Ox-Herding) Pictures, seeing them with a Christian eye.

COMING OUT SOON:

Meditators on Meditation and Marriage - The experiences of those who do both

Just Turn Up! - the journey of an aspiring meditator and the challenges they face on the way. By Julie Roberts

In Focus

Anu Pylkkänen, Finland



Finland is very Lutheran: about 70% of the population are members of the Church. In Helsinki, the reformed Lutheran church and its services are very down to earth, non-mystical and really open to everyone. It has both women and men priests and bishops.

Growing up in Helsinki, with its liberal and permissive spiritual atmosphere where the Church did not regulate or really exercise any strong role in our lives, formed my relationship with the Church. I am very grateful that the Church was approachable and sort of neutral. Even if I only went there for weddings, christenings, confirmations and funerals, the support and steadiness of the Church felt really good.

This Church, however, was not the place where I would go for spiritual nourishment. I have felt the strong pull of the simplest wordless *presence* for as long as I can remember, so I went looking for answers elsewhere. My path took me along what I would call the “usual eastern route”. I explored the really wonderful teachings of many Indian and Buddhist masters which still today I appreciate as precious jewels. I am enormously grateful for the doors they opened in me.

Meditation, I felt, was the way forward for me, and I longed to find a practice that would “make flesh” all these teachings. However, the last place I would look for this was the Church, as I had never heard of meditation being combined with Christianity. So when, some ten years ago, a friend saw a small advertisement about Christian meditation, we decided to go and see what it was all about. I still remember that little group where we felt so welcome. I had a sense of homecoming. It was something I immediately knew I wanted to go deeper into. From that day on, I have attended the group every week. I read John Main’s *Word into Silence*, which opened the door for me. It remains to this day the book to which

I perhaps feel closest.

The path, then, has presented a number of interesting adventures and challenges, such as giving many presentations on Christian meditation, doing translations, meeting absolutely wonderful people, and then also becoming the National Coordinator for Finland, and finally also returning to the Church.

A priest once said that he had to stop his theological university education, as he felt that they were only talking about recipes and there was no food on the table. When he found meditation, he found the food and then could go back to the university. Or as an Indian Master put it, “You cannot taste honey by licking a book where the word honey is written.” Meditation is the real experience.

I also feel that like any meal, the manna of meditation is best shared with other people. John Main said that meditation creates community and, as one of my favourite writers, Simone Weil, put it:

“For nothing among human things has such power to keep our gaze fixed ever more intensely upon God than friendship for the friends of God.”

(Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*)



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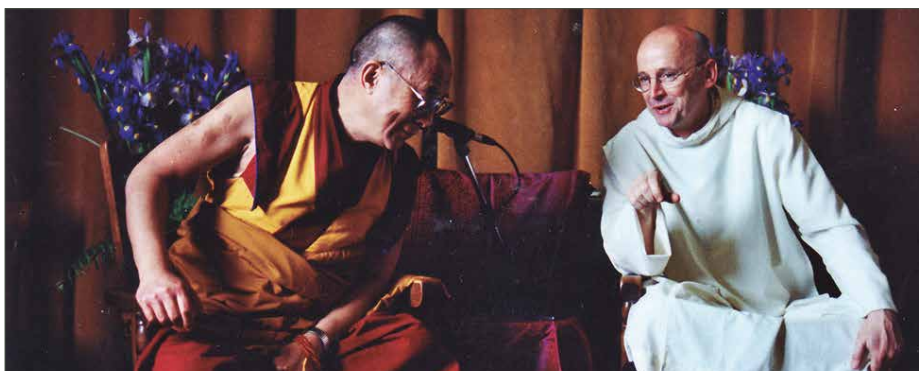
Editor: Leonardo Corrêa (leonardo@wccm.org)

Graphic Design: Gerson Laureano

Would you like to contribute to the WCCM Newsletter? Our next deadline is 20 November.

Events

HH the Dalai Lama will bless Bonnevaux and WCCM during a dialogue online in December



The Dalai Lama and Laurence Freeman at one of the sessions from The Way of Peace series

The Dalai Lama will meet Laurence Freeman again, this time online, to speak on Unified Consciousness (the WCCM theme for 2022). It will be an online dialogue on 1st December, at 4:30 am (French time) during which the Dalai Lama will

bless Bonnevaux and the Community. The event will provide an opportunity also to celebrate a longstanding friendship and the 30th Anniversary of the founding of WCCM. More information will be published soon on the WCCM website.

Pilgrimages led by Laurence Freeman in 2022

Holy Land (17-24 Feb 2022)

“Life is a pilgrimage – as every meditator comes to discover through their inner journey. When we go to the Holy Land as contemplative pilgrims – not tourists but pilgrims – we are strengthened in understanding life’s purpose. And so, we come to see our personal journey with deeper gratitude and wonder.”(Laurence Freeman)

Fatima, Lourdes and Bonnevaux (18-29 Oct 2022)

A journey to two of the foremost Marian sites, Fatima and Lourdes, plus a 3-day retreat in Bonnevaux. Meditating together, worshiping, sharing personal journeys, will become part of the healing and inspiration that each of these holy places offers the pilgrim.

For more information about both pilgrimages: <http://tiny.cc/pilgm22>

WCCM online events

2 NOV

Health Series - The Harmonies of a Healthy Life, final session with Dr Barry White and Laurence Freeman

4-7 NOV

Living Life Anew - Highlighting the WCCM Spain, led by Laurence Freeman

9 NOV

Speaker Series: A Healthy Intelligence for Our Digitised Societies, led by Marco Schorlemmer

MORE INFO & REGISTRATION:
visit wccm.org

Bonnevaux events

These are in-person retreats hosted in a test-phase, to prepare for the official opening of the Retreat Centre Guesthouse:

9-13 NOV

Seeing with the Heart, a retreat led by Cynthia Bourgeault

29 NOV-5 DEC

Saving Time - Advent Retreat led by Laurence Freeman and Giovanni Felicioni

MORE INFO & REGISTRATION:
visit bonnevauxwccm.org

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Lockdown and Finding the Power of Peace

For ourselves, for our children and for our young people

by Helen Bramanathan
Religious Education and Faith
Formation Officer, Catholic Education
Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn

Lockdowns continue for many in parts of Australia. Two years ago very, very few could have imagined life as it is for millions of us right now. Our world changed – suddenly and dramatically and the impact is huge.

We watch it unfold daily on our TVs – the deaths, the hospitalisations, the job losses, the financial stress. And the consequential personal impact of hardship, of isolation, of stress and of loss of hope. How can we find peace in a situation like this?

If we look within, deep within, we can make a journey of self-discovery. With time and an open heart, we can encounter God's infinite gift of unconditional love. And how do we open ourselves to this gift of love and the peace it brings?

Praying contemplatively is one such way. Contemplative prayer takes us from our heads and our analytical minds, to our hearts where each one of us can experience God's indwelling presence. The practice of Christian Meditation can help us do this. This ancient form of prayer dates back to the 4th century and was called 'pure prayer' by the desert fathers and mothers and connects to Jesus telling us in Matthew, Chapter 6, about how to go 'into our inner room.'

Christian Meditation is about stillness,



silence and simplicity. Our body and mind come to stillness and silence as we pay attention and lovingly repeat our

“By helping children and young people learn to pray contemplatively we will help them experience God's infinite love and the power it can offer them.”

sacred word or mantra. We let go of all thoughts, leave 'self' behind, and open our hearts to being with God within. This is contemplative prayer. We are not asking anything of God. We are just opening ourselves to 'being' present. Sometimes, however, in God's good time we may be blessed with the Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Is this a path to a deep knowing of God's love and the peace it brings? Many who have made this inner journey attest to the impact it has had in their lives.

Jesus had a special love of children and although it seems counterintuitive, children can also enter into this form of prayer. Many who have been introduced to it now ask for it to be a regular part

Continued page 17.



Praying with Icons

Reflections on the Silent Retreat Day

by Rosie Hamilton
State Co-ordinator South Australia

The South Australian Christian Meditation Community has been blessed during this year of pandemic. Meditation groups have met in person, following COVID safe practices, and a Community Day and a Silent Retreat Day have also been held.

In June, Sister Cynthia Griffin led the Silent Retreat Day. Prior to the pandemic she was privileged to go on a study tour of Russia to learn about icons. In a morning and afternoon session she enlightened us about the significance of icons in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

Icons are never painted. They are written and have to be read. They are written for contemplation and are about receptivity. As we gaze upon an icon we are invited to move from the head to the heart.

The desert fathers and mothers

who fled to the desert in Egypt after the fall of the Roman Empire wrote the first icons. Many of the icons from this period are housed at St Catherine's Monastery at Mt Sinai. The desert

“Icons are sacred. They are signs of God’s presence. They make the invisible world visible.”

monastic communities that grew out of the informal gathering of hermit monks became the model for Christian Monasticism. From the east these monasteries spread to Byzantium and Greece and later Orthodox Christianity was adopted in Russia.

Prince Vladimir I (ruled 980-1015) is regarded as the father of Russia. He believed that the only way to unify the country was for the people to have a common faith. He reportedly gave great thought to choosing which religion was right for his people. He chose Orthodox Christianity with its emphasis on beauty and splendour. The liturgy created was colourful and meaningful with icons as a part of it. The music was the unaccompanied voice and the priests had to dress like kings.

Icons are sacred. They are signs of God's presence. They make the invisible world visible.

The traditional Russian icon is written on a carefully prepared wooden panel. First, a cloth is attached to the panel's face. Then many layers of a primer made of glue and powdered chalk or alabaster are applied over the cloth. When the primer is thoroughly dry, an outline of the design is scratched or carved into the surface. Images are

composed of tempera paints that are made from powdered colours mixed with egg yolk and a small amount of rye beer. Tempera paints are applied in graduated shades with dark colours applied first and lighter colours added on top. This results in a slightly three-dimensional effect. The finished icon is varnished with a boiled linseed oil mixture that brightens and protects the colours. Every icon is made of natural materials and as such matter is mediating the divine.

The icons could be called a theology in colour. Each icon is a perfect combination of colours that have the same meaning as words.

Icon colours

White stands for divine light, purity, and holiness. It is also used to depict



the robes of angels, the shrouds of the dead, and the swaddling clothes of babies.

Blue stands for heaven or the Kingdom of God that is not on this earth. Being a symbol of another everlasting world, it also shows the infiniteness of the sky. Dark blue is the colour used for the Mother of God. It shows her heavenly nature.

Red signifies life on earth. It is a symbol of life-giving energy, love, passion, and Christ's sacrifice. It also represents the saving nature of the resurrection. Some icons have a red background to symbolize the celebration of life.

Purple is the colour of royalty. It is intended to show the glory of Jesus Christ and the Mother of God.

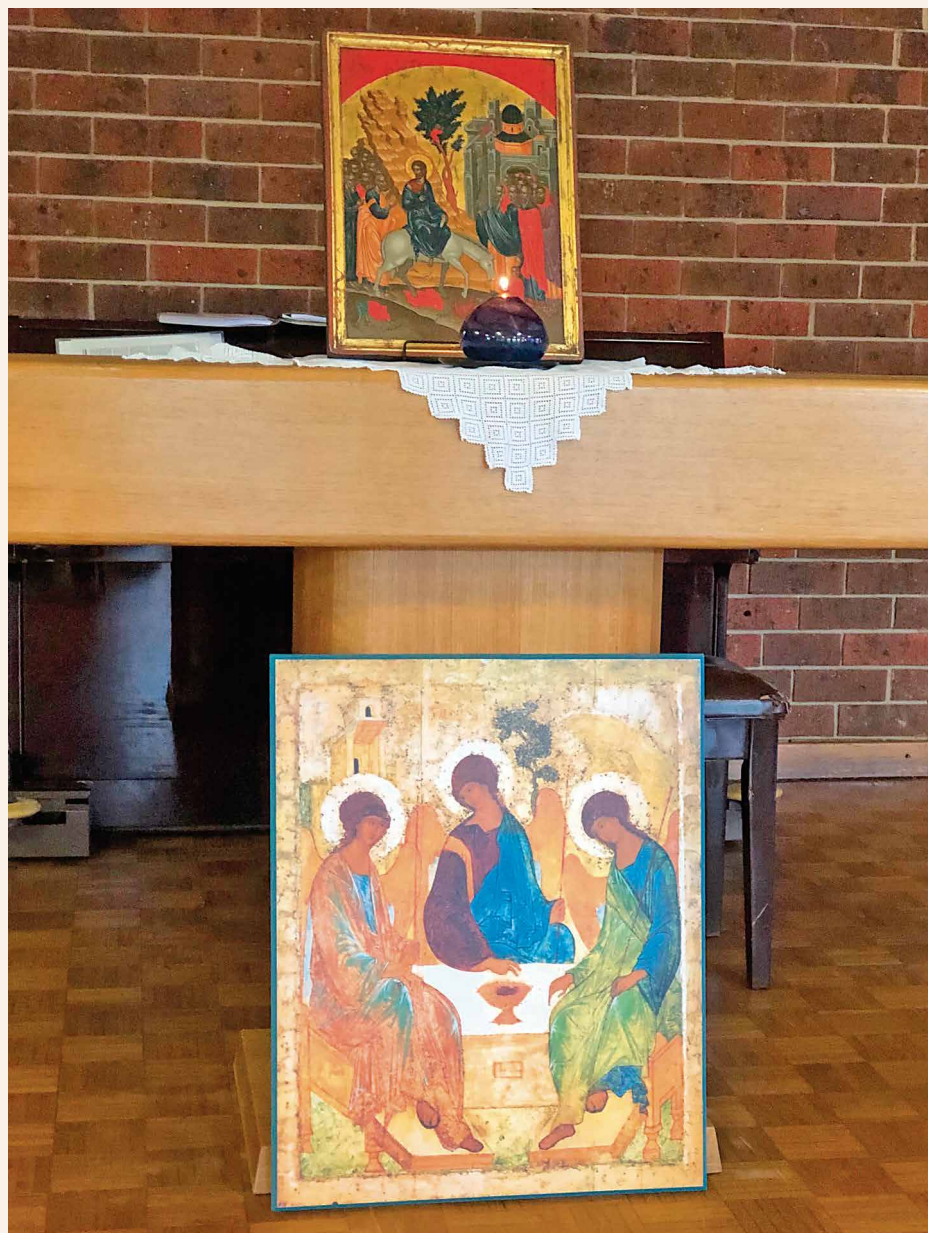
Gold is reserved for Jesus Christ. This brilliant colour symbolizes his divine nature and the uncreated light of God Himself.

Green is the colour of eternal renewal, hope, flowering, youth, and nature. It is usually used to indicate where life begins such as in the scenes of the Nativity and the Annunciation.

Brown represents the earth and humanness. Almost all faces in icons are brown.

Black is a symbol of death and evil, black is usually used to depict satanic beings, demons, and the infernal abyss. It represents an ignorance of light.

In the second session Sister Cynthia read the meaning in some specific icons such as Our Lady of Vladimir. A legend exists that the image for this icon was painted by Luke the Evangelist from life. Sister Cynthia pointed out that in most traditional Madonna icons there is a hidden message of stillness and silence. The ears and mouth are small but the eyes are large. This suggests that the viewer should hear with eyes of heart. This icon is wordless but has great eloquence. The gaze of the Virgin is confronting in some ways. She looks not only at the viewer but also into his or her future.



Queensland Update

by Johanna Lawrence
State Co-ordinator for Queensland

The Covid-19 Pandemic continues to have an effect on all meditation groups in Queensland. Some have learnt to meet online and continue to do so for the present; others are able to meet in person; and still others have agreed among the group members to meditate at the same time – each in their own homes.

Some have had reduced numbers attending their group. When I hear from meditators it is clear that people value the practice and are persevering through whatever challenges they face during this time.

One group leader described the experience as ‘We recognize the simple importance of gathering together to meditate. Even though we spend only 45 minutes together each week, we feel much more than a superficial relationship. The mystery of that mode of connection! It also helps to maintain a commitment to personal practice’.

One group which meets in Maleny consists mainly of men. They meet early in the morning and then go to one of the coffee shops to enjoy each other’s company – still possible in their area.

Some of our elderly meditators are a source of inspiration in these times because of their hope, their perseverance, and their encouragement. Clarice, who is 93, has meditated for many years and wrote that ‘meditation has seen me through lots of dark spots’. At the end of the day she now meditates after taking a relaxing hot bath, and then getting comfortable on the bed, with pillows to prop her up. She describes this as ‘so refreshing, spending time alone, finding inner peace’.

I think we are all encouraged when we meet or hear from other meditators, and listen to their story. I’ve included an interview with a long time meditator, Rhonda Barker. I’ve also included a tribute to Trish Seaby, the late group leader of the Warwick meditation group, who died of inoperable cancer.

Peace and blessings.

When I meditate it is a time for me to be in God’s presence and be in his love

Paul Gilroy interviewed Rhonda Barker; WCCM meditator, and group member of the Burleigh, Gold Coast, Australia group, and shares her responses with us.

Rhonda was born in 1926 in Melbourne, Australia. Her family consists of her husband (deceased), 4 children (1 deceased), 13 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren.

“I have always been interested in meditation and I was interested in finding a Christian meditation group. On one occasion when visiting my son in Sydney, I went to church with him to a meditation group run by one of his friends Lorna Fitzsimmons. I meditated with the group and before I came back to the Gold Coast, I asked Lorna if there was a WCCM group on



the Gold Coast. She gave me the name of a group in Burleigh and it was just what I wanted and within walking distance from where I lived. I joined this group in 2010 and it has meant so much to my life. It has been a real blessing.

I joined the group and started meditating twice a day. I meditated at 5 am before swimming 1.5 km in the local Miami Olympic pool weekdays and in the surf on Saturday and Sundays. Swimming is my passion. Unfortunately the pool closed due to the Pandemic and I also fractured my

Tribute to the late Patricia Mary Seaby “Trish” (Warwick Christian Meditation Group)

The late Patricia Seaby, “Trish” was the driving force in commencing Christian Meditation in St Mary’s parish Warwick. Her dedication, commitment and encouragement inspired all around her to persevere in their meditation journey. She also warmly welcomed every new person who expressed a desire to join the group.

I did not know Trish until I decided to answer the advertisement in the Church Bulletin about a Prayer Group. I was welcomed by all, but especially Trish. She was a beautiful lady both inside and outside. She cared very much for everyone and helped so many people, and many we do not know about. She is greatly missed. Trish reflected the love of Christ in all she did and to the people she ministered to, showing saintliness and humility.

When Trish was diagnosed with inoperable cancer her strong faith was evident in the way she accepted it and she just placed herself in the Lord’s hands. She knew her loving God would be with her during this journey. Trish continued to meditate and was an inspiration to all who knew her.

May she rest in peace.

Thoughts contributed from some of our group: Maree Ryan, Pamehlia Eather, Mary Bourke, Geoffrey Clements.

Lockdown and Finding the Power of Peace

● continued from page 13

back and I can only swim 2 days a week now and only for 0.5 km at the pool. I found that it was best for me to meditate at 5 pm in the evening before dinner as I would fall asleep for several hours if I meditated sitting up after dinner.

I meditate now at 5 am everyday for 30 minutes and then I pray for everyone for the next 30 minutes and then I read a Uniting Church letter called the *Upper Room* which is an inspiration for me during the rest of the day.

When I meditate it is a time for me to be in God's presence and be in his love. It is my time for being with God. It has made me more aware of God in my life. Meditation has made me calmer and more able to cope with life. I find guidance in my meditation sessions. Throughout my life when I am still and listen, I find that life is good. When I act on my own, it can be disastrous. I look at my life as what God wants me to do.

Meditation has made me realise that God doesn't have any boundaries and it is man that makes the boundaries. God is everywhere and he doesn't limit himself to one denomination.

I find that with my friends, in meditation, we are all more or less one in spirit. I love the group meditation as it doesn't have the many distractions that I have at home. Meditation has been an inspiration to me, my son in Adelaide has joined a WCCM meditation group and we meditate together when I visit."

of their school day. Often they say they feel "calm" and "peaceful" after it. Research (Graham & Truscott, 2020) has shown Christian Meditation offers an opportunity to strengthen children's personal relationship with God, improving social interactions and concentration. Christian Meditation, like all prayer, is a journey of faith, and the earlier a person begins this journey the more profound the effect.

Children are the future and it is reasonable to expect that our children's future will indeed involve more big changes, like the Pandemic has presented us. By helping children and young people learn to pray contemplatively we will help them experience God's infinite love and the power it can offer them, as they live into the future and deal with whatever it brings.

Having a six year old tell you after Christian Meditation, that it feels like "Jesus is putting His arms around me", maybe says it all. Many Australian diocese have begun this process of introducing Christian Meditation into their schools so all students have an opportunity to pray in this way. The challenge is to continue this work so the blessings reach all.

As the late Bishop Michael Putney wrote in relation to Christian Meditation, "If children are taught when they are young, to be still so that their hearts can be open to the movement of the Spirit, ... they will have a gift which will continue to bring them great blessings throughout their lives."

Resources: *Christian Meditation for Children and Young People*
www.cominghome.org.au

Children in Townsville catholic schools have been experiencing meditation for more than 10 years.



The National Appeal

The National Appeal invites us to think carefully about giving back to our community here in Australia for the gift we have been given, the gift of Christian Meditation.

Your donations help us to continue to share our tradition with the wider community in many ways and support the large number of groups meeting every week across Australia.

I know the past 18 months have been difficult for our community we have experienced uncertainty and stay at home restrictions.

But it has been a blessing as well many have learnt new skills, including using our Zoom account for many events, meaning community members have

been able to join an online group for meditation as well as state, territory and national gatherings no matter where they live in Australia.

This gift of meditation we have received is priceless and it is our wish to continue to share it.

"The Peace, the stillness, the harmony that we experience in meditation becomes the basis for all our action."

John Main OSB

I would encourage you to support the community by giving to our National Appeal.

With my love and grateful thanks,

Jan Wylie
National Coordinator



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Deep listening critical to the health of democracy – Charles Taylor

by Roland Ashby

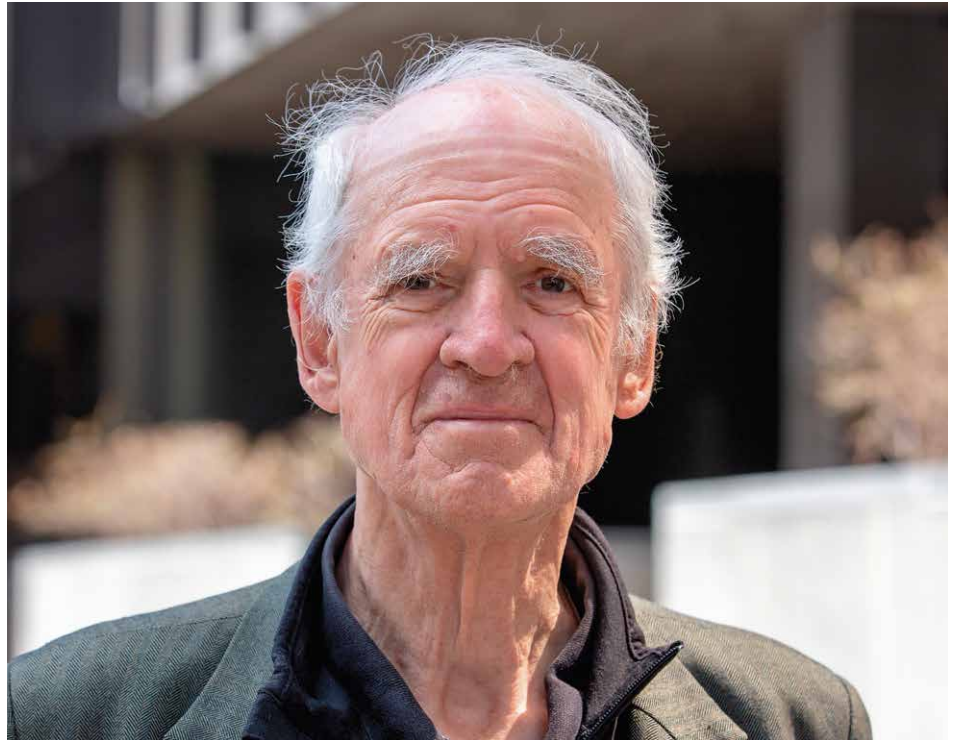
Western democracies are under serious threat because of the deep divisions and distrust which have been growing over several decades, renowned Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor said in a recent talk, 'Listening to people we don't like', to the World Community for Christian Meditation*. A Roman Catholic and a meditator, the Emeritus Professor is best known for his book *A Secular Age*, in which he analyses the rise and character of secularism.

The emergence of "populist saviours" like Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro was the result, he said, of deepening inequality, which had been produced by economic neo-liberalism that had been growing in the West since the 1970s. From that time, he said, "a lot of the equalisation of income that occurred during the War and right after begins to slide away and inequality in income and inequality of wealth increased."

He added that the neo-liberal assumption that "the market would sort things out" had proved to be an illusion, and that many felt "their standard of living, their whole situation, had radically declined and that nobody really cared".

At the same time the idea of meritocracy became common, he said. This was the idea that if people are doing well it's because they have talent, work hard and deserve it, but if they aren't doing well it's because they aren't trying hard enough.

This had also been accompanied in America by an increase in discrimination by men towards women, and whites towards blacks, based on a belief in a hierarchy of men over women, and white over black. "[This] is because [those discriminating] ... need, in order to have a sense of self-respect, a kind of external comparison [with someone they believe to be] inferior."



Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor.

He said that both the media and social media had contributed to division, and that social media in particular was creating an "atomised society" in which the user's views could be either manipulated or reinforced. "Just contact this person or that person, and if they

"The burden of hate was denying people all the advantages of enrichment from, and collaboration with, those with different experiences."

all say the same thing it makes you feel better and that becomes your truth."

"The result of all this is that we now have very deeply divided political societies" in which people form political identities that are deeply distrusting of those who hold differing views, to the point that they see those people as "betraying what is essential to our world".

He said that religious faith had an important role to play in helping us to overcome the divisions.

In America, he said civil rights campaigners Martin Luther King Jr and John Lewis had shown the way. "John Lewis had a wonderful expression: 'lay down the burden of hate'. [He was saying the burden of hate] is keeping you from the truth about yourself and about us ... You're burdened by this. This is not an advantage for you, this is not making you better ... this is crushing you."

He said that 'lay down the burden of hate' had sprung from the insight that Lewis and King had, "that [opponents,

your] persecutors are suffering too, and they had to [find] a way of communicating that was not simply dismissive; which had an element of reaching into the ... inner ethical self of the other person, deep ethical intuitions that could be awoken in the other people.”

The aim, he said, was “mutual liberation”, through recognition that the burden of hate was denying people all the advantages of enrichment from, and collaboration with, those with different experiences.

The willingness to listen deeply to others of different views was critical to this process, he said. Moreover, “We can’t really talk effectively until we’ve listened”. He praised in particular American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild for her deep listening, over five years, to the stories and views of Tea Party supporters in Louisiana, which resulted in her book *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*.

“She got to know them, and wrote this brilliant book in which you get a really great insight.”

Good listening, he said, was about not imposing your agenda, something that meditation taught. “[In meditation] you’ve got to sit down and not impose your agenda on the situation.”

Asked if he believed that secular



“We can’t really talk effectively until we’ve listened.”

western society had lost a sense of the spiritual dimension, he said: “The sense that there’s something bigger beyond us which we have to get closer to, which we want to get closer to, because we’ll become more loving, more open, more creative ... is absolutely ineradicable from human life ... you can’t take it out of the human soul”.

He concluded with a reference to the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant, that “we have a moral obligation to hope, because the only possibility of realising a moral life is if you have this kind of hope that it can be done.”

**Professor Taylor spoke via zoom as part of a monthly series of talks organised by the Bonnevaux Centre for Peace, the international home of the World Community for Christian Meditation in France. For more information about the Bonnevaux Speaker Series see: <https://wccm.org/events/speaker-series/> See Roland’s blog *Living Water* at www.thelivingwater.com.au*

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 it or when your attention is wandering.

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





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