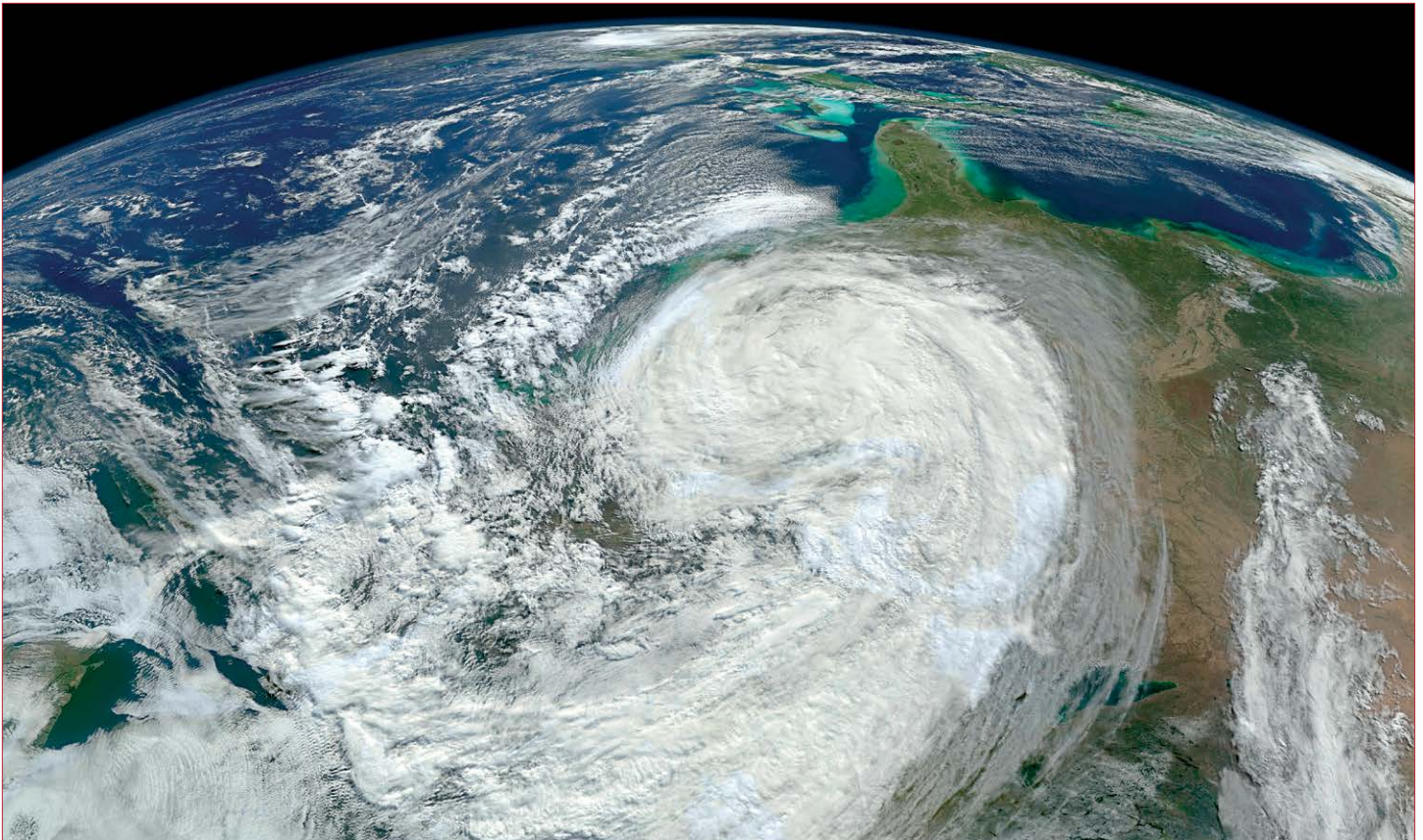




## Quiet in **the storm**

In this special issue on stress we see how meditation helps people to manage and even take advantage of the storms of life



Satellite image of Hurricane Sandy, which hit Central and North America in October

Photo: NASA GOES Project

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A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

The once great city of Teotihuacan ("where man meets the gods") lies about an hour from the world's presently most populated urban area, Mexico City. In its heyday the numbers of this pre-Columbian civilisation were estimated at up to 200,000. Then like, all empires, all successes, it waned. By the time the Aztecs came across its broad straight central avenue with the vast Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon and of the serpent god Quetzlcoatl, the memory of the culture and its beliefs had largely faded, leaving only the physical remains of the great edifices. The red-ochre surface plaster of the pyramids crumbled away leaving only the underlying grey stone. As with English medieval churches that we see today in their familiar, beautiful grey-ness, the language of old vital colours and sensory exuberance has been lost.

So, they are immensely present and impressive but silent about themselves, like powerful people who speak little.

We don't know what the inhabitants of Teotihuacan believed. Even the names of the pyramids were invented by the Aztecs who discovered them. As with the great neolithic sites of Europe the energy of faith in the air seems to be emitted directly through the stone: hard, powerful and moving. Here once, we sense, were people committed to something they knew to be real and by which they found transcendence in the intensity and focus of their faith. What they believed however remains obscure to us, though no doubt it was held with intense conviction. Perhaps, like many still with rock-hard beliefs, they assumed that what they believed was the best or only truth. Perhaps this explains why today in their non-dogmatic silence these sites are so conducive to meditation - especially when you are in need of a rest after having puffed and stumbled to the top level of the pyramids' steep and narrow steps.

Yet one cannot ignore the beliefs embodied in these great buildings. At each of the four corners of each level of the

Pyramid of the Sun the skeleton of a sacrificed child has been discovered. Enemies captured in battle were kept alive until they were used up for ritual slaughter. Their gods were not friendly. And however brave and strong their culture, it was controlled in great measure by chthonic fears and an obsession with death.

Happily my visit to the meditation community in Mexico coincided with the national, indeed continental feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The story of the feast is deceptively naïve. A native Indian - that is, an indigenous person, not one of the ruling Hispanic class - received a vision of the Virgin. 'She caused herself to be seen by an Indian named Juan Diego,

*They are immensely  
present and impressive but  
silent about themselves,  
like powerful people who  
speak little*

poor but worthy of respect" as a contemporary account puts it. He was a 'humble but respected poor man of the people'. One day as he walked to the great city he found himself in - or newly perceived the familiar surroundings to be - paradise. "Am I in the place our ancient ancestors and grandparents told about?," he asked himself. Juan Diego's delight in the glorious natural beauty of trees and animals that he saw himself to be immersed in, evokes the same response of the 19th century Russian pilgrim whose prayer of the heart awakened him to see the divine beauty all around him. Beauty, like love, can cast out fear.

The Virgin appeared with an irresistible message of compassion. She will listen, she said, to the weeping of the poor, to their sadness; and she will 'remedy, cleanse and nurse all their different troubles'. She says to the poor Indian who will be her messenger that he will carry word of all her personal love 'in my compassionate and merciful gaze.' The heart

of this great story, and the feast that re-charges its meaning for the people, is not violent. But it is a fearless confronting of all institutionalized, political or religious violence that causes the weak to suffer unnecessarily and deprives them of dignity. It does not reinforce fear but casts fear out. Her response - a direct manifestation of the divine response to all human pain - is a contemplative gaze.

Juan Diego was told to go to the bishop and tell him that the Virgin wanted him to build a 'sacred little house' in her name. He approached the imposing residence of the bishop and was kept waiting a long time. Finally he got a hearing but the bishop was sceptical and condescending. The second appearance of the Virgin encouraged the poor Indian not to be afraid but he was again turned away. The advisors of the bishop persuaded their master that the stubborn little Indian was a fraud. Juan Diego tried then to avoid the Virgin and her further demands. But she blocked his way and told him to fill his cloak with the ordinary plants and frostbitten flowers lying on the ground near them. When he opened his cloak at the next meeting with the bishop beautiful fresh Castilian roses cascaded out. The Spanish-born bishop's attention was finally engaged. On the inside of the cloak there was also impressed the image of the Virgin which is the focus of the pilgrimage that countless poor people were making to Guadalupe during my visit and that they have made every year since the apparitions. The little house she asked for is a huge basilica; but the intensity of devotion and faith in the people outshine the magnificent church buildings just as they do the dark awesome pyramids of Teotihuacan.

The simple faith of the poor... The crowds filling the streets are making their way purposefully to the shrine. Where there are crowds there are market forces but the commercialism of the event, the multiplicity of images, is overshadowed by the passion and joyfulness

of the pilgrims. To the sceptic or the non-believer it is merely a curiosity but to anyone with faith – even a different set of beliefs – there is a moving and stirring sincerity in the single-mindedness of the pilgrims. It is a different kind of exuberance and energy from that of a football crowd. The joy is authentically religious, flowing from some point immeasurable in the material sphere, not dependent on the thrill of competition or success or the adrenalin of the fear of losing.

Joy stimulates all aspects of the human and engages all of us in an experience of wholeness leading to the transcendence of self. This joy that we thirst for in a thousand substitutes derives from being not having. To be whole is to recover simplicity and purity: some of the early teachers said that through contemplation we recover virginity at a new level. It is this simple joy that drives the single pilgrims who have been carrying an image of the image of the Virgin on their backpacks for hundreds of kilometers, the families who have trekked here from the surrounding villages, the groups of young men who, anywhere else, would be an object of fear but whose enthusiasm here is innocent and infectious.

Religion of this kind highlights the connection between sanctity and simplicity. How often do we meet religious leaders who are political animals, looking for danger or dissent like security guards rather than recognizing the seeds of holiness all around them, in all they meet and trying to encourage not stifle? Instead of simplicity religion can cultivate obsessiveness, the neuroticism of fundamentalism, the anxiety of the addicted. True simplicity is tested by its direct access to the source experience of religious awareness and behaviour, the all-inclusive and all-pervasive presence itself.

In this presence God does not need to judge or punish nor does he need his agents to do so in his name. Divine love – which keeps the simple holy – triumphs

without violence or the use of fear because it is faithful to itself. Violence is a consequence of being distracted from our true self. Only when we have felt, in the grace of the presence, that this continuous, dynamic stillness is the true nature of God can we fall in love with God. Until then we seek without finding. Otherwise, in desperation, we sell our soul to an idol who hides its violence behind a false smile.

The religion of this people is not black and white. It is an explosion of primary colours each of which registers on a part



of the emotional spectrum. In the great square in front of the basilica huge loudspeakers pump out a surprising variety of music – from Bach and Mozart to traditional Mexican songs. Yet all the noise and the riot of colour, the striding pilgrims across the square, the lines passing constantly before the original image, the groups that simply have sat down on the ground to wait – all this activity has a mysterious stillness. It is all held, one feels, in the contemplative gaze of the Virgin.

True religion is always receptive to the

contemplative. It is the religion built on fear, violence and the love of power that refuses to return that gaze of love. This fake religion insults the simplicity of stillness by calling it self-centred or dismissing it as unorthodox. False religion fears contemplation because the contemplative gaze sees through and dissolves all masks; it penetrates and undermines all pretence and pretension.

In contemplation, too, all the divisions and oppositions by which power operates are over-ridden. 'In Christ there is neither male nor female...' Violence is

the friction between those divisions. It is more often associated with the male ego and patriarchal systems. But the root of the problem is not in gender; it is in aspects of the human psyche to be found in all men and women. Nevertheless it is hard to imagine those pyramids built on sacrificed children being run by women; or some of the condemnations pronounced by male-dominated churches coming from sisters, mothers and wives. Whatever the sexual politics of religion, the compassionate gaze of the Virgin expresses the feminine aspect

of the divine which religion too often suppresses or ridicules.

It would be easy merely to psychologise the cult of the Virgin in Guadalupe. And it is true that one can see some religious techniques at work – some bread and circus - which attempt to control the devotion by means that might actually impede Mary's merciful gaze. But religious psychology or religious opportunism does not invalidate the spiritual truth or personal authenticity released in this place of joyful prayer.

Holiness needs simplicity to flourish. Sanctity is wholeness. And the infinite simplicity of God which draws us relentlessly to itself is the union of all opposites. How could He have created them male and female in His image unless these polarities were resolved in Himself? Contemplative experience is participation in this transcendent yet incarnate simplicity. It is the energized peace that flows when the friction between us is transformed into the power of attraction. The irony of our culture is that religion so often has lost the language for this experience. So it often fails both to teach and understand it. It is left to the priests of the scientific method to explore this phenomenon and to try to describe in mathematical terms what peace, simplicity, wholeness and love mean.

Mary is the powerful yet non-intrusive personal symbol of the human capacity to share and be transformed in the simple holiness of God. The human icon of that simple holiness is our own true and good nature.

At times she has been appropriated, hijacked even, by the forces of male domination in the service of their patriarchal hierarchy. Yet the power of the feminine is ultimately stronger than this. It uses means other than violence to affirm itself – especially the silent, compassionate gaze. In this gaze she is more than a psychological projection. Compassion is more, and more radically transformative, than any kind of temporary consolation. In this gaze we feel the source of the spiritual strength and courage that is needed to endure the worst

of life's hardships and even to emerge through them more whole than we were.

Mary's transmission of love from this well of divine life, which she fell into through her love for Jesus, draws on the deepest roots of the feminine. Theologically this means she is the 'new Eve'. Anthropologically we see how many shrines of the Virgin hosted pre-Christian cults of the eternal feminine principle. However, this is not just to explain it away or to be satisfied with a reductionist solution to an intangible mystery. As with the cosmic mystery of Christ, a human person remains at the heart of this gaze of compassion.

In her maternal affirmation and her magisterial patience with Juan Diego, the simple Indian man of the people who became her messenger, we see the power of nonviolence in reconstruct-

*Every pilgrimage,  
Guadalupe included, is  
sacred because it expresses  
the journey to our  
inner room*

ing justice and dismantling the forces of oppression. Although the bishop in the story is treated respectfully, he and his institution are clearly associated with these forces until he weeps his tears of conversion as the Virgin's miraculous signs are revealed.

The story and Mary's words to Juan Diego echo the great *Magnificat* of Luke's gospel, the song of Mary which is no less the song of the true church and of the poor. It also echoes the biblical prophetic tradition in its resonance with the Song of Hannah. The mighty are cast down from their thrones, the lowly are raised high. Her contemplative gaze contains a power that revolutionizes the injustices in human affairs and corrects the balance of power.

At the stoplights in parts of Mexico City at night the windshield cleaners emerge from the shadows to earn a few coins. They are obviously high on drugs,

desperate for their next hit, their self-control almost gone. In their individual broken lives, they bring home the big picture. In our day the global gap between rich and poor is increasing dramatically – though less so, as the economists are mystified to observe, in Latin America. The link between poverty and violence however is widely accepted. Half of the world's population lives under the poverty line of \$2 a day. More than a billion earn less than \$1 a day. By 2020 the population will increase by 2 billion, 95% of whom will be in the developing world. These bare statistics make abstract the basic human experience of the street dwellers and addicted small drug dealers - inequality, alienation and dependency, infant mortality, broken families, malnourishment, the lack of primary education the ravages of political elites corrupted by drug cartels. But the trend is clear however when it shows how the poverty trap is maliciously tied into the cycle of violence.

When we read the story correctly the message of Guadalupe is simply that of the gospel: the cure for the economic poverty trap is poverty of spirit. To recognise this is to inaugurate the next great paradigm shift. There have been others equally momentous – when we moved from seeing the world as flat to round; when we realised that the sun does not revolve around the earth; when we understood that the theory of the four humours is insufficient for effective medicine. We sit on the brink of a new shift in consciousness: the opening on global scale to the spiritual dimension, to a nondual vision of reality, to accepting that thought is not the key to the highest truth, that silence and stillness are the condition in which a new kind of knowledge dawns in order to illuminate all ways of knowing and show how they relate to each other. Meditation is fundamental to the next step of human evolution.

When you arrive in a new city – Teotihuacan or Mexico City – we are confronted with new problems of communication. Not only language but cultural differences too. A Spanish omelet means

one thing in London and another in Spain. Experiencing a challenge to communication and understanding is always disturbing. We become accustomed to our routines and protocols which give us our sense of security and identity. Change is threatening and very often makes us angry.

The parable of the rich farmer (Lk 12:17) illuminates this. He wanted to store his bumper crops and planned to build bigger barns and take life easy. But then that very night his soul was de-

and take as many innocents as possible down with them.

God communicates by the utterance of one Word. By this word spoken from pure being came all that exists, existence itself. As creation evolved so the same Word came to the prophets (in all faiths) awakening them to the danger of false religion supporting unjust social institutions. Eventually, in a certain small town on a certain but unspecified date the Word became flesh. The process however was still not complete because

sends rain on the just and the unjust. No easy idol to worship – something so inexplicably inclusive and radically challenging to the ego's smalltime view of justice and morality. All he tells us about what we must do to, as he says 'be like your heavenly father' is to love our enemies. 'Love those who persecute you... so that you may be children of your father in Heaven.' The still deep reasonableness of this seemingly impossible teaching is amplified in his response to the guard who struck him at his trial: 'If I said something wrong, give evidence of the wrong. But if I spoke the truth why did you strike me?'

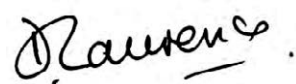
His words convey the same contemplative gaze as Mary bestows on a suffering and violent humanity in the story of Guadalupe. It is a gaze we must either hold and then change our ways; or avoid and run desperately away from. We can only be 'rich towards God' from the depths of poverty of spirit – that is, the renunciation of our need to hang on to power and possessions.

Because the teaching of non-violence – *the way of peace* that is the way – is intrinsically mystical, because it reveals our true nature as inseparable from the divine being – we can only put it into practice by joining it to the contemplative dimension of the gospel. This is revealed in his teaching on prayer.

Every pilgrimage, Guadalupe included, is sacred because it expresses the journey to our inner room, the closing of the door and then our whole-hearted attention to the presence that we find residing there. It sounds a tough journey but the sign that we are making it – the sign that filled the streets of Guadalupe during those festal days - is simple joy, the colourful radiance of life and the energy of peace.

Every blessing in this Christmas season and throughout the New Year.

With much love,



Laurence Freeman, OSB



manded. Jesus comments: 'This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.'

As well as material possessions, we try to store the truth in our preferred means of communication – in words, systems of thought or theology, in rituals and institutions and hierarchies. But in so doing we walk on thin ice over fearful depths, not in the spirit of the gospel. But how can we be 'rich towards God' as Jesus says?

By becoming poor in spirit. Words, traditions and institutions have their value. Otherwise, perhaps, Mary would not have sent Juan Diego to the bishop. But they can also become barns where we develop the false, death-denying securities of oppressive regimes that fight to the death to defend their illusion

that individual had to live and die if the Word was to enter into the whole gamut of human existence. Even then there was more to come, the breaking through of the ultimate veil of death which so terrified and fascinated the people of Teotihuacan as it does us in our ritual consumption of violent movies and videogames. But there is still more to happen before the Word can return to the depth from which it is begotten, now incorporate with all existence transformed into human beings capable of loving as God loves and perhaps even needs to be loved by us.

This is the mystical meaning of non-violence. All Jesus reveals of the God he knew from within, as himself, was that God shines on good and bad alike and

# Keeping peace in the storm



Destruction caused by Sandy in Jay Stewart's neighbourhood (photo: personal archive)

A year ends. A new year begins. People run round frenetically. Rushing, hardset faces, lost smiles. One of the biggest marketing Consulting compan-

nies, JWT, recently included a "super stress era" in the top ten trends of 2013. But it is not only over-filled schedules that affect us. There are other stress-

ful situations: illness, financial difficulty, problems with personal relationships, even natural disasters.

How can meditation help us to keep the balance even during these hard realities of life? How can we remember what is the "better part"? In this last issue of 2012 we meet the wisdom of experienced meditators. From the US Jay Stewart, in New Jersey on how he endured Hurricane "Sandy" and Sean Hagan, General Counsel at the International Monetary Fund on how meditation helps in a busy job in the stress of the financial crisis. From Brazil, Doctor Fernando Bigna on how meditation helps people to live in reality less damaged by stress because they are more aware of themselves.

## "The fruits of meditation became evident to me in my own reactions" - Jay, about Hurricane Sandy

By Jay Stewart, WCCM US Council member

Hurricane Sandy hit the New York – New Jersey area directly, and caused unimaginable damage. The hardest hit areas were along the coast, where houses and cars washed away or were severely damaged. Even well inland, the damage was severe.

I do not want to be overly dramatic. I was never in danger of being washed out to sea. My house and car were not damaged. I was lucky. Nonetheless, the damage from Hurricane Sandy to my neighborhood was significant. Many mature trees were felled and took down utility wires with them, as is shown in the accompanying photos.

One never appreciates electricity until it is not there. At first, a world without electricity was like an adventure – cooking and eating by candlelight; hovering around the fireplace. At first my meditation practice fitted comfort-

ably into the rhythm of this adventure.

But, the loss of electricity continued, day after day. The temperature outside fell below freezing at night. As time went on, the temperature inside the house fell to the low 40s. The once invigorating cold showers were less comfortable once the air temperature in the bathroom - when the shower was over - was colder than the water. Nine days after the Hurricane, we had a snow-storm; and still no heat or electricity.

After a while I lived in two different worlds. Once the roads were passable, I was able to get to my office, which had heat and electricity. This world was back to normal. I was comfortable; things were familiar. After work, things were far from normal. It was dark and cold. There were no computers, TVs, or other conveniences.

Some of my colleagues at work had electricity and some did not. Those

without electricity complained about their situation and railed at the slow response from the utilities. They were angry and distraught.

A week after the storm, our meditation group was able to meet. Group members shared stories of their experiences, and offered to share their homes and food with those of us still without power. After our meeting, we all shared how especially comforting it was to continue our group meditations among all the chaos around us.

Those in the meditation group who were without electricity spoke matter-of-factly about their situation. They certainly were uncomfortable, but they were not angry about the situation. There was a notable contrast between their reaction and the reaction of my co-workers. They faced the situation with an inner calm.

Once my power returned, I immedi-

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We are often content to live in darkness and confusion unclear about where we are or where we are going. This darkness results not from any darkness of God but simply because our inward eyes are closed. While our inward eye is closed we remain in the dark. (John Main)

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ately got on my computer and made a donation to a Hurricane Sandy relief fund. Having experienced some disruption from the storm, I had great sympathy for those who had suffered much more significantly. I think that Hurricane Sandy illustrated the everyday value of meditation. My group members were able to maintain their

inner calm and be charitable even as victims of this natural disaster, much more so than some of my co-workers.

The fruits of meditation became evident to me in my own reactions. Meditation allows us to step back from our egocentric reaction to things and reach out in compassion and charity to others. I have no doubt that my

impulse to donate to the hurricane relief fund sprang from my meditation practice. While I would not wish a natural disaster on anyone, Hurricane Sandy brought home the impact of Christian meditation on me. I hope all, in some way, get a chance to see the fruits of their Christian meditation practice in some concrete way.

## "A spirit of attention seems to actually slow things down"

*By Sean Hagan, WCCM Guiding Board Member and General Counsel of the IMF*

Any executive confronts stress on a number of different levels.

First, there is the challenge of simply managing the constant flow of work - which can be overwhelming. The typical day for an executive starts with a list of things to be done. And, invariably, as the day progresses, nothing on that list gets done. Crises occur, meetings are called, meetings are interrupted by new crises. In fact, the lists get longer and it is easy to enter into a state somewhere between panic and quiet desperation. Like a machine that is asked too much of it, one's mind can literally seize up; by trying to focus on everything, one is unable to focus on anything.

I have found that meditation provides a useful way of placing some order into this chaos. For those who meditate, no matter what the tradi-

tion, the objective is to enter fully into the present moment, with the repetition of the mantra being the vehicle for doing so. To the extent that you can carry this spirit of attention with you in your professional activities, multi-tasking becomes much easier. Instead of focusing on all things that need to be done that haven't yet been completed, one gives one's full attention to the task in front of you. Whether it is writing an email, reviewing a document or discussing an assignment with a subordinate. Indeed, a spirit of attention seems to actually slow things down. Of course, all of this is consistent with the memorable passage in Matthew: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's troubles are enough for today."

A second source of stress relates

to the decision-making process. An executive is often asked to make decisions in difficult circumstances. One often does not have all the information one would like. Moreover, sometimes we are forced to choose among unattractive options. At least in my area of work, the ideal is not always achievable. In these circumstances, good judgment is key, and meditation helps me to detach myself from the "heat" of the decision making process, thereby giving me a clearer perspective. It also helps me keep my ego in check. Working in the public sector, as I do, it is important that my decisions be motivated by a sense of service - not out of a sense of ego. As John Main says, one of the key objectives of meditation is to turn your attention off yourself. Not always easy - but the important achievements never are.

## Meditation, reconnection and well-being

*By Dr. Fernando Cardoso Bignardi, Physician Clinician and member of WCCM Brazil*

Stress begins before the event. The event may be outside our control - like climate change - or, more frequently, it may be related to the way we interpret what is happening. I mean, we as-

sign a value to something and by doing that we became absent from the present moment. We allow ourselves to be driven by a past memory or an anxiety about the future. In this way suffering is born, to the degree that we absent ourselves from the present moment.

The first step of meditation - prior to whatever neuroscience may later add - is the awakening of direct perception. That means we go back into sensitive touch with reality rather than with our imagination. Through meditation we come back to the present moment,

thus eliminating a fundamental cause of stress.

Besides this, the results of our research have been showing how the meditator is able to reconnect with his/her life's main purpose. With this experience there follows a series of benefits, beginning with a change in many mental patterns. This has direct consequences even in a meditator's physical posture which then generates more physical vitality. The final result of the cascade of benefits is health accompanying well being and fulfillment.

## Meditatio News

By Brijji Waterfield, Special Project Coordinator

# International Office moves to Meditatio House



Change brings new beginnings. After 12 years at St Marks, the International Office has now moved to its well-designed new home in the Meditatio House in West London. The spacious loft area easily accommodates six new desks, leaving space for meetings and yoga! Last Sunday the UK Oblate meeting took place there. A new Meditatio Centre will be launched on 19 March 2013 at St Marks. We are still busy organising that! With enthusiastic support particularly from the younger meditators the program for the Centre is beginning to take shape – watch out for details which will be posted on the website in the New Year.

We have had three new Meditatio publications – the beautiful WCCM Calendar for 2013 with photographs taken by Fr Laurence in the Amazon and two small booklets which are great introductions to their topic – *The Business of Spirit and Meditation and Addiction*. All these are available via our new online Meditatio Store.

In October we held a series of workshops with Fr Joe Pereira (National Co-ordinator for India) on *Meditation and Yoga in Recovery* in different locations in England which were warmly re-

ceived. This was followed by our main Meditatio Seminar in London called *Meditation and Addiction: The Way Through*. Fr Laurence, Fr Joe, Mike Sarsion, Dr Vanessa Crawford spoke about how a more holistic approach with meditation can help people persevere on the path of recovery. Linda Kaye and May Nichols gave a workshop on *Christian Meditation* as an 11th Step Practice. There was a particularly moving interview with a young man who was still a user and whose story made us realise the depths of the challenges addicts face.

On the WCCM website, you will find short videos on the homepage about the Seminar. All the talks of the Seminar are available on our website. We also had a follow up day Workshop in November on the need for forgiveness and meditation in healing. Much work needs to be done on this important topic and we will continue to delve deeper at another Meditatio Forum to be held in a Buddhist Monastery in Thailand in January.

Meditatio continues to introduce meditation to children in schools. In Scotland we will be giving some training days early next year and Fr Lau-

rence, Cathy Day and Ernie Christie will be speaking at a Meditatio Forum in Poland in January. With plans for another Forum in Georgetown on *Meditation and Business* in April and a Meditatio Seminar on *Justice and Prisons* in July in London together with the program at the new Meditatio Centre we pray that the work of Meditatio will continue to flourish in the New Year.

## Sajja: The Vow of Recovery

### Christian and Buddhist Perspectives

Saturday 26 January 8.00 am to 5.00 pm.

Thamkrabok Monastery, AmpoeKoonklone, Phraputtabat, Saraburi, Thailand.

This Meditatio Forum on *Addiction and Recovery* examines how those in recovery can be assisted to a full and flourishing life. This fullness must involve the spiritual dimension. The Buddhist and Christian perspectives - emerging from deep compassion - can help clarify what this means in a holistic and spiritual way. What is the role of meditation and the commitment to wholeness by means of a vow in the whole process of recovery?

Christian and Buddhist monks, Fr Laurence Freeman OSB and Abbot PhraAjahnBoonsong, clinicians, psychologists and meditators from both traditions will explore these questions.

The talks, dialogue, workshops and discussions in this Meditatio Forum, with common meditation practice, will offer insights and inspiration on how to apply wisdom to this field in both personal and professional spheres.



## Events

### Latin America Tour

Fr. Laurence had a full schedule in Latin America in November and December, with retreats and events in Venezuela, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay, US, Trinidad and Mexico.

### Venezuela

The tour started in Venezuela with a Meditation with Children Session in Caracas at a Fe y Alegría school (A Jesuit network of Schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods).

### Trinidad



Meditation with children is growing in this Caribbean country, led by Sr Ruth Monrichard, the National Coordinator. Photo: a session with students of a Primary School in Port of Spain.

### Brazil



The Brazilian community promoted an Essential Teaching Weekend, in Campinas, close to São Paulo, with 37

participants." Everybody loved it. People especially appreciated the possibility for interaction and exchange of information in the group discussions" commented Roldano Giuntoli, the new National Coordinator in Brazil. The photo shows the final oblation of Taynã Malaspina who is the new regional coordinator for São Paulo state and the coordinator for meditation in schools.

### Paraguay



Fr. Laurence gave talks and met with group leaders. A retreat was held close to Asunción. Photo: children from Santa Elena School meditating.

### Argentina



The Argentine community also held an Essential Teaching Weekend,

with 64 participants. Photo: the closing ceremony, when people received the "Coming Home" manual.

### Uruguay



The Christian Meditation Community in Uruguay has a new national coordinator, Philippe Sauval (photo). A day retreat attracted many participants in Montevideo, with the theme Meditation: an Experience of Faith and Healing.

### Mexico



In December, Fr. Laurence spent a week in Mexico, giving talks, having meetings and leading a national retreat. Enrique Laval the National Coordinator and Michael Rathbone, an English oblate from Meditatio Community assisted. Photo: a young audience in a meditation talk at Fundacion Don Bosco, a high school in Cuernavaca.

*ONLINE: see more photos of the Latin America Tour at [wccm.org](http://wccm.org)*

## Reviews

By Jim Green, author of the Meditatio booklet, Meditation and Mental Health

### Film Review: **The Master**



If you are prepared to entertain the possibility that your spiritual teacher or the leader of your faith community has unresolved issues about power and sexuality and is a secret tippler of illicit paint-thinner-based hooch, then Paul Thomas Anderson's latest production, *The Master*, could be just the movie for you.

Also see it if you are interested in how a self-improvement initiative turns into a cult or – even more specifically – if you are after some clues about L. Ron Hubbard and his Church of Scientology.

These, though, are just the most obvious aspects of this latest masterpiece from Anderson. As in his previous work (*Magnolia*, *There Will Be Blood*) what we get here is a slow, steady meditation on what it means to be a human being, how to live with our wounds and limitations, the possibility (or impossibility) of making a connection of trust and love with a fellow suffering, searching human being.

The protagonist of the piece is Freddie Quell (Joaquin Phoenix), a severely

ly traumatised WW2 naval veteran who emerges from the war crushed, distorted and burned out. He seems to have been reduced to something elemental, his speech eroded, almost incomprehensible. We first encounter him and his fellow sailors on an empty, far-off shoreline. Their futile object of desire is a voluptuous woman fashioned out of sand. These are men on the edge.

Returning to post-war civilian life, Freddie has a series of jobs, breakdowns and violent encounters. Freddie is Everyman, but he's also a particular man at a particular historical moment which – thanks to human ignorance – keeps repeating itself. What does the psyche – specifically here the post-war, American, male psyche – do with all that hurt, pain, violence and loss? How does it learn to be human again? Can it?

The rest of the film could be read as an account of America's attempt to get its mental health back (Hubbard's most celebrated book is entitled *Diagnosics: The Modern Science of Men-*

*tal Health*). It's all here: psychiatry, self-help, psychotherapy and religion as relentless self-improvement. The turning point in Freddie's life comes when his Caliban meets Prospero: Lancaster Dodd (Philip Seymour Hoffman) is the Hubbard-inspired Master of the title. He is by turns seductive, needy, charming, ruthless, self-absorbed, charismatic... just the person specifications, it would seem, for heading up an intermittently dysfunctional cult.

The heart of this great film lies in the fascinated relationship between master and follower. They can't leave each other alone and so this becomes a kind of love story, with the two men locked together by the conflicting dynamics of surrender, mutuality, dominance and need. Dodd's supremely ambitious project, "The Cause" ("This is something you do for a billion years or not at all. This isn't fashion") insists that humanity is asleep, in thrall to its accumulated toxic past. He urges Freddie - and everyone else – to wake up. It's to the credit of this generously thoughtful film that, as Freddie lies down again on the beach in the final scene of the movie, it remains an open question just who is awake and, furthermore, just what "being awake" could possibly mean.

Throughout this film the sea - the slowly swirling blue ocean - is an occasionally-glimpsed but powerful presence. It becomes an actor in this mysterious human drama: mother, time, spirit, the unknowable reach of our existence here. The other actors' performances as well make this movie a rare witnessing of heartbreaking human yearning and vulnerability. If Joaquin Phoenix doesn't get an Oscar, suspect a Scientological conspiracy.

## In Focus

By Javier Cosp, WCCM Paraguay



In my childhood and teens I received a strong religious upbringing from my parents who were not only involved in Church activities, but were themselves very holy. In my twenties a certain type of political militancy led me away from the Church and from spirituality. I felt that there with so many problems in the World, the existence of a God was not an important issue.

Towards the end of my 30s, a psychologist recommended that I do yoga. I followed her advice and yoga fascinated me. I began to recommend it to everyone. During the moments of meditation that were part of the practice of yoga, I began to feel a spiritual presence that led me back to a certain spirituality. I began to read about Buddhism, which I found interesting, and I really liked the idea that spiritually involves a constant effort to perfect oneself in order to reach a state of illumination, a state in which one would integrate with divinity. This

vision contrasted with the light position we Christians take about our religion.

The Buddhist passages and a certain dissonance while meditating with Sanskrit words I did not understand, led me to Christian literature, such as *The Seven Storey Mountain* by Thomas Merton. This piece also spoke of the lack of commitment on the part of the average Christian, for whom, "what isn't forbidden, is permitted" which contrasted completely with the idea of integrating oneself with divinity.

Midway through the year 2000, at the age of 45, while surfing the web, I came across Christian Meditation. At that very moment I felt something like "returning home" to what I had been looking for for a long time. I read the reading passages

*At that very moment  
I felt something like  
"returning home" to  
what I had been looking  
for for a long time*

on the page, signed up on the mailing list which allowed me to communicate with other meditators. I put my name and contact details, for people in Paraguay who wanted to form a group.

Although at the time I wasn't contacted by anyone from Paraguay, Magdalena Puebla wrote me from Argentina, and offered to include Paraguay in Father Freeman's itinerary during his visit to Southern Cone countries in 2006. Father Freeman's visit was made possible

thanks to the NGO "Buscando la vida" (Searching for Life). They organized the details of the first and very successful retreat. Later, the same organization, under Miriam Ritter and Ada Centurion, continued working to spread Christian Meditation in Paraguay. In 2008 Father Freeman visited a second time, and recently, this year, we had his third visit which has attracted a lot of interest.

Meditation marked a turning point in my life. It has only been two years since I actually started meditating regularly on a daily basis, and only three months since I have started meditating twice a day. Yet, despite not being a very constant disciple, not only have I received the physical benefits that all research on health and meditation speak of (lower levels of stress and fewer stress related illnesses), but I also sense I have become more compassionate with myself, with others and with nature. This last sentence seems simple, but these benefits have made a huge difference in my wellbeing and that of the people around me.

Without disregarding the beautiful Buddhist readings, I have discovered and now prefer Christian authors such as Thomas Merton, John Main, Simone Weil, Edith Stein, and lately Dorothy Day, especially because they reached their commitment after years of searching,

Meditation has enhanced my self knowledge and I am aware that I still have a long way to go, but above all I am convinced that meditation is the pilgrimage and the best way for me to do overcome my weaknesses.

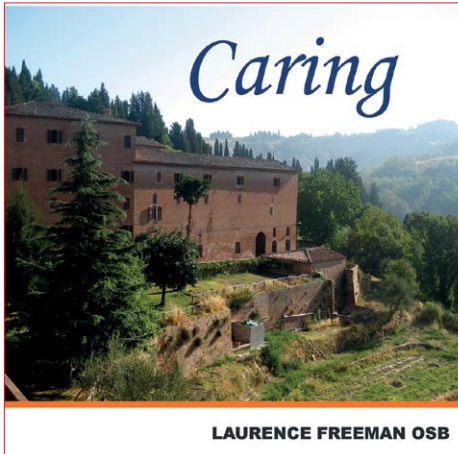


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## Releases

CD: Caring, by Fr. Laurence Freeman



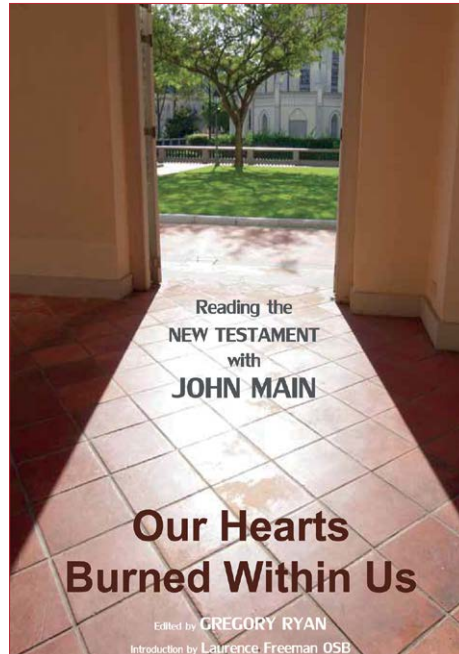
In these talks on the centrality of caring in human life, Laurence Freeman explores how we can all learn to care better for each other and to realise that we are ultimately cared for. Care has two general meanings: the sense of sorrow and the sense of caring for, healing, or paying attention to.

They come together in the power of compassion. Caring for oneself, for example, is not merely self-indulgent. It is part of a spiritual path that leads to transcendence of the ego and so to a fuller degree of life. Meditation is caring for oneself, and becomes a discipline freeing us from the tendency to slip into fantasy.

ISBN: 978-981-07-3784-9 and the catalogue no. is 6245.

The recommended retail price is US\$34.90 and £22.50

Book: Our Hearts Burned Within Us, by John Main



Our Hearts Burned Within Us - Reading the New Testament with John Main

Edited by Gregory Ryan

When we look at the New Testament with eyes enlightened by the spirit of Christ burning in our hearts, we cannot but become amazed at the wonder of the destiny that is given to each of us. John Main OSB

After his death in 1982, John Main's personal copy of the New Testament was found to have many passages marked by him. He had highlighted words of inspiration that he used as

the basis of his own teaching on meditation. These passages nourished his insight into the Christian meaning of meditation as wordless, imageless prayer. In this book, Gregory Ryan matches these passages of Scripture with extracts from John Main's own writings on the same verses.

This empowers our understanding of the familiar words to be illuminated and refreshed by John Main's insight: By meditating we respond to Jesus' call to faith and open ourselves to the riches of the divine reality within us. His insight helps us see why we meditate in Christian faith and why the mantra is a sacred means of letting go of distraction and becoming 'like little children'.

ISBN is 978-981-07-2812-0 and the catalogue no is #6012.

The recommended retail price is US\$10.00 and £6.90

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