



Making the Divided Self Whole

Laurence Freeman describes the healing that comes with self-knowledge
as WCCM announces 'Health' as its theme for the new year



Heron in the lake of Bonnevaux (Photo by Laurence Freeman)

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Dearest friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

In between the rolling shutdowns and isolation, I slipped away for a couple of days to visit the origins of humanity. I had long yearned to visit the Lascaux caves which are just a couple of hours from Bonnevaux in the beautiful Dordogne region. On 23 September 1940 they were discovered by three boys playing football. Their dog, called Robot, fell down a sinkhole and in rescuing him they slid down a steep slope to find themselves in a vast subterranean chamber. Then they noticed the powerful, silent images of animals, bison, horses, auroch, bulls, deer and a bear, on the walls of the cave. The boys were the first to see them for 20,000 years. They ran to tell their schoolmaster who couldn't get down the hole but asked them to draw the images they had seen so he could show them to the experts.

This event not only opened new horizons to Paleolithic Art but to the self-understanding of humanity itself. No longer could we think of our human ancestors, even up to 40,000 years ago, as stupid or what we usually mean by 'primitive'. Their minds were more complex and sensitive than we imagined. Studying this earliest, enigmatic art convinced scholars that the images are not random but intelligently and beautifully composed and not merely magical but consciously symbolic. It changed the way we think about what 'human' means while intriguing us with an intimate, strangely familiar mystery that we will never be able to solve or prove.

Six years later three Bedouin shepherd boys entered a cave in the Judean desert and discovered ancient Jewish scrolls as old as the third century BCE. The Dead Sea Scrolls, as they are known, became the centre of shameful academic and finan-

cial competition for years but have changed our understanding of the Biblical tradition and early Christianity. In the Dordogne and in the Qumran caves discoveries were made that exposed our ignorance, our complacency about what we thought we knew and freed us for greater self-understanding.

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I have always been attracted to caves and rather frightened of them. They are deep, dark, mysterious and offer the promise of treasure. Like the cave of the heart, we have to feel the attraction – or surrender to the accidental discoveries – that introduce us to these sacred spaces. But then we have to be young at heart,



"Lascaux II" by JackVersloot (licensed under CC BY 2.0)

more curious than scared, and risk the journey inwards, to slither down the slope that leads to the inner chambers full of the resident primal presence in which we find ourselves. And we need companions in this solitude.

The Cave is the symbol of the journey of self-knowledge. In Plato's famous Allegory, humanity is enchained in ignorance watching flickering shadows on a wall cast by a fire behind them that they cannot see. One person manages to get free and begins the long steep journey up and out of the cave into the light. There he

is amazed by the colours and beauty of the world but looks higher still till he gazes into the sun, the source of light. He comes back into the cave chamber and proclaims his discovery, urging them to follow him to freedom. But they are scared to leave the cave and angrily refuse to believe him. The descent into the cave is the beginning of the journey up and beyond the cave. As the great teachers of wisdom often put it – they needed and loved paradox to communicate what they had found. The way down is the way up. The way forward is the way back. The way in is the way out.

I was pleased to discover that the part of France where Bonnevaux is situated contains a large number of

pre-historic caves whose paintings helped inspire a new wave in humanity's self-discovery. Bonnevaux, too, gathered as we are in the cave of the heart, is concerned with the journey of self-knowledge. In a sceptical age like ours, largely disconnected from common religious symbols and faith, distrustful of authority and institutions and foremostly seeking personal experience and authenticity, self-knowledge seems the most authentic goal to aim for. But how do we prioritise self-knowledge like this without collapsing into narcissism, self-fixation and the deadly boredom

of endless self-referencing – the ‘I-me-mine’ generation? Self-fixation is the failure of self-knowledge.

But when we learn – what all the wisdom traditions teach – that self-knowledge paradoxically grows through other-centredness, then we are making progress. Before long we learn that self-knowledge leads into the cave of the heart. The presence that resides there welcomes us with an explosion of joy. Whatever degree of self-knowledge we reach – it’s a never-ending journey – is the degree to which we know God. And that knowledge of God is hidden within our experience of being known by God.

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Humanity is continually re-discovering itself. In each person and in the collective experience of humanity, self-knowledge develops through the interweaving of joy and suffering. And, we should add, through interludes of boredom. Although handling boredom is not something we, with our craving for constant stimulation, peak experience and novelty, handles well, it has a value. One of our young guests, who is spending an extended time with us, told me how interested and oddly happy she felt to discover that the element boredom in the rhythm of the life, once accepted, was introducing her to a sense of renewal and peace she had never felt before. It reminded me of the first attraction I felt towards the monastic life which was to an apparent boredom which was somehow not boring.

Self-knowledge makes everyone feel strange at first. We might even feel disoriented for a while by feeling we are strangers to ourselves. We are in fact meeting ourselves again for the first time. We are coming home and recognising the place we had forgotten. We feel different and see the

world with the same difference. Two experiences give us the same feeling at the same level of intense clarity – falling in love and dying. Normally we are frightened by both, while at the same time being drawn into them against our wills, more strongly than our fears. When resistance is overcome, we feel free to soar.

Love and dying are messengers of the true self, angels of the divine, that we do not recognise at first because we do not yet know ourselves. Both experiences express the fundamental driving force of self-knowledge which is other-centredness. Even if

...self-knowledge leads into the cave of the heart

we fall in love and become hopelessly complicated by attachment and possessiveness, at least the lesson we are learning is to pay attention to what is simply other than ourselves and to find ourselves in the other person. We are learning to accept the transforming power of death. As we take the attention off ourselves, we learn the pain of detaching from who or what we love. Possessiveness is replaced by altruism and a spirit of service. The letting go that allows us to receive the gift that has found us is the death of the ego. The deeper the dying, the more we accept it, the fuller the next stage of life we pass into. If we fail to learn the lesson, there will be other chances until we do.

People today often relate better to the meaning of *wholeness* than to the idea of *God*. What matters most, however, is the experience rather than the name we give to it. Wholeness emerges through the process we call growth. To feel we are growing even through a painful experience helps us

put up with a high degree of uncertainty and discomfort. It gives us an experience of *meaning*, of being connected to some kind of process, even if we can’t define what the meaning means or what the process is for.

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Perhaps this is why self-knowledge is connected to our concern for our health. No doubt our ancestors painting those amazing images in the Lascaux caves were concerned with their health, too, when they felt a new kind of pain or saw that one of their group whom they felt close to was dying. For many millennia after them the medical treatments people were offered to cure ailments did no good at all and often made matters worse – such as bloodletting. Today, as Dr Barry White puts it, we live in the ‘golden age of medicine’. We cure many more things and extend life significantly. And thank-you to techno-scientific medicine, as we await the new Covid vaccines. But modern healthcare faces enormous problems for the caregivers and for the patients. People sense that health is delivered to them while their self-responsibility for living healthily is confused because of the lifestyle we are conditioned to live. The question ‘what is health’ is therefore not only of financial or political concern but, even more, an important key to open up a new and urgent level of human self-knowledge.

The WCCM Guiding Board has chosen the theme of ‘Health’ for the community’s common reflection in the coming year. Each national community is invited to choose an approach to this question that suits its best. Beginning in January, Barry White and I will be offering a monthly online seminar exploring the meaning and various aspects of health, including practi-

cal ones such as sleep and nutrition, relating this to the spiritual tradition. We hope this will contribute to a contemplative approach not only to this health crisis to what lies beyond it.

I think most of us feel that the real crisis the world is facing is more than Covid. It is essentially a spiritual crisis that Covid has exposed. The pandemic has made us acutely aware of the fragile preciousness of every human life which has the same value in the most vulnerable like the elderly in care homes, in the health-workers serving anyone who is sick, the migrant workers of India or the great cities of the world. The infectiousness of the virus shows it is no respecter of persons and how equal and interdependent rich and poor are in its presence. Through the past year, fragility, impermanence and unpredictability have been inescapably revealed as essential elements of the common human condition.

The question of health – what it really means and how to be healthy – helps us see the full meaning of the underlying crisis. Covid is one of many tipping-points, with others to come. For example, in our unhealthy relationship to the planetary environment which is sickening and increasingly showing points of breakdown. Or the social emergency that has undermined trust in institutions and democracy itself. Beyond Covid lies a major financial crisis that calls for a radically new approach to economics and social justice. What does 'getting back to normal' at a moment like this mean? Will we remember what we have learned?

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Achieving the self-knowledge we need on a global scale seems a mountain too steep to climb. But recall the mind expressed in the cave paintings millennia ago across different conti-

nents by artists who had no contact with each other. The painter of the bison in Lascaux or the beautiful horses in the Chauvet caves did not take a selfie in front of them and send it to his WhatsApp group. Yet great similarities, a common mind, may be perceived among them. What they thought we will never know for sure. But what they



Meditation session in nature at Bonnevaux

saw still resonates with us today.

The mysterious unity in human self-awareness offers us hope as we confront the complexity of our crisis today. Recognising the mistakes we have made is painful and discouraging – the harm we have done to that beauty of nature which saves us from despair; the cruelty to animals who are also our ancestors and life-companions; the neglect or worse of the most poor and vulnerable of our family members; the harm we have allowed the mega-rich to inflict on themselves and others because we flattered and indulged them instead of calling them to face the reality of our inter-dependence; the abuse of the young to whom we denied spiritual knowledge and training in their materialistically-driven education; the harm done to our own intelligence as we became addicted to the technology we created. But painful as this first stage of self-knowledge may be, it will generate hope and open new futures.

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If we can understand what health means – and Barry White articulates this powerfully as a meditator and as a doctor – perhaps we won't miss what may be our last chance at self-renewal through self-knowledge. It is the contemplative's responsibility to highlight and insist on this hope

against the pessimism about humanity itself which is increasing today. In this work, the Christian contemplative tradition has an immense wisdom to contribute.

Clement of Alexandria, a 2nd century teacher of Christian faith, saw it as a way of life and a natural way of human growth, rather than as merely institutional membership or doctrinal orthodoxy. For him, the Christian life began with conversion from paganism. This means a fragmented vision of divinity devoid of the experience of God's unity and person-centred love which results in our being scattered among many gods. Paganism manifests in every culture as it does in modern consumerism. Then, having started this transition, we need support in the basic discipline and attention to our way of living so that a healing of the division between the inner and outer self can begin. Finally, in the third stage spiritual maturity through interior knowledge is deepened and a contemplative human be-

ing is formed.

What is specifically Christian about this? It is that Christ, whose coming completes all sources of wisdom, and does not compete with other traditions, guides each stage both as Teacher and the 'Divine Physician'. Clement sees Jesus as Jesus saw himself: as a healer not as a judge. 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor' he said. What he heals directly in each person and in the human family as a whole, is every kind of sickness of soul. In the early teachers of the faith, this sickness is sin. Clement (like other Christian mystical theologians) likes to tell the story of the Fall which describes Adam as a new creature who is sent on a mission by God. With youthful enthusiasm he rushes off to fulfil it but quickly falls into a pit which he cannot get out of. God does not blame or punish him for this but sends His Son to free him and restore humanity to its mission.

When they think of healing in relation to religious faith many people jump straight to the idea of miraculous cures. As long as we are mortal, this will be an understandable response to pain and suffering. But, even though many of these miracles are now available on prescription, there will always be the sickness we cannot recover from. However, a contemplative approach to health weaves healing and curing together. Cures are desirable and often mysterious. Many factors apart from medication or treatment seem to be involved in making cures successful. But healing is a deeper mystery still. We can die healed. We can live with disabilities or chronic conditions healed. Healing is restoration of the whole person to a new level of wholeness, one they would not have reached without sickness. If cure

happens as well, that is cause for celebration; but even when it does not, healing itself expresses the essential purpose of medicine.

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As Barry White will explore in his monthly online sessions beginning in January, to understand humanity we need to understand what health means. What do we really aspire to when we want to be made well and feel better? At the core of the mystery of healing and true health is the wondrous power of simple, pure attention. Distractedness, fragmentation, interior and external division are all forms of sickness that attention is needed to heal and restore.

The Journey of humanity means growing into a common mind and unity

Meditation is the universal wisdom that introduces us to this truth most simply and immediately. Attention brings us to stillness and in stillness saving knowledge emerges. If we persevere the way of attention becomes increasingly simple until there is no work to do, no goal to achieve, no observer to watch:

Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am
Be still and know
Be still
Be

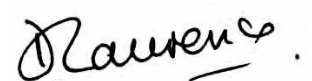
I met a graduate student once who had been on medication for ADDH since grade five. She told me how impossible it was for her to sit physically still anywhere for more than one or two minutes. Longer than that and it felt as if an army of ants was crawling all over her. If she could make it

to ten in a meditation session she was overjoyed. We can only measure health and wholeness by the unique criteria of each person. But health is recognisable anywhere we find it. To be healthy and enjoy the liberty of wholeness feels essentially the same for everyone. It is part of our common humanity. In their own way the painters of Lascaux must have felt essentially what we feel. We are most one with each other in the state of health because then our personal divisions have been healed. If we are one with ourselves, we find oneness with all. The journey of humanity means growing into a common mind and unity.

John Main understood that all growth is from the centre outwards. In the centre is the original innocence we can never lose, our wholeness in the infinite simplicity of God. To return to this centre step by step, day by day, is to be healed even as we grow.

All growth needs rootedness. Our need for roots is critical to health and so we must learn how to treat the rootlessness of the modern world. Contemplation heals the world, restoring health where brutality, cruelty, greed and egoism has wounded us. The destination is even beyond this, as the mystery of the Incarnation reveals to the eye of the heart. Our common destination, our personal destiny is oneness, where we know because we are known, love because we are loved and where our work, whatever it may be, is service.

With much love



Download the audio of Fr Laurence reading this letter at <http://tiny.cc/LFletter1120>

JMS 2020

Five wisdoms from the John Main Seminar 2020

JMS2020 Online (19-22 October) was hosted by WCCM Mexico with Alex Zatyryka SJ as the keynote speaker on the theme 'One Heart, One Hope - Indigenous Wisdom and the Future of Humanity'

By Leonardo Corrêa

1- It is possible to do an online Seminar keeping the sense of community and human connection

This year's Seminar was proof that it is possible to migrate to the on-line format without losing the spirit and the real sense of connection and community. The WCCM Mexico Coordinator, Enrique Lavin, describes it as follows:

In the summer of 2019 I read about an indigenous person feeling at home with tribes in Finland, Australia and Canada because they shared the same principles. I began investigating and found out that indigenous all over the world share many values: care for one-self, for the community, for the earth. And they look at the heart as a center of spiritual wisdom.

When we were at the JMS2019, the plan shaped up and we had a title: One Heart, One Hope: Indigenous Wisdom and the Future of Humanity. Back in Mexico we spent some time looking



Alex Zatyryka and Laurence Freeman during a dialogue session

for the right venue. We had everything ready to make a beautiful presencial Seminar, a wonderful array of activities around the theme. And then came the pandemic, the lack of certitude, the uncommon and forced lockdowns. We went back to the drawing board. And then the time zones! And changing the time allotted to the speakers, and...

So we just followed John Main's advice and said our mantra. Eventually all

things began to fall into place. When a door shut, a window opened, there has been grace everywhere.

The Seminar showed that the spirit of John Main is alive and well no matter the circumstances. More than 350 people from over 30 countries show that we are, a real community, a monastery without walls and without borders, built in love and present to our times and to each other.

2 - Theological attitude is being open to the contemplative experience

The keynote speaker, **Alex Zatyryka SJ** delivered two profound talks on Indigenous Wisdom, sharing also out of his experience as a missionary in Bolivia and Mexico. It is not possible to summarize all in a few lines so we will pick one important point of his teaching, which he called Theological Attitude: this is an inner

attitude that we can cultivate to perceive the communication with God, the experience of transcendence. Zatyryka words:

What attitudes describe that vital disposition? I am going to describe three fundamental ones where the theological attitude comes from. From our Christian perspective, this ultimate

reality is a person, and it is important to approach the encounter with this ultimate reality as a person. And for that I have to prepare myself, I have to cultivate a series of elements, because what all mystics emphasize is that when we want to treat God as an object, the perception of his presence disappears and we are left with an idol,

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no longer with the living and true God.

First fundamental attitude: the cultivation of solitude and silence. And this cultivation of solitude and silence to heal us from dispersion and superficiality. Then solitude and silence are not an end in themselves but are like atmosphere, atmosphere, for the encounter that we are looking for.

Second element: correct attention, learning to attend correctly and this implies rehabilitating our capacity to

perceive and this in turn implies learning to free oneself from the discourses of the mind, which in 90% of cases function as prejudices a kind of automatic that filters reality and that in the end dissociates us from reality. So, whoever wants to learn the theological attitude has to learn to distance himself from his thoughts, from his discourses, in order to be cured of this attitude of prejudice.

And finally, there is the decentral-

ization that is also known as intentional inversion. I intentionally invert my way of relating to the world with reality. Here's what I mean: suspend, put in parentheses, stop for a while ,my reactive and proactive tendencies. I don't try anything, but I exercise to take what I am given. I do not cling to anything. I give what goes. So, this attitude is also fundamental when we have all three, we are talking about the theological attitude.

3 - The value of a profound respect and reverence for the Earth

The connection and respect with the land, with Earth, was something also present during the John Main Seminar. **Hilario Chi Canul**, from Mexico, a linguist of Maya ethnicity, highlighted this in his talk:

In my village there is something very interesting, because people walk with their language and with the legacy of the Mayas. We are a people who walk with the cross, we inherit and we believe that the tree, the cross, speaks and that this cross is the one that leads us. And that is why around it we build all kinds of offerings, to call all the gods that we inherited from our cultures, from our Mayan, ancestral cultures. (...) to all the gods to ask their permission. To share the space with them. We have always seen that the Earth has life and it must be fed, and it must always be remembered. And we have always kept in mind that to step on the face of the earth is in itself to step on our own face, it is to step on the face of our mother, that is why we cannot even spit on the Earth, and in due time the Earth also asks us to feed it, to feed it with smoke, to feed it with water, to feed it with our spirituality.

Ana María LLamazares, from Argentina, spoke on "Building Bridges" and also mentioned the need to see the Earth as a living being, even with its own consciousness:

The sense of belonging to a cosmic and vital web, where the Earth is a living being, is fundamental in the participation of human consciousness. It is no longer a reservoir of exploitable raw materials but a living being that we need to honour and respect and how to accompany our passage as humans along with the passage of nature and the cosmos. Therefore, this idea of time no longer as a unilinear linearity but as a cyclical flow that unfolds very qualitatively, not metric, not mechanical, and that is giving rise to a spiral unfolding, not necessarily in circles that repeat themselves, but in an evolutionary spiral. This looks at the universe with consciousness, even forms of consciousness beyond the human, these would be some of the conceptual bridges that are sowing the field to allow this dialogue between cultures, spirituality, religions, peoples and different views.



Hilario in one of the images from his presentation: Mayan culture shows respect and gratitude for mother Earth

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4 - The importance of Community and the idea of Ubuntu

Puleng Matsaneng, from South Africa, spoke on Liturgy and African Spirituality, and one of the key elements she mentioned was the importance of the community:

Indigenous African spirituality is expressed differently by the variety of indigenous African groups. It does however share certain common aspects. One of these is the centrality of community. Unlike in many places in the north and west, the individual is less important than the community. The well-known proverb (Zulu) umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu/ motho ke motho ka batho ba bang (Sesotho), which means, that a person is a person through other people, expresses this powerfully. Ubuntu is where each person is seen, each person is heard and each person is valued and



African Spirituality value the wisdom of the elders

loved. Their basic dignity is affirmed. When we are talking about ubuntu we are talking about agape love. The love Jesus talks of when he says: 'love one another as I have loved you.' In our very broken context it is the love which casts out fear. The gospels are ubuntu and we reach ubuntu when we practice gospel

values. As Christians the gospels are a road to ubuntu.

Puleng shared some interesting videos on the important dance and music for African liturgy and the damaged caused by colonisation and Apartheid in South Africa. You can watch it here: <http://tiny.cc/pulvid>

5 - Colonisation wounds and the need of healing and reconciliation

Another point that was strongly present during the seminar was the reality of the wounds caused by colonization and the deep need for reparation and reconciliation. **Tau Huirama** and **Vanessa Eldridge**, from New Zealand, shared from the Maori perspective. An inspirational and spiritual indigenous story teller, Tau explained how the laws imposed by the colonizers damaged the Maori culture of healing:

I'm classed as a tohunga, which is a Maori word for someone who's really experienced in what they do and is trusted. Some of the work that I do is healing work. I don't like to call myself a healer. I think I feel more comfortable with being the facilitator for the ancestors to come through and to be able to

help. (...) The Tohunga Suppression Act (1907) had a huge impact upon Maori and their needs, especially their ability to sustain themselves through complex health challenges. As a consequence of this act, we weren't allowed to do any Maori natural therapy. If you did, you were fined or sent to jail. What happened was that we either lost the capacity to heal ourselves or it went underground. Vanessa Edridge also highlighted the impact of colonization and the need of reparation and rescue of the Maori culture:

The land was made to be like a little England. It was deforested, and turned to pastures. Health, healing and spiritual beliefs and practices were forbidden. The centrality of family, sub-tribes,

tribes, was broken and in a religious or spiritual sense we were expected to forget our traditional gods and deities and move on to Christianity. As such, indigenous people throughout history have been "othered." They were forced to become dependent minorities, rendered landless and cultureless, without the resources or means to earn or create a viable life. At worst there is a sense of shame as we forgot who we were and who we truly are. But here we are now: seeking to recover indigenous wisdom, working to save Papatūānuku, our mother earth, the place that we all call home. And I am confident that we have much to offer the world, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be here.

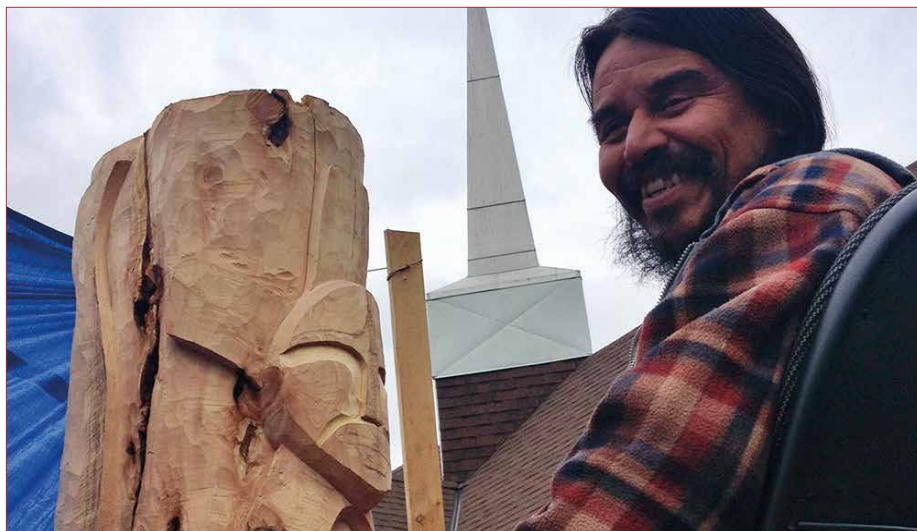
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Carving reconciliation

Ron Berezan and Ivan Rosyp-skye, from British Columbia, Canada, evoked some of the most moving moments of the Seminar. Ron is ordained as an “eco-deacon” within the Anglican Church of Canada and has a ministry focus on Earth Justice and Creation-centred spirituality. Ivan is an artist and a member of the Heiltsuk First Nation on the Northern BC coast of Canada.

During their presentation, Ron and Ivan spoke together, describing again how colonization damages native people, this time in Canada, where indigenous children were forced to attend “Indian Residential Schools.” A Canadian Commission of Truth and Reconciliation later declared this practice a form of cultural genocide against indigenous people. Ivan spoke touchingly of his mother’s suffering when forced to go to one of those schools.

Ron met Ivan through a carving project on Ron’s parish grounds seeking to bring attention to indigenous justice issues and the call to reconciliation. They described the process and showed images during their talk, and at the end they were both moved - as were many of the attendees online. They finished the presentation with a hug and expressed the hope that rec-



Ivan and his art work that became a symbol of reconciliation in Canada

conciliation is possible.

Ron then reminded everyone that action is needed more than words to reach this reconciliation:

Any real movement towards reconciliation cannot be just about dialogue and feeling, it must include action. In Canada the process of decolonization involves respecting indigenous rights to self-determination, according to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Patterns of exploiting Canada’s indigenous resources, for example, putting a pipeline through a territory where people do not want it to be, is an example of the same kind of playing out of the Doctrine of Discovery described previously.

Ron and Ivan’s talk left us with a question: *is reconciliation possible without justice for indigenous people? (And it’s a yes or a no!) Is it fair to say that we are willing to learn from indigenous people and to embrace indigenous cultures unless we join in solidarity with indigenous people in working for justice, and for an end to colonization, and we also join in the culture of resistance that indigenous people offer us?*

This is our greatest hope today, and people like Ivan and the community he comes from, and many other indigenous peoples, are showing us the way forward, said Ron. Watch a video on the Carving Reconciliation project: <http://tiny.cc/carvrec>

Did you follow the JMS2020 online?

Tell us what lessons you learned and we will share your comments on our social media channels. Send your feedback to comms@wccm.org

Did you miss the Seminar? A second chance to see the talks!

Video recordings of the John Main Seminar 2020 will be available on our website (www.wccm.org) at a lower price soon

News

Bonnevaux Perspectives 2021

2020 was a year of adaptation for Bonnevaux - and for the entire world - whilst facing the reality of Covid-19. After March nearly all of the Bonnevaux Programme migrated to an online format and during this strange and challenging time we learned that it is indeed possible to build a real sense of connection with the world - despite all interactions and conversations transpiring on a flat screen; dialogues, webinars, online retreats, contemplative Eucharist, yoga classes - all these events created a myriad of opportunities for the global Community to feel present at Bonnevaux.

We are currently planning the 2021 Programme and will continue

to strive to build on the strengths of our online events. We envisage providing online-only events through to mid-2021, dependant upon a forthcoming re/solution to the pandemic.

Looking ahead with hope and faith that the state of the world will improve, we can also share that renovation works on the Bonnevaux Retreat Centre should be completed by June 2021, and an official opening day celebrating this wonderful milestone could be planned for the latter half of 2021. Please continue to visit our website and to join us online for both our Programme and regularly-scheduled weekly events. Please keep Bonnevaux in your prayers - we



Meditation time at the Barn in Bonnevaux

remain grateful for your support, in all the many generous ways in which it manifests. For more information visit www.bonnevauxwccm.org

Meditation as a Healing Response to Trauma

Tim Kelly, WCCM Oblate who works with the US Government's programme on survivors of torture, about the Seminar on the role of meditation in the healing process

What parts of the Symposium and Workshop struck you more?

The first thing that comes to mind are the guest speakers for the Symposium and Workshop who shared how meditation has been helpful to them. One of them was a refugee from Bhutan who journeyed to Nepal as an unaccompanied minor and grew up in a refugee camp before coming to the United States. The other was an asylum-seeker who was completing a graduate degree in the Democratic Republic of Congo when she had to flee persecution leaving her home and family. Their inspiring stories of how daily meditation and a meditation group has helped them to heal from trauma provided a context for the presentations and discussion that followed.

For example, the meditation group which they both belong to consists of people from different cultures, languages, and religions. One of them described how it has become like "a sacred family to me". This comment beautifully and succinctly describes two key principles of trauma-informed meditation, that meditation is a universal spiritual practice and that it creates unity out of diversity. The other thing which stood out for me was how well the different speakers related to one another and the depth of their discussion. Most of them had never met. They were from various countries of origin and are currently living in the U.S., England, and France. They approached the topic of meditation and trauma from different professions includ-

ing neuroscience, psychiatry, social work, psychology, community health, religion, and contemplative prayer. However, there were common threads throughout the presentations on the art and science of meditation and from the three organizations which offer meditation groups to various populations of refugees and asylum seekers.

What kind of fruits or next steps do you hope after that event?

We are planning to: 1) produce a special edition of the Meditatio Journal based on the presentations, 2) work with the organizations involved developing guidelines for trauma-informed meditation support groups, and 3) create an international working group to share the information and resources on the topic.

In Focus

Naomi Downie, Australia



Peace with every step to you. Hello! I am Naomi, and I currently host the International Young People's Meditation Online Group. Our group was meeting on Zoom before the Covid pandemic. I feel blessed that we were set up and in place ready to be a support during lockdown in connecting communities of like minded people during this time.

I have been a part of the New South Wales WCCM young people's meditation groups and retreats since I came to live in Sydney over 10 years ago. When I saw the pamphlet at Cafechurch in Glebe it was a great relief to have found a Christian path of intentional silence.

I have been drawn to meditation since my university days when I borrowed tapes of guided meditations

from the library. I had grown up in the church, but I was seeking a mystical way which I didn't see in my childhood church. The tapes were very helpful, and I continued on to Buddhist retreats and chanted Om Mani Padme Hum. I attended Kirtan with Hare Krishnas and sang Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Krishna in a call and response style with the group. I read the Bhagavad Gita, which was a seminal text for me. I experienced chakra meditations & Reiki and attempted to raise my kundalini with breath work. All of these things were enriching and fascinating for me, but I still missed the regular fellowship and guidance of a continual teaching.

That is when I joined, at 25, the School of Philosophy in Newcastle. For a wonderful three years, I attended a weekly class that gradually introduced concepts and wisdom teachings with robust and increasingly intimate discussions. I have never forgotten my initiation into the School's mantra in a beautiful ceremony. I continued to use that mantra for a further four years, twice a day, as well as doing readings and mandala drawings. I was very devoted. The School used the name of a Hindu god for their man-

tra. After a time the word did not sit well in my spirit, and I couldn't stop coughing when I said it. After I left the School and then had a relationship breakdown, someone sent me a CD of Father Laurence on Christian Meditation. His voice was so soothing and calming to me. I began a slow process of returning to Christ, and going to spiritual direction in Melbourne.

When I moved to Sydney for work, it was very important for me to find a church where Christian Meditation was practiced. I found one, and I haven't left. I have experienced wonderful retreats in Mittagong and Dargal Island, silent retreats at St Mary's, and day retreats in Lavender Bay and Blue Mountains. I have also attended groups in Paddington and Glebe, and incredible seminars and conferences in Sydney and Melbourne.

Online meditation sessions, retreats, and conferences have been really inspiring and supportive for me as I seek to recommit to regular devotion and personal practice. I recently joined a committee for the NSW Young People's Coordination team. I look forward to moving into the future with this team and working to grow Young People's Christian Meditation.



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(leonardo@wccm.org)

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

Resources & Events

Book & Online Course

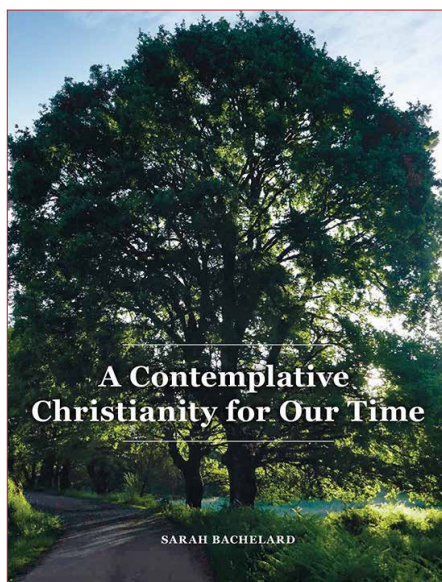
A double opportunity to reflect on Contemplative Christianity with Sarah Bachelard

The teachings from the John Main Seminar 2019 on A Contemplative Christianity for Our Time are now available in two different formats: an online course and a book.



Book - What is the meaning and point of faith, and of religious identity? Why not just meditate, leaving behind the weight of dogma and tradition that seem to have lost their relevance? This book explores the significance of a contemplative Christianity and offers a renewing vision of the connections between contemplation and faith, and the gifts of the contemplative path for a world in travail. The official release date is 15 December. More information and pre-order here: <http://tiny.cc/cchbook>

Online Course - This course is based on five talks from the John Main Seminar in 2019 addressing the most urgent issues facing not just the future of the Church and Christianity, but also that of the world itself. Sarah's contribution to the seminar was described by Laurence Freeman OSB as "a breakthrough in the understanding of modern Christianity" Enroll here: <https://rebrand.ly/cchoc>



Eternal Birth

Prepare for Christmas with Laurence Freeman



Laurence Freeman will lead an on-line day retreat to help prepare us for Christmas. There will be talks, meditation and time for reflection on the true meaning of the feast. A special day set aside to spend together at the busiest time of the year. Some quiet and peace to imbue the holiday period with true meaning.

Saturday 12 December

1.00-6.00 PM (France)/

12 Noon - 5.00 PM (GMT)

Register: <https://rebrand.ly/pxmas20>

Art Show in a Time of Crisis

An initiative by Judi and Paul Taylor (WCCM Friends Coordinators), *Art Show in a Time of Crisis* is an on-line exhibition with artworks donated by meditators. All proceeds go to The World Community for Christian Meditation's Friends Programme. More info here: <https://artshowinatimeofcrisis.com>

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VISIT WCCM's ONLINE BOOKSTORE: <https://mediamedia.com/>

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www.contemplative-life.org
email:contemplativewisdom2@gmail.com
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christianmeditation@wccm-canada.ca
Tel: +1-514-485-7928

ASIA

email: mmi@wccm.org
Tel: +65 6469 7671

AUSTRALIA

jopanetta@gmail.com
Tel: +61 2 9482 3468

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www.christiansupplies.co.nz
email: order@pleroma.org.nz
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(Within NZ Only)



Meditation and Climate Action

by Vikki McDonough

On 1 January dear friends John, Di and Frank listened with horror to news broadcasts of the fire emergency that was unfolding on the NSW South Coast.

Passionate climate activists, they were filled with a sense of fear, anger and impotence – they decided they must do something. They headed to the Lodge – the Prime Minister’s residence here in Canberra and stood opposite with a large banner:

*“OUR COUNTRY IS BURNING
WE NEED CLIMATE ACTION”.*

My husband and I were in Perth at the time – we were there for the arrival of our first grandchild who was born in what was Australia’s hottest summer on record. Our son Josh who lives and works on Kangaroo Island had also come to Perth to meet little Xavier and share Christmas with us. By the time Michael and I joined our friends opposite the Lodge on January 6, thousands of people had been evacuated from the South Coast and almost half of Kangaroo Island



“Our little group with some interruptions and social distancing has however continued to maintain our weekly presence on Friday mornings 8-9am opposite the Lodge.”

had been devastated by fire.

There was very little traffic on the road that day and the air was thick with smoke, masks were necessary. But the occasional driver honked their horn in support and solidarity.

Now, ten months have passed and more crises have unfolded. On January 20 a ferocious storm cell hit Canberra and an estimated 20,000 cars were hail damaged. In February fires burnt through 80% of the nearby Namadgi National Park and in March the realities of the COVID pandemic began to emerge.

Our little group with some interruptions and social distancing has however continued to maintain our weekly presence on Friday mornings 8-9am opposite the Lodge. On any one Friday thousands of cars will pass our banners:

*“RESPECT AND LOVE
TO ALL OUR FIRIES”*

*“QUIET AUSTRALIANS
WANT CLIMATE ACTION”*



Continued over page



"OUR CHILDREN NEED A SAFE CLIMATE"

And the honks of support and solidarity have grown to a steady stream.

Standing back and reflecting on this past year it's very painful to think of all that's been lost. The current ABC series *Big Weather* gives a sobering and confronting overview of the sheer scale of the devastation:

<https://iview.abc.net.au/show/big-weather-and-how-to-survive-it>.

Pope Francis' recent TED talk reiterates what scientists are predicting – this will become our new normal if we don't act with urgency to reduce our carbon emissions: https://www.ted.com/talks/his_holiness_pope_francis_our_moral_imperative_to_act_on_climate_change_and_3_steps_we_can_take?language=en.

And the daily practice of meditation? Well for me this is the quiet, essential, restorative inner work that helps to keep me steady, to keep me turning up, and in solidarity with others, hold a sign and a space for the generous giveness and beauty of our environment, our planet, our common home.



KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK
 My thanks, admiration and praise to the merry band of climate action campaigners who set up opposite The Lodge every morning our hapless leader decides to grace us with his presence. Your enthusiasm is compelling in a world where maintaining hope is increasingly under strain.
 Phil Schubert, Curtin



Thank You, Mirella

by Kath Houston

Over the past few months, our much-loved National Coordinator Mirella Pace has been battling ongoing health issues.

Mirella has now made the difficult decision to step down from the role of National Coordinator as she feels she can no longer provide her ongoing dedication and attention while her health issues persist.

Jan Wylie has very kindly volunteered to step back into the role on an interim basis while discernment of a new National Coordinator continues. We are very blessed to have Jan's dedication to the community and her experience, wisdom and generosity.

Mirella's devotion to our community is the rich fruit of a faith journey deeply grounded in Christian Meditation. After serving the Victorian Community for many years, Mirella took over the role of National Coordinator in 2018 following the National Conference that she helped to organise. In September 2019 Mirella was asked to speak about Christian Meditation at the National Catholic Prison Chaplains gathering.



“Mirella’s devotion to our community is the rich fruit of a faith journey deeply grounded in Christian Meditation.”

In 2019 Mirella organised a week of events in Melbourne with Fr Laurence including *Meditation with Children*, presentations for the Contemplary community and the Archbishop's Office for Evangelisation, and a fund-raising dinner for Bonnevaux. Each

day finished with the national conference and national council meeting.

At the council meeting in 2019 it was decided to plan a Meditatio event for September 2020. Mirella had started making plans and speaking to those who would be involved when COVID-19 came. The event has been put on hold and will now be held in September 2021.

Throughout these busy times Mirella gave her loving attention and continuous support to the state coordinators and other leaders in the community.

In addition to these roles, Mirella has been a leader in the development of Meditation with Children. Her work in this area is highly respected as is her work in forming and supporting teachers.

I know you join with all of us on the National Council in expressing our deep gratitude to Mirella for the love she has given our community in abundance and her wonderful work that has seen our community grow in maturity and in number over the past years.

“When the light of the kingdom dawns in our heart, it touches all we touch” John Main.

We are truly blessed!

The new way to get the Meditatio Talks Series

Visit meditatio talks.wccm.org

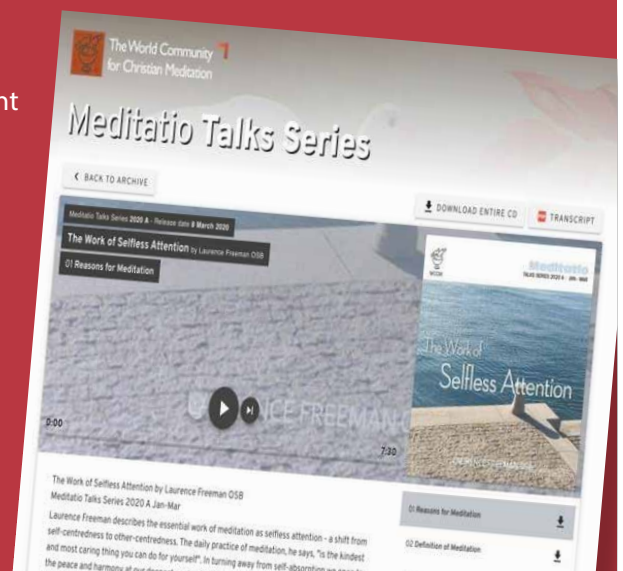
For many years and four times a year a **Meditatio CD** has been sent to each registered Christian Meditation group around the world.

In the new **Meditatio Talks Series** page (link above) you will find the audio files (with transcripts) of these talks which have come from many different teachers in the community, including John Main and Laurence Freeman.

To keep up with the times, these **Meditatio CDs** are being offered as audio files that can be simply downloaded and used at weekly groups.

Check out a simple tutorial ([here](#)) on how to download the audio files.

The World Community for Christian Meditation – wccm.org



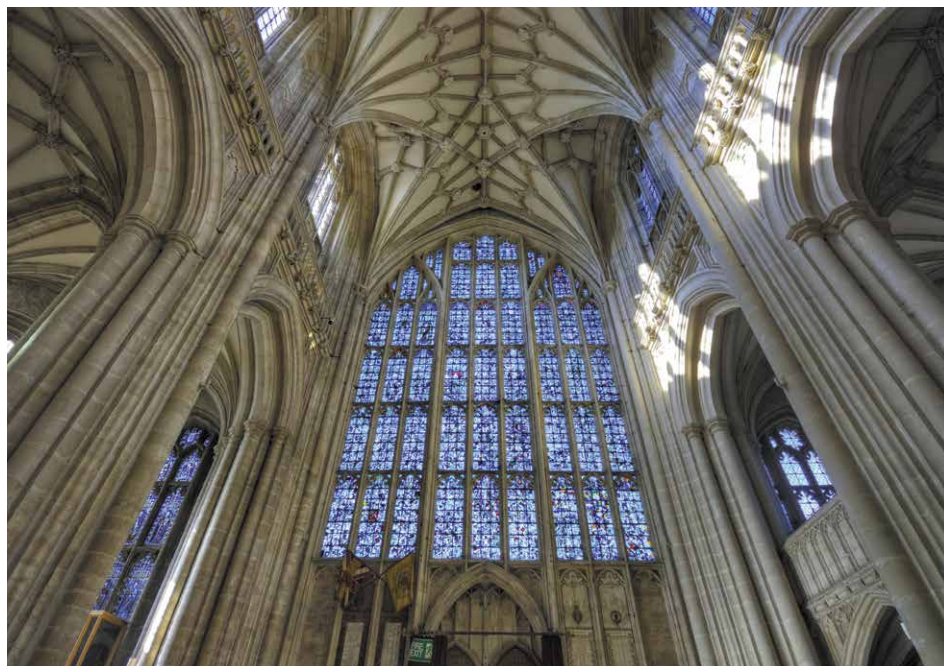
Our Tasmanian Community

by Joy Hayes

We have had an interesting few months here in Tasmania, and there is more to come!

The lockdown gave us an opportunity to get together in meditation as a rather large group from all over the state. We had what was called **Tues@5**, a meditation session that ran for the 15 weeks that we weren't able to come together in our regular groups. It was an emailed format, beginning with a reflection on what was current in the week and a talk from the community – we listened to John Main's *In Times of Anxiety* and *The Work of Selfless Attention* by Laurence Freeman. There were readings and words of wisdom, we explored music of all sorts and had images of a wide range of Australian art – definitely a cultural few months! Some of us were able to meditate at 5pm on a Tuesday as usual, while others participated when it worked for them. Hence we kept in touch.

Two other lovely events are happening in November. Firstly we are having our annual Quiet Day, *The Light We Cannot See*, where we are going to explore through our contemplative path, the mystery of the light of God within us. We will discern this light through the cracks in us and in our world –



Winchester Cathedral's Great West Window

think Leonard Cohen, Kintsugi and Winchester Cathedral's Great West Window, and in the awakening and enlightening of our inner selves, think Prisms, Salvador Dali and the Transfiguration. Lots of silence and meditation too. **The day was SOLD OUT in 24 hours!**

The other special event is that after this day of reflection and discernment we are going to witness one of our meditators, make a commitment to enter his time of Postulancy as he continues to discern his call to be a Benedictine

Oblate within the WCCM. In our state there are two of us who have made our final oblation. In doing this we accepted the Rule of St Benedict as our guide, promised to live in the spirit of Obedience, Stability and Conversion, and to share always in the life and work of our community. I know that this special time will be filled with presence of divine grace.

Our community is happy and holy, and it's spirit is joyful. While it is small, it is stable, and over many years of silence has developed deep, strong roots that continue to grow.

Art Show in a Time of Crisis



**All proceeds to
The World Community for
Christian Meditation Friends
Programme**

Welcome to the WCCM Friends online Art Show.

All the art exhibited has been produced by meditators and donated. Artworks are available for purchase. The works come unframed. Add postage of \$15 within Australia. Despite greatly reduced income during this crisis, the WCCM intends offering both the online events and the resources of *A Contemplative Path* as a free-will offering opportunity. This fundraiser is your chance to support this wonderful initiative.

<https://artshowinatimeofcrisis.com/>

Monastic Spirituality and Oblation

by Gloria Duffy

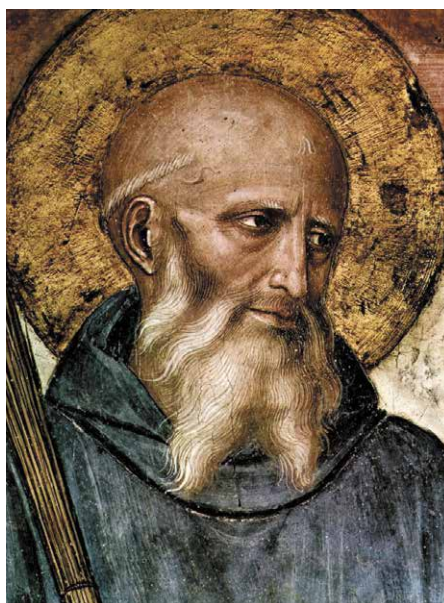
Responding to requests to explain Benedictine Oblation the following is a very brief introduction to both the terms and practices associated with this spiritual discipline.

In principle, the multiplicity of Christian traditions attempt to instil the life of the Spirit into a meaningful Christocentric lifestyle for their members. Succinctly, Benedictine Oblates are God-seekers who follow the monastic Rule of St Benedict, one of the oldest Christian disciplines with the intent to realise a deeper sense of God in their life. Benedict, like Augustine, predates the Reformation and belongs to the entire Christian church and therefore is an ecumenical spirituality.

Gospel values are foundational to living the Rule of St Benedict. The Rule underpins a living monastic tradition that has existed for over 1500 years focusing on a Christocentric paradigm of prayer, work, and familial relationships in a wholesome balance of life. As Oblates one promises to 'serve God and all people according to the Rule of St Benedict'.

The word 'oblate' is from the Latin 'to offer'. It is a religious commitment which is more than being an 'associate' of a religious organisation or community. Contemporary monastics/oblates accept:

'Monastic life is the diametric opposite of aimless living. It has a



"St Benedict's motto Ora et labour still holds challenges for all who attempt to balance their daily life of prayer, work, study, and recreation."

goal and it has a tried and ordered network of means by which that goal is realised.'

Formation for Oblates consists of a structured prayer life composed of a lifelong study of the Rule (moderation and intentional living), *Lectio Divina* (spiritual reading with the heart more than the head), Liturgy of the

Hours (the sanctification of time), meditation (silent listening), retreats (alone with God), and community cell days (loving and supporting one another).

St Benedict's motto *Ora et labour* still holds challenges for all who attempt to balance their daily life of prayer, work, study, and recreation. As part of WCCM Oblate formation one becomes familiar with the spiritual direction and mystical theology of John Main that permeate his letters to meditators. These are contained in the books *Community of Love* and *Monastery Without Walls*.

It is noteworthy how forward-thinking John Main was on believing monastic spirituality was as valid for the laity as for professed religious. A current internet search on monasticism provides links to a diversity of movements from 'spiritual but not religious' groups that are forming new monastic communities. *Living the Hours*² is an exploration of the contemporary interest and variety in the new monasticism. Raimon Panikkar in *Blessed Simplicity: the universal monk*³ looks at what 'monkhood' is, suggesting it is a vocation for everyone who seeks conversion and fuller life in God.

References

1. Michael Casey, *Strangers to the City*, Massachusetts. Paraclete Press 2013, p. 5.
2. Anthony Grimley & Jonathan M Wooding, *Living the Hours: monastic spirituality in everyday life*. Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2010.
3. Raimon Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity: the universal monk*. New York, Seabury Press, 1982.

Checked out www.wccmaustralia.org.au lately?

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Truely Thankful for Our Blessings

by Sue Woods
WCCM Australia (NT) Co-ordinator

Greetings from the Centre, Alice Springs. Grace and Peace to you all.

What a year 2020 has been. A year of much change and restrictions. Interestingly 2020 is often referred to as a term of sight – ‘you have 2020 vision’. I hope and pray that this year for each of us has widened our vision of what is important to us, personally, communally and as a nation and for our world.

As people of faith it is eye-opening to read in the Book of Revelation the various visions and challenges John puts to the churches:

Revelation 2: 4 & 5 – *You have less love now than you used to . . . Repent and do as you used to at first.*

Revelation 3: 3 – *Remember what you have received and heard; obey it and repent. Wake up.*

Revelation 3: 6 & 13 & 22 – *If anyone has ears to hear, let them listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.*

Taking time to REMEMBER the blessings we have received and to be truly thankful has been something I have tried to do in this year with all its uncertainties.

Here in the Northern Territory we have had minimal disruptions to our life. After only a few weeks of



Campfire
in the
Heart

“During our lockdown we began to Zoom our Morning Prayer and have been continuing to do so since, because it has blessed us with people joining us from various states around Australia.”

lockdown we were able to resume life as normal with COVID-19 safety plans. Our weekly Christian Meditation Groups were continued with people meditating in their own homes at the usual meditation times. This only happened for a few weeks then we resumed our gatherings with the social distancing requirements. Our two groups are only small so that didn't present any challenges. We were certainly very grateful when we could meet together again.

At **Campfire in the Heart**, our ministry of leading a number of

residential Retreats each year was, of course, not possible because of the various border restrictions. So like so many others we Zoomed two Retreats this year. Zoom has certainly been a blessing to us and we give thanks for this amazing technology. During our lockdown we began to Zoom our Morning Prayer and have been continuing to do so since, because it has blessed us with people joining us from various states around Australia. We are so very grateful for this blessing.

The Podcasts by WCCM have been such a great blessing to so many of us this year. They have been most inspiring, hopeful and challenging during this world crisis.

David, Celia and I are hoping and praying that in 2021 we will be able to have a full program of Retreats. David and I believe that 2021 will be our last full year here in Alice Springs and ministering at **Campfire in the Heart**. The Spirit seems to be leading us south, probably south of Adelaide. We ask your prayers as we continue to discern the Spirit at this time. Not only for us, David and myself, but also for the continuing vision of Campfire, here in the Centre of Australia.

Blessings of Advent – Waiting with Hope – as we come to the end of one year and prepare for the New Year.

New Blog Promotes Meditation as Answer to Global Crises

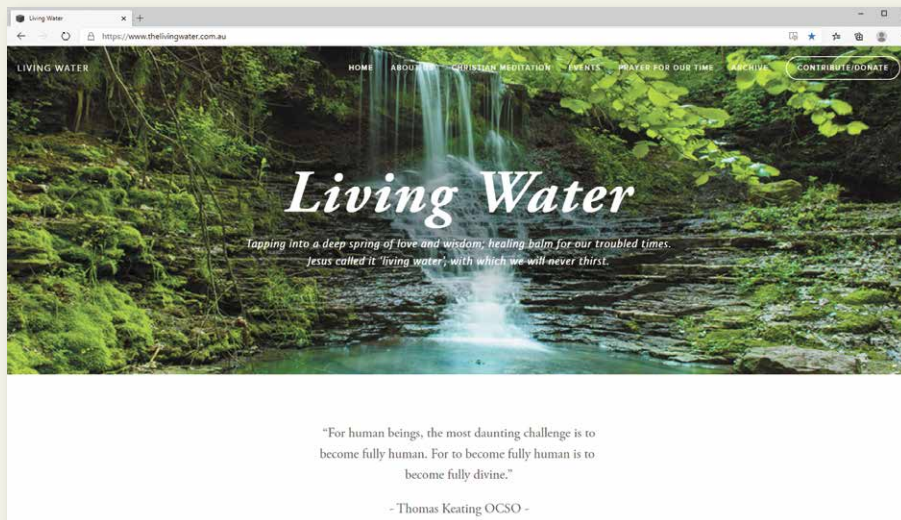
Roland Ashby, a long-standing meditator and member of WCCM-Australia, has embarked on a new venture: to offer a more hopeful future in these dark and anxious times.

The tool for this project is his new blog, *Living Water* (www.thelivingwater.com.au), in which Roland explores contemplative wisdom and consciousness.

"I can only see as a way forward the evolution of a contemplative consciousness and wisdom," he said. "We all have within us the indwelling Spirit, or what Anglican Solitary Maggie Ross calls 'deep



Roland Ashby



mind! If we connect with this Deep Mind, the Indwelling Spirit, particularly through meditation, we'll then find the strength, courage, compassion and wisdom that's needed to meet the great challenges of our time," he said.

Through the blog Roland hopes to promote four key strands: contemplative consciousness and wisdom, not only within the Church but also wider secular

society; Christian meditation and contemplative prayer; social justice and care for creation; and interfaith dialogue, understanding, peace and reconciliation.

In recent articles on *Living Water*, Dr Deborah Guess writes about meditation and the environment, and Dr Sarah Bachelard reflects on a new contemplative church she has established.

See: 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.



www.wccmaustralia.org.au

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