



WCCM

Newsletter of The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Silence and Celebration

LAURENCE FREEMAN ON THE JOURNEY OF A GROUP OF YOUNG MEDITATORS AT WORLD YOUTH DAY



WCCM group at the vigil with Pope Francis in Lisbon

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Leaver Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

We are beginning to sense how great a watershed the Covid pandemic has been for our world. It has made us frightened to come out, retreating into the comfort zone of virtual zoom reality, and it has shaken our trust in authentic authority. For many it created a false solitude that compounded the pre-existing epidemic of loneliness which only inter-iority, true solitude in unity with others, can cure.

And yet (beware of single explanations) at the same time, and while it was keeping people locked indoors, it helped many to search more deeply for the inner room of contemplation. Our community's online programme was born during Covid specifically as 'a contemplative path through the crisis'.

Over its first months, I noticed a familiar face present at nearly every online event. When I spoke to them later, this person told me of the deep personal conversion they had undergone during the shutdown. Every online event took the process deeper. As I listened, I could see the signs of this personal change: a greater openness of mind and gentleness of manner, a sense of humility at what they had undergone, a new tenderness.

It's the same message for all but there's a different take-up for everyone: Like the business student I spoke with about his learning to meditate who taught me that the path of true meta-noia doesn't always run smooth. He had started a daily practice of meditation, once a day. I asked him what he felt about the 'work of the mantra'. He said 'well I feel it's right and I am drawn to it. But it's difficult'. So, I asked what he did when he found it difficult: he said he put on his headphones and listened to a guided meditation or soft music. But he was open to discuss this and at the end seemed grateful to hear what I, or any experienced meditator, would have sug-

gested: stay with the mantra, gently and faithfully, and take the headphones off.

*

Believe me. Even with the mantra, meditating outdoors, under a hot sun, amid a crowd of hundreds of young people, with those closest to you singing 'Happy Birthday' in every tongue at maximum volume, is a challenge. It was a crazily wise idea formed among the twenty-two young adult meditators (from



Young Meditators in Fatima before World Youth Day

Indonesia to Mexico) with whom I attended the World Youth Day last month. We sat in a circle on the ground hoping to be a sign with our 'flash meditation mob'. Signifying what? That you don't have to be solemn or churchy to enter the inner room of contemplation; that meditation is a part of life like birthday parties and travel and meeting new people.

The unity of our small flash group connected and, so we hoped, witnessed to the boisterous crowd around us. Altogether, the million and a half young Christians from a record 200 countries richly represented the chaotic catholicity of the church, a huge spectrum of individuals, communities and types of theology. Anyone who thinks the church can enforce standard beliefs and practices had better read the Acts of the Apostles and come to the next World Youth Day

in Seoul. I'm not saying it was the Heavenly Jerusalem yet – often more like the earthly one on a global scale. But as the waves of joyful young people intermingled, flowing through the streets of Lisbon, the question that nudged me was 'what is the essence of this experience of unity?' Not a football team or a rock star. Nor just one theological preference. The source of such unity is not easy to explain. It lies beyond the horizon of our vision. But then I remembered Wittgenstein, the

difficult-to-understand philosopher of the simple. He said that to understand all human beliefs and behaviour, we must take into account the vital distinction between 'what can be expressed and what cannot be expressed but *only shown*'. To those with eyes to see and ears to hear – at times noisily and at other times silently – this unity was being *shown*.

*

I couldn't think of any political rally or sporting event that would unite so many people on such a scale. If only the church was better at living out this immanent unity in its ordinary life; and if the media was more objective in reporting what this unique kind of celebration of inter-cultural shows about human potential.

Of course, the whole event was a flash-multitude of a million or more, not

something to confuse with the challenge of the normal. Yet for its short week of super-vitality and despite its magnitude, it was on a human scale. The young meditators were a diverse human group small enough to both recognise and embrace the big differences between us, individually, linguistically and culturally, from an investment banker to a theology student. It was also authentic enough to open the eye of the heart to a mysterious personal presence, who could be *shown* but not photographed and who was the source of our unity beyond our inner horizons, the mutual friend of our friendship.

Our mutual friend, Jesus, showed us that unity isn't uniformity. It can't be pushed inside a box which an external force can stifle or suppress, control or contain. The long history of social and personal oppression shows the resilience of humanity's unity in freedom. This ultimately irrepressible source of unity is ever the enemy of oppressive forces. Nevertheless, the dark fantasy of Orwell's '1984' or Simone Weil's prophecy of 'totalitarian bureaucracy', seems ever more real today in the mass surveillance and enforcement of pitiless control in China or in the secret algorithmic worms of mass media. Anonymous forces driven by greed for power can only degrade our sacred human freedom and divine catholicity if we let them.

In its perverted application of science, technology and media, the language of mass communication becomes lies and nonsense, absurd denials of the obvious, which few dare to expose. Truth is twisted into alternative realities, peace becomes the result of aggression, justice is betrayed in the warfare of special interests, love is reduced to desire, conversation to a jungle noise. Without the defence of reality, for which the contemplative mind is prepared to sacrifice itself, the best inventions of the human mind are enslaved into the service of the gods of mammon

and nationalism. Creative imagination is possessed by the demon of pride into devising more clinical means of mass destruction; forms of 'communication' are deliberately designed to obscure, addict and polarise; the earth sciences capable of solving our self-made crises are misused to exploit the remaining finite resources of the biosphere; and economics, capable of achieving fairer distribution of wealth, expands the gap between the rich and poor and alienates us all from our common home on this fragile planet.

Rhetorical lists of our problems today are easy to make. Yet, once we have seen the essential point and are ready to

Our mutual friend, Jesus, showed us that unity isn't uniformity.

ask questions about how to change - our personal lives or the fate of humanity - we should suspend analysis and ask the redemptive question that initiates real change of direction. The first transformative step of recovery is asking: 'what can I do?' Those who poured out into the Judean wilderness to find a prophet asked John the Baptist, 'What shall we do?' Cassian and Germanus asked their desert teacher, 'give us a practice'.

*

There are many arts within the art of prayer. Practiced in good faith, they do not exclude each other. Like different instruments in an orchestra, even if they seem to use very different means they all lead into the one prayer of the Spirit.

There is the art of the work of silence, the grand poverty of spirit as Cassian called it which has formed and renews our community. We gain this poverty, the first Beatitude, by the 'renunciation of all the riches of thought and imagination'.

It is the central understanding of prayer in the whole desert tradition: the 'laying aside of thoughts'. We shared it with many of the young pilgrims in Lisbon who seemed hungry for spaces of silence and stillness especially amid the constant activity and noise. But another art of prayer, the reading of scripture, which by contrast uses words and imagination, enrichingly interweaves with the way of silence and mental stillness. We need both as a plane needs two wings to stay on course.

*

When saying the mantra gets hard meditators who have learned their art resist the temptation to put on their headphones. Even with a sense of failure we can embrace and enjoy the work of the Word, 'in prosperity and adversity', and learn what it means to turn life into a pilgrimage by being a pilgrim in everything. Then we benefit from each step we take on our daily path, even the backward ones, welcoming the friendship of others and the many nurturing practices and surprises that enrich the path.

One of the most nourishing of these complementary practices is the art of reading wisdom texts in a way that allows them to read us, transform our perspectives of living and reveal that the sacred is everywhere. As we learn how to read in this way, the texts subtly, often imperceptibly merge throughout the day with our thoughts, speech and memories. Like friends, companions, teachers they become inexhaustible wells of wisdom.

I have just started a series of online sessions called 'Between the Lines: How to read the Bible and other Sacred Texts'. Reading in the way that sacred texts should be approached so that we can discover their hidden treasures is one of those rare things of great value: something that is a good thing in itself. Freshly each time, it opens new wonders of consciousness, always refreshing our tired

minds or low spirits, while also preparing us to return to meditation and the essential work of poverty.

The wisdom of great texts like the Bible weave in, merge and overlap with those in other traditions. Wisdom is a language of revelation with many dialects, many tongues. Following these tracks with patience and attention, we understand how we are already members of a great family of wisdom, greater than we could imagine. We always have many more relatives than we think, and the more we discover them the more we experience the boundless kinship with the living and the dead, with those far and near, remembered and lost in memory. All humanity belongs to the family of wisdom which expresses itself in great writing passed down the millennia. As in a large family reunion which brings different generations and cultures together, the different parts of the clan as well as each individual feels an enrichment of identity by celebrating in unity all our differences. Every time we read a sacred text – not so much commentaries but the original – we celebrate that unity.

But for many churchgoers, and followers of other faiths, scripture is only heard mumbled from the lectern, then preached on, usually moralistically rather than mystically, from a pulpit. Without attentive hearing there is no transformative listening and without listening the muscle of attention atrophies as it is doing in our age of distraction. Basic knowledge of the texts and traditions is necessary: less than half of self-identifying US Christians can even name all four gospels. In inattentive minds the half-heard, over-preached words become a jumble. The empty spaces between the lines that offer us room to expand and soar are often jammed with slogans and the sacred quickly becomes the political.

Words we think we know pass in one ear and out the other without ever awak-

ening the mind with the great surprise that dawns by recognising new realities. Kafka described true reading as 'like an axe for the frozen sea within us'.

*

For many, especially the younger generation, not only sacred texts but any form of reading from a page is frighteningly unfamiliar. It makes them feel their loneliness. A student once told me she preferred to study on her computer in a noisy café because she found the silence of the library creepy. Another told me that he derived most of his knowledge from YouTube and hardly ever read from a physical page. But after starting to meditate, he had gradually been drawn to read books for the first time. He revealingly described his sense of the difference between word and image. YouTube was easier, more passive, but he didn't retain its content very well. Reading was harder but gave the surprise of 'meeting another mind'. What he read entered long-term memory. This suggests what St Bernard meant when he spoke of the 'word becoming flesh' when we attend to it lovingly and allow it to slide from mental to heart consciousness.

St Benedict made daily reading one of the three pillars of the monks' life. He prescribed an extra hour during Lent. This is the more surprising as literacy rates were low in the 6th century, so many would have learned to read only as they learned to live the monastic life. It was part of their learning how to pray. Nevertheless, he seemed to believe that all monks could – in fact, should – read; and, like many abbots since, he had to exhort them to make it a serious and regular practice. Today, many busy emailers in contemplative communities struggle to 'make time to read', just like their counterparts in more worldly occupations.

Why this emphasis on reading in the contemplative tradition? Not in order



Meditation during the vigil at World Youth Day

to make us scholars or winners on quiz shows or pass exams. But because the process of attentive reading sheds light on our interiority and enticingly draws us towards the inner room. Reading is beneficial for everyone because the attention demanded leads to stillness and so to a clearer, less self-centred mind. For the contemplative practitioner it is an essential part of their life. Every child needs to learn how to read. As contemplatives we need to learn how to read in this way. A little training helps us to engage with scripture and wisdom texts in a transformative way. I hope my course will help people to discover this for themselves because in this, as in any learning, experience is the teacher.

*

The art of reading is the first stage of the art of prayer itself because like pure prayer, 'lectio' helps me take the attention off myself and see that the essence of pure prayer is other-centred attention

This type of reading is not for entertainment or information. It is for mental training and deep enrichment in the

knowledge of the self. It is a journey of discovery that expands to show how all relationships of daily life – the ones we enjoy or struggle with or merely dream may happen one day – will lead into vaster and more interior spaces. Reading familiarises us with our own minds and makes for a healthy relationship with ourselves. To read sacred or beautiful texts well is to become more transparent and honest with ourselves because they repay our attention by reading us. Reading mirrors our mind as mind mirrors what we read. But with the greatest texts we see *through* the looking-glass. We cross the frontier of language and imagination. *Our* “relationship with God” is liberated from duality as we move into union with the web of relationships that make up the world.

Actually, this simply describes the human journey itself. Meditation, supported by a good diet and discipline of reading with other contemplative practices and a commitment to work as service, does not explain but *shows* us what being human means. This sustains the lifelong process of metanoia, changing our mind and its worn-out habits and expanding our horizons of vision. What we see is what we become. In a culture as addictively fixated on images as is ours, re-learning the art of reading offers a way back to the visionary capacity - beyond imaging - of the contemplative mind.

Offer your very selves to him... the worship offered by mind and heart. Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will discern., what is good, acceptable and whole. (*Rom 12:1-4*)

How does this degree of change happen? Life is a buffet of catastrophic events, excruciating losses, exhilarating

celebrations and profound healings. But the deepest changes unfold quietly, out of plain sight, unstoppably and with an overpoweringly gentle and generous sense of meaning. Wisdom texts, like the Tao Te Ching for example, provoke us to understand why ‘peace and quiet govern the world’, even when we see the world in turmoil. And in a world of

attention we need to make to the real. They are more than about re-charging drained batteries. They are transformative. The process of metanoia begun with meditation in common continues back home and back at work. The experience of self and its new way of seeing is free and freeing for those who take the risk of daily practice and live each day in



Labyrinth and Chapel at Bonnevaux

bursting agendas we are reminded, as in Psalm 46, why we should ‘be still and know that I am God’.

In the coming series of talks I would also like to show how reading these universal texts needs direct, not second-hand contact. Let us read them with our own eyes. This releases a spring of joy that is so often blocked for modern people because personal experience is so often screened and externalised. To learn to read in this way we need to be lured away from screens. The bait is simply what gives us joy and teaches us to prefer the real and unpackaged over the imitation.

Meditation and places, like Bonnevaux, where meditation is practiced daily are more than escape routes from the problems of the world. They point, however humanly, to the sacrifice of

transformation. The way is the biggest challenge: to trust the simplest thing we can find.

Contemplative experience nurtured by the twin practices of meditation and sacred reading simplifies everything. It allows the paradox of reality to open like a flower and germinate the seeds that become the fruits of the spirit. Wonderfully, meditation merges with daily life. And the places, like Bonnevaux, where we can learn the pilgrimage of metanoia and return to refresh the practice, becomes an everywhere.

With much love

Laurence Freeman OSB

Laurence

News & Articles

World Youth Day 2023 - finding silence everywhere

GROUP OF YOUNG MEDITATORS TAKE PART AT THE GLOBAL GATHERING IN PORTUGAL

Portugal hosted the World Youth Day (WYD) from 1 to 6 August 2023 in Lisbon. WYD is a gathering of millions of young people from all over the world with the Pope. A group of young meditators from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia/Canada, Finland, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Spain and the UK took part, led by Laurence Freeman and Taynã Malaspina, the WCCM Director for Meditation with Young Adults. The programme included a retreat in Leiria and a visit to Fatima prior to the WYD events.



"Flash Mob" meditation session at Miradouro São Pedro de Alcantara, Lisbon

Taynã Malaspina*, Brazil



"The experience of coordinating a WCCM young people's group at World Youth Day will forever reverberate in my soul. The most striking thing was to realise in practice what a community is made of: love. We always read this in the books by Fr Laurence Freeman and Fr John Main, but experience is the best teacher. We were with twenty young people of different ages and nationalities, but sharing a common unity: the desire to

experience Christ's love through silence. It was exciting to be in silence at a vigil with 1.5 million young people. It was moving to hear the Pope say, "In the Church there is room for everyone." It was touching to hear Fr Laurence transmitting contemplative practice to young people from all over the world in the chapel in the City of Joy. Now we go back to our ordinary lives with a reflection from the Pope, "What will we take back with us to the valley of our daily lives?" Drawing on the day's Gospel, the Holy Father proposed three verbs: "to shine, to listen, and to be unafraid." * WCCM International Coordinator for Meditation with Young Adults.

Johanna Wisoli, Indonesia

"The meaningful experience of WYD showed me that even though we were all coming from different parts of the world, we all belong to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The walk to the night vigil made me

think of the journey of life. It reminded me to be a simple and humble person and, when challenges on the journey make me want to give up, to keep on praying and asking for God's strength. At the end, when everything has worked out for the best, I can only be grateful to God and rejoice in the beautiful journey He has just engraved in my heart."



News & Articles

Enos Mantoani, Italy



“For me, two aspects were very important, and they are intertwined. The first is the deep, moving and loving feeling of belonging to a community. The second is the practice of meditation. We experienced directly Fr John Main’s insight that “meditation creates community”. Indeed, meditation was the ground on which the little community that we formed was founded, and the practice nurtured the roots of this community, making it grow day by day, adventure after adventure, despite our different nationalities, stories and backgrounds.”

Rafaella Noschese, Brazil



“The most important experience for me was the group connection of sharing our lives, thoughts and feelings. It made me feel at home.”

Hung Emily Kwan Yiu, Hong Kong



“I am so glad that I could be part of the WYD with the WCCM group, with all its friendly and welcoming members. I particularly enjoyed the group sharing and the talks provided by Fr Laurence after the morning meditation, which inspired me a lot and reminded me of how meditation helps with my daily life and enhances the congruence between my mind and behaviour. I also enjoyed the moments spent together with the group, and I hope to see everyone again in the future!”

Miguel Gonçalves, Portugal



“I would like to highlight the opportunity to share the WYD experience in community with Fr Laurence and the WCCM group of young people of different countries, ages and cultural backgrounds, but all united by a sense of belonging in the shared silence, joy and faith in Jesus.”

Patricio Lynch, Argentina



“This was a great opportunity for me to know more about the Community and to spend time with Fr Laurence as well. I just loved it; it was a beautiful experience. It was a balance of having silence in our apartment and the messiness outside. But I loved both.”

Grace Reynolds, UK



“There was a lot of chaos and noise, but we were still able to practise meditation and find silence throughout. I didn’t know that was possible. There were many moments where I thought, ‘We’re going to meditate now?!’ but it was actually really beautiful.”

News & Articles

“From Anxiety to Peace” with a group of young French people at Bonnevaux



A retreat, led by Laurence Freeman, with young French-speaking adults, was held at Bonnevaux from 7-9 July. The theme was “De l’anxiété à la paix” (“From Anxiety to Peace”). Thomas Litzler, one of the participants, shares his experience: “This retreat gathered a very nice group of young people around the practice of meditation and the exploration

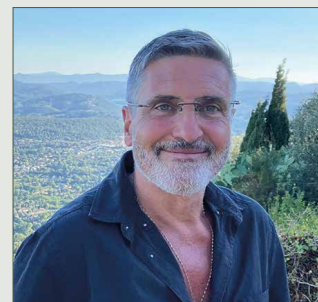
of the Bible. The atmosphere was joyful and simple. We had people from very diverse backgrounds, so the sharings were deep and enriching for all of us. I left very motivated to continue exploring the Bible through the exercise of “Lectio Divina” which gave me a glimpse into the richness and spiritual wisdom of the words.”

Retreat with Canadian community in a time of leadership transition



Bonnevaux hosted a retreat from 18-23 July with the Canadian Community on the theme of “Friendship: Finding Oneself in the Other”, led by Fr Laurence. It was an opportunity to celebrate the leadership transition of WCCM Canada, as André Choquet took over from Martin Malina as National Coordinator. The Community is grateful to both Martin and André for their service.

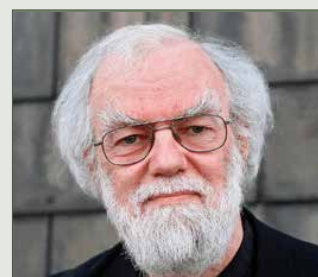
Upcoming events in the programme



31 October - 5 November

Embodiment: creativity and healing, making all things new – Yoga & Meditation Retreat (fully booked)

Led by Giovanni Felicioni



14-19 November

Good Measure, Pressed Down and Overflowing: How Contemplation Shapes our Action

Led by Rowan Williams

5-10 December

Waiting for Change, Waiting for Transformation – Advent Retreat

Led by Laurence Freeman and Giovanni Felicioni

24-25 December

Online: Christmas Eve Vigil and Christmas Contemplative Eucharist

<http://bonnevauxwccm.org>

News & Articles

Earth Crisis Forum 4: *Ecological Grief*

DR JASON M. BROWN WILL LEAD THIS ONLINE GATHERING ON 12 OCTOBER

Earth Crisis Forum 4 will be held at 11 am Vancouver time on 12 October on the theme of "Ecological Grief". This online forum, the fourth in the series, will be led by Dr Jason M. Brown from Simon Fraser University in Canada, and will include breakout group sessions and a time of meditation.

Dr Jason M. Brown has a diverse academic background, with undergraduate studies in anthropology, a master's degree in forestry and

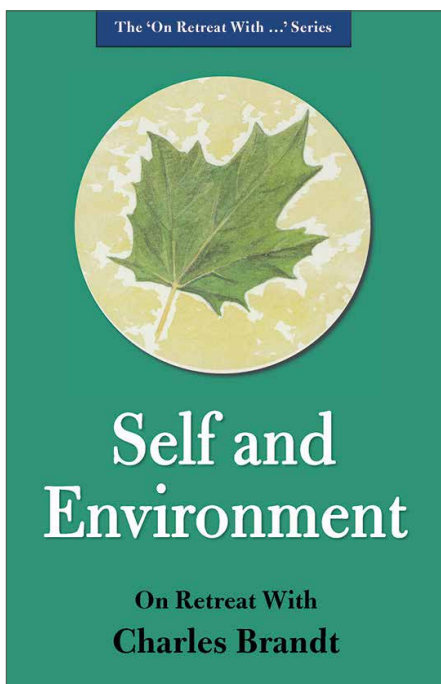
theology from Yale, and a PhD from the Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability at the University of British Columbia. He teaches courses on the humanities and environmental studies. More information on his work can be found at <https://holyscapes.org/>.

For more information about Earth Crisis Forum 4, visit the Earth Crisis: Climate and Ecology page at https://wccm-int.org/med_eccm.



Self and Environment: On Retreat with Charles Brandt

MEDIO MEDIA IS RELAUNCHING THE BOOK FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1997



"Self and Environment" is part of the "On Retreat With ..." series. In this volume, Charles Brandt, writing from his hermitage in the forests of British Columbia, leads us to a fuller sense of the sacredness of creation and of our oneness with nature. He explores the damage inflicted on our sense of self and of God by the split we have created between humanity and the natural world.

He helps us recover wholeness by showing how meditation and insight into the beauty of the earth offer vital hope for a world in crisis. The 'On Retreat With ...' series responds to the spiritual needs of people living the busy and stressed lifestyle of our current time. Each title in the series offers a personal retreat led by an experienced spiritual guide. You are helped to use the time

and space at your disposal to create a retreat, a return to your spiritual centre, which will refresh and enhance the spirituality of daily living.

Charles Brandt (1923-2020) was trained as an ornithologist and environmentalist before being ordained a hermit priest in British Columbia. He occasionally led retreats during which he shared the fruit of his solitude with others. 'My hermitage is located deep in the temperate rain forest of the Oyster River. The logging road, along with other trails through the forest, is where I practise walking meditation. I do not think of the road as leading anywhere. It is the road to nowhere, the path on which I journey and have been journeying for a lifetime ...' To order the book visit <https://wccm-int.org/selfenv>

Contemplating Earth - an online course by Jim Green

Jim explores how contemplation is fundamental, enabling us to act wisely and urgently, living through this crisis with hope. More information here: <https://wccm-int.org/cearth>

News & Articles

Congress of Benedictine Oblates: diversity and unity



WCCM Oblates: Dorothy (Canada), Janet (UK), Catherine (Switzerland) and Leonardo (Brazil)

The Fifth World Congress of Benedictine Oblates was held in the Primatial Abbey Sant'Anselmo, Rome, from 9-16 September. The theme was "Moving Forward - Living the Wisdom of the Rule". WCCM was represented by a group of four oblates.

Catherine Charriere, Switzerland

We have been received in a real Benedictine way that feels like being welcomed by Christ in person. It has been very warm, joyful and special. The talks

are really extraordinary and profound. It is something that I can bring back to my life and to the Community. Meeting oblates from different parts of the world, seeing how different everyone is, is very enriching. The trips to Montecasino and Subiaco were lovely breaks in a very full schedule. I would like also to highlight the "Island of Silence" element of the programme which was a teaching on the importance of silence to the oblate, and the session on Christian Meditation by Elba Rodriguez (WCCM Colombia)

came as a nice surprise.

Leonardo Correa (Brazil)

It is such a gift to be there. Everyone has been very welcoming. Benedictine hospitality from the beginning. The talks have been very stimulating, especially the one by the keynote speaker (Donato Ogliari), which have very much touched on aspects of what we are experiencing in the WCCM oblate path: the silence, the discretion, the Synodal process happening in the Church. I have resonated a lot with that. It has been an experience of the diversity of the Church. I was in Portugal for World Youth Day. And while the experience there was very different, I have found some striking similarities in terms of the global aspect and the diversity of the event.

Janet Robbins (UK)

Right from the first day, I realized how very special this is and what a privilege it is to be here. Probably behind that has been the acceptance of me as an Anglican. There are just ten of us here who are not Roman Catholics, and yet we have been made so welcome. And of course, that's how it should be. This is a Benedictine Congress. But to be able to be together, to be at one with one another, has been an unexpected gift.

Dorothy Wood, Canada

This is the first time I've been in the flesh with oblates from elsewhere than Canada. And it's really wonderful to see the commitment of oblates from around the world and the richness that they all bring. And the value of unity in diversity. I think where there is diversity, God is at work. I really feel that God is at work here, and it's helping me to make my commitment more concrete.

In Focus

Jenny Scott, UK



I first tried a meditation class as a university student. There were lots of people sitting on beanbags in a dingy room and we were told to relax. I didn't return.

My next attempt was about ten years later when I enrolled in a local meditation class. It was slightly better; I remember sitting at my kitchen table staring into a candle, trying to focus on the flame while letting go of all my thoughts. I was trying to get pregnant at the time and it was part of my strict relaxation regime!

Again, it didn't stick. In hindsight I think it was because while I was curious about the practice, I was largely using the meditation as a means to an end; to belong, to destress.

And then I encountered WCCM and

Fr Laurence. Meditating became a completely different experience. It became integrated into my life and, most importantly for me, into my faith. It was no longer something separate, a tool to allow me to perform better in the rest of my life. It was simply about deepening my relationship with God, then being open to whatever followed from that.

I now try to meditate every day. I get up early, drink a glass of water and sit in the rocking chair in the corner of our living room. I try very hard not to check my

Meditation brings all my internal contradictions into the open

phone for overnight messages or tidy the mess from the evening before; Mary and Martha ringing in my ears.

I can go months when my meditation times are restless and distracted. I will always say the mantra throughout, but it can sometimes be a tick box exercise; I'm saying it but I'm not attending to it - I'm making a mental list of what I have to do that day or turning over a mistake I've made at work. It's amazing how that can feel more engaging or important than being open to God. But I've learnt to accept this without going down

the rabbit hole of judging or condemning myself. That pure acceptance that I have found by resting transparently in God has been one of the most liberating experiences I've ever had.

Taking the pressure off judging myself has made me much less judgemental of others. It's also made me more aware of and even appreciative of the contradictions within me. Instead of them being a tangled, swirling mass that threatens to take me under, I'm learning to see them as part of the richness of being.

Meditation brings all my internal contradictions into the open, which turns out to be an incredibly spacious place, easily large enough to hold them all. I find I can sit with them peacefully, without trying to rationalise or justify them.

I still find it very challenging to carry that "peace that surpasses all understanding" through my day. I emerge from my 20 minutes full of resolve to being open to the spirit in everything I do... until my first encounter with a delayed train or a daughter who is running late for school. And then I meditate again, prise open my closed heart and hope to take an infinitesimally small step towards living from the ground of my being.



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Would you like to contribute to the WCCM Newsletter? Our next deadline is 10 November.

Events & Resources

John Main Seminar 2023

Voices of hope from Bonnevaux

CYNTHIA BOURGEOULT, ANDREW HARVEY AND LAURENCE FREEMAN LED THE REFLECTIONS ON "NEW WINE, NEW SKINS"



The John Main Seminar 2023 was held at Bonnevaux from 14-17 September. Cynthia Bourgeault and Fr Laurence spoke from Bonnevaux and Andrew Harvey joined online. The Retreat Centre was full to capacity and in addition, there were more than 300 participants online.

"Dear God, gather us all in the chalice of your heart, that we may become the flowing wine, in a new wine skin you will give us to inhabit..." **(Cynthia Bourgeault - prayer at the closing Eucharist)**

"The most profound lesson I received from Laurence is when he said that contemplation is martyrdom. I was so moved by the truth of that. It showed what a noble task it is to stay concentrated in the depths of yourself through contemplation, allowing the very intensity of the process secretly to keep burning away your illusions and fears and fantasies." **(Andrew Harvey)**

"There is a providence at work: it exists, in our perspective, through the realms of chance, time, and the unpredictable to which we should always be open. Meditation keeps us open to that dimension where we are not in control, not predicting. Then we are real: neither pessimistic nor falsely optimistic. We are just in the present." **(Laurence Freeman)**

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Meditation in daily life is at the heart of our community: the experience of Being as the foundation of all Action. Help strengthen and enliven our community by sharing with us how meditation has changed your life.

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A Goshawk, Wikimedia Commons.

The Goshawk, the cat and climate change

Anglican priest Linda Chapman lives on the south coast of New South Wales, Australia, which was devastated in the mega-fires which swept through the area in the Black Summer of 2019-2020. She reflects on this in the light of a recent encounter with a type of hawk – a Goshawk – and what it can teach us about the necessity of contemplative consciousness, if we are to heed the warnings of the latest IPCC Synthesis report into climate change.

By Linda Chapman

I write from a place of grief. Here, near where I live, we see a landscape of burn scars: tracts of charred sticks, which were once living trees, and burnt soil, which will not regenerate for a very long time. These scars are also burnt into my psyche and even body.

I move through periods of lament. If you at times feel this similar grief and lament, the cry of the earth, do not let anyone tell you it is some kind of private

neurosis or pathology. We must let the great psalm of lament live through us; it will come and go. And we will still feel the joy and gratitude of life. But unless we face this suffering we will not be truly present, as we must be at this time.

Goshawk and cat

I let the cat out for his morning run and was attending to something in the garden when I heard a scratching sound on the shed roof. I turned and looked up to see a white goshawk just a couple

of metres away. I stayed looking for a few seconds then quietly moved away towards the door of the house before turning to look again at the bird who was still there.

It was then that I noticed the cat, sitting on the ground under the cover of the shed roof just below where the hawk was. I called the cat and as he came out from under the cover of the roof the hawk swooped with his talons open right in front of me. I saw the talons open and close as the cat ran under the house.

What struck me was the attention of the hawk. I was struck by his presence: silent, with the dignity of any wild creature who has not “developed a field of great complexity around itself”, to use Benedictine monk Laurence Freeman’s words.

Reflecting afterwards I thought that the presence of the wild, in this case the hawk, is pure. Pure in that there is a sense of the absence of the noise, the inner chatter – and that field of great complexity in and around us. Pure, in that the attention of the wild creature is of necessity so focused, still and not captured by the many desires and distractions by which we are captured.

In some respects a wild creature may become our teacher. Just to be in close proximity to the hawk was gift. The sheer, silent 'Isness' of the bird stays with me as a re-minder of an other, unadulterated consciousness.

Or at least, it suggests we might develop a more humble awareness of the way in which our lives are interconnected with all creatures.

For Indigenous people throughout the world the presence of other animals and of trees, rocks, rivers and so on is part of the whole field of awareness, of life. Not just a backdrop to human life. Or a useful resource. The awareness of seamless relationship with all life runs deep in original consciousness *and is essential for life to continue.*

The Goshawk's presence was stunning. It had all the alert stillness, strange otherness, and simplicity of a creature free of the egoic entanglement of the human being.

The sense of the bird's wild dignity struck me powerfully: the dignity and silence of a wild creature who is not burdened by that complex of disordered and grasping desires that humans develop, and which have such profound and dire consequences for wild creatures and the whole earth.

Some people catch wild birds to possess them, to trade and hunt. These captive birds perhaps reflect that humans are captured so often by a culture that has lost deep connections with other-than-human life. We have lost our original connection with the primordial silence from which we come, but which we still sense in the wild.

Meditation may be a pathway to restoring that connection. It's possible for us to recognise our original human vocation – our contemplative consciousness of life as a whole and our place in it.

Shortly after our cat's close encounter with the goshawk, I watched him as he sat in the sun coming through the window, licking his paws after a feed of prawns. He wasn't disturbed. He wasn't telling himself a story about his near-miss, railing against the hawk, plotting revenge, all the sorts of things that a human mind might do. He's a cat after all.

My mind however went back to a time when he, and so many animals and people, were disturbed by a disaster in the form of fire. Three years after the mega-fire of the Black Summer here in Australia, and with La Nina moving away and taking her rain that caused such significant flooding, we begin to see fires again, and are reminded of the need to prepare.

"Contemplative presence makes a difference in this world in times of disaster, and times of peace."

All over the globe more and more people will face the kind of disasters that heating of the climate is bringing. Cyclones, floods, fires, the weather is now really something to watch. And to prepare for.

Here we know how to prepare our homes in the event of fire, but how many of us consider how to prepare our minds? And what role might an enduring practice of meditation have in the preparation of our minds?

Because when we speak about the responses needed to global warming we speak first of the need for mitigation – essentially bringing down our carbon emissions caused by our use of fossil fuels. The latest report by the IPCC says this is the earth's last chance to avoid climate disaster. The world will likely exceed 1.5 degrees of warming within a decade and is on track for a catastrophic 3.2 degrees by the end of the century unless there are immediate and deep cuts in fossil fuel use. We must cease digging ancient sunlight out of the earth and instead harness the sun's power directly.

So, mitigation is the first priority. But we will see more global heating related weather and fire events, however, and this calls for adaptation which involves preparedness.

An Australian psychologist is researching what is being called "disaster brain". Danielle Every, from Central Queensland University, has interviewed people who have lived through various big fires in order to understand how to better prepare our minds for these sorts of events.*

She found that even though many people had done the basic preparation they found themselves panicking when the fire came.

"They've thought about what they're going to do, but of course on the day thinking about it isn't going to be enough. You can't know just how minds can flip out in this space", she says.

"Under extreme stress many people reported they changed their plan at the last minute: they left it too late to go; forgot to take essential items or left their animals behind; did random tasks that wasted time; or completely collapsed and went to sleep."

When your brain is put under stress there is a window where it is alert and able to function, but beyond this it can become either hyper-aroused, causing you to panic, or hypo-aroused causing you to shut down.

"When you're faced with a threat, the primitive, reflexive part of your brain (the brainstem) and the emotional part of your brain (the limbic system) are designed to react immediately," Dr Every explains.

The higher part of your brain (the pre-frontal cortex) regulates your brain's response to the threat. "It keeps you in that zone where you can still think quite clearly. But when we've got a threat that is really overwhelming, we can actually lose this connection with our pre-frontal cortex."

This sends you into fight, flight or freeze mode.

I recalled a couple of instances of this from our own experience. My husband Anthony had stayed behind at our home with my brother who was visiting – despite my suggestion to him that it was not a good time for a holiday on the south coast. Like some other holiday-makers he



was one of those who had little idea of the risks confronting us.

When Anthony called out to warn that the fire was approaching from both the west and the north, my brother panicked, jumped into his car and took off – one of the worst things you can do. He didn't get far, as when he turned the corner he saw the fire hitting the vegetation on the sand dunes of the beach. His brain went into flight mode.

How to cope under extreme stress

Dr Every's research shows that people who are better prepared for disasters are mindful, and are able to stay focused; and use active coping strategies to control their anxiety.

Dr Every suggests using a strategy known as anticipate, identify and manage, or AIM. "Actually knowing you're probably going to flip out is really, really helpful," she says.

Being able to identify that you are feeling stressed is a cue to use techniques to calm yourself. "These are simple things like ... deep breathing, having a small object close by that is grounding, or being with someone who is themselves calmer than you are so you've got emotional feedback loops between each other."

"Being able to keep your cool, stay connected in the midst of overwhelming bodily impulses to flip out is so valuable for people and we can teach anybody," Dr Every says.

Contemplative consciousness

At the impromptu evacuation space we had set up in our hall and church it became very clear to me that a practice of meditation has real world consequences in critical times.

When the phone rang early in the morning telling us to leave, the fire had burnt quickly through the night towards us, I did not realise that I would be heading into town to hold a safe space for so many people and pets. Before I put our cat into his basket and into the car to leave, my phone started ringing with people asking if they could come to the hall. I got

there, opened up and began to prepare the space – firstly by making pots of tea – we had gas then so this was possible.

People arrived as you might imagine in a stressed state. Tea always helps! By the second day I had put up a list; a kind of timetable of activities and roster for helping with meals. The list included meditation. There were two of us there who are regular meditators.

On this particular day a woman burst through the door of the hall telling us about the plans she and others had hatched should the fire come into town. She was in a slightly frenzied state. She looked towards the whiteboard, and noticing, on the list of activities, meditation, asked if she could join us.

After the gong sounded to conclude the time, she said thank you. And then she left in a slightly better frame of mind. Months later she told me how significant that time had been for her. So, too, does a friend who came to stay in the church because of the sense of ordered calm.

These remain significant images: the juxtaposition of the chaos – the orange smoke, the sound of water bombers and helicopters, the general anxiety, the uncertainty of not knowing if one's home was safe - and this little space that welcomed people, and which held and settled them.

It reminds me of the wombats who apparently let other creatures into their burrows underground to shelter from the fire. Meanwhile, our cat had found his own burrow in a cupboard in the parish office where he remained, for the most part, until we could take him home.

The reality of the world we human beings have constructed, out of the great complex of desires we have propagated, is that this construction is ultimately our destruction. "The wicked problem", as the climate crisis is sometimes described, is wicked because it's cause is so much part of just about everything we do, the way we live in the world as we have constructed it. The weather becomes in some sense a reflection of our consciousness – overheated and intemperate.

Yet what we also see arising at this time is the growth of contemplative consciousness through communities such as the World Community for Christian Meditation, and others. And this matters.

It has real life application. Contemplative presence makes a difference in this world in times of disaster, and times of peace.

The next time I saw the Goshawk he was sitting high in a tree as butcher birds swooped him. He remained as still as the first time I encountered him. Until that is when he swooped on the cat. Yet even in this action there was dynamic stillness. On this second encounter I saw that the little birds seemed not to affect him at all. He remained seemingly unperturbed.

One could see this hawk as an image of the mind that is aware of swooping thoughts yet remains centred and still. I guess however that if really needed, the hawk would have moved, taken action to ward off possible harm to itself with that particular economy of movement so characteristic of wild creatures. Contemplative consciousness knows when and how to act.

The Rev'd Linda Chapman OAM is Rector of the parish of Moruya on the far south coast of New South Wales, Australia. Linda founded 'Open Sanctuary' at Tilba Tilba: a contemplative ecumenical community committed to living out practical sustainable life principles and the practice of silence. Linda nurtures the Christian contemplative way and is an oblate of the World Community for Christian Meditation. An occasional retreat leader and spiritual director, as well as advocate for action on climate and conservation, Linda sees the urgent need to be contemplative in action for the common good. See: <https://www.opensanctuarytilba.org/>

Linda's article is a slightly edited version of a talk given at Benedict's Well in March 2023. Benedict's Well is an outreach of the Benedictine Oblates of the WCCM. The weekly event (Mondays) consists of a period of meditation followed by an inspirational talk. See: Benedict's Well - Oblates (wccm.org) <https://oblates.wccm.org/v2019/news-from-the-oblate-community/events/benedicts-well-6/>

**See: How to prepare yourself – and your brain – to face bushfires – ABC News <https://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2020-10-28/how-to-plan-and-prepare-your-brain-for-bushfires/12796906>*

This article is from Living Water: <https://www.thelivingwater.com.au/blog/the-goshawk-the-cat-and-climate-change>



Community Day Walk in the Royal Botanical Gardens, Melbourne



Community Day Walk in the Royal Botanical Gardens, Melbourne

by Adele Mapperson
State Co ordinator Victoria

In April this year the WCCMAVic shared a Community day with a difference; we went for a walk, in the Royal Botanical Gardens Melbourne, guided by Dave, Karyn and Barbara from the Institute of Forest Therapy

They told us of trees that are our friends, releasing complex chemical components (phytoncides) into the air from their leaves, offering us boosts to our immune systems, increasing our mental health and creativity, reducing stress and anxiety.

They invited us to befriend a tree near where we were standing, listening to it, getting to know it differently from how we first looked at it, knowing it as a friend for life and coming to visit whenever we were passing by.

They told us how trees befriend each other, sharing water and nutrients through an underground network of roots and very fine filaments, strengthening and supporting those around them, withdrawing from those they sensed were dying, exchanging electrical and chemical signals to warn of approaching danger and insect attacks.

They spoke to us of those who had walked the land for thousands of years before us, the people of the Wurundjeri Woy-Wurrung and Boon-Wurrung clans of the Kulin nation, who fished from the Birrarung (Yarra River), and were fed from the many birds and animals that were attracted to it.

And they spoke of the changed course of the Birrarung after European settlement in order to straighten its course, so creating the Ornamental and Central Lakes we now know, of the waterfall where Queens Bridge now stands; of the establishment of the Royal Botanic Gardens in 1846 and the decision for it always to remain public land.

They invited us to walk through a scented garden, to feel, touch gently, to run our hands up stalks, over leaves, feeling their softness, their velvety texture, to pinch our fingers together in front of our nose and to inhale the great gift of aroma, to breathe in the healing phytoncides in the plants deep into our bodies.

They led us through a tall rain forest, inviting us to feel its coolness, to notice the myriad shades of green all around us, to look up and marvel at the tall and

straight trees, to stand a while before trees with beautiful patterned bark, to feel it and think of paintings created by indigenous artists

Emerging, we were invited to stop, to take the time to sit in front of a garden, beside the lake, and let the silence, the soft birdsong, the colour of flowers, the drift of clouds above us (of which there were many!) sink in, to become part of our being.

And in the end, we sat down together on mats decorated with first nation motifs and shared some herbal tea poured from Japanese teapots, in tribute to the people who first developed Forest Therapy after WW2 in response to the bombing and destruction of so much of their country.

In the days that followed I found myself listening differently to the birdsong all around me, noticing the light on the wall as I walked out my door, where once I would have walked straight past it, and as I sat in morning meditation, alert to the sounds of the dawn breaking outside, I knew myself more alert to the divine in everyone and everything, and hoped for it to permeate my actions and my attitudes in the day to come.



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.

As we start this new year with our 'new normal' way of living, holding events along with our weekly groups I am thankful to each of you as you have continued to find new ways to keep in touch with each other and draw

our national community closer together.

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
WCCM Australia
National Coordinator



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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.



Reflections on the Essential Teaching Weekend

by Vikki McDonough

In September, I was privileged to share an Essential Teaching Weekend in the online company of 15 others.

The weekend was an opportunity to review and renew our practice and to deepen our experience of meditation and learn more about the tradition, the 'living line' that we are part of.

We gathered on Zoom from South Australia, Victoria, NSW, Queensland and the ACT. There were initial introductions on Friday evening followed by two consecutive Saturdays covering 4 sessions.

Three video presentations were provided:

- Carla Cooper explaining the story of the connection between Father John Main's contemporary teaching of Christian Meditation and Cassian's Conferences on prayer from the 4th century.
- Father Laurence Freeman reminding us again of the essential teachings of Christian Meditation. The beautiful simplicity of the "how to" of our practice.
- And finally Eileen O'Hea led us visually and poetically through the stages of our spiritual journey.

A highlight of the Essential Teaching Weekend that many comment on is the opportunity to reflect and talk with others on a shared spiritual path. With each of these presentations we were given time in small groups to speak about what surprised, challenged and /or encouraged us – this was a rich offering.

Finally, as with all activities provided by WCCM we were given the opportunity to meditate together – to let go of all thoughts and imaginings, all struggle and effort, all questing for the next stage and instead to just be, in a time of shared stillness and silence – simply focused on repeating our mantra.

Traditionally the Essential Teaching

Weekend has been a residential experience – and this was the case years ago when I first did it. But with the arrival of COVID the community began to explore and adapt the weekend into an online offering, which is proving to be a successful alternative. I greatly enjoyed my time together with my fellow pilgrims and continue to be pleasantly surprised by the satisfying depth of connection across time and space that new technology is providing.

"The online mode of delivery was convenient, flexible and cost effective."

Thanks to all who shared this recent journey and here are some of your comments.

"What did you find most helpful?"

- Listening to the experiences of others (presenters and participants) allows one to think more deeply about ones practice.
- I think its good to be reminded / told yourself and or your group are part of the greater whole of WCCM. Not individual meditators
- The lineage and history of how the Community came into being. I now understand more clearly the use of the Mantra and the purpose of it.
- Hearing the background stories and the answering of many of the questions was both inspiring and comforting. Knowing that others shared similar challenges was encouraging
- The excellent follow up emails with the prayers, readings and reflections forwarded so promptly!

- Excellent weekend and certainly the online mode of delivery was convenient, flexible and cost effective.

"In what ways has the ETW given you greater confidence in your own practice and/or in passing on the teaching?"

- The confidence to keep the practice up, not to expect too much and knowing that changes in my life will come gradually. On the teaching side, to be able to describe the practice in a loving and caring way.
- Knowing that you are part of a greater collective making a difference has given me more incentive to factor the second meditation into my life.
- The 'Living Line' was new learning and provided the background that would assist tremendously when faced with Catholics who may be 'suspicious' of the Practice. This information is certainly very beneficial in passing on the teaching.
- This was the 2nd time I did the online ETW. It was very helpful in reinforcing the content.

Further ETWs are planned for 2024. If you would like to participate, please let Penny Sturrock know at torlonia@bigpond.net.au She will forward information directly to you.

We'd love to hear news from your Community Meditation Group

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