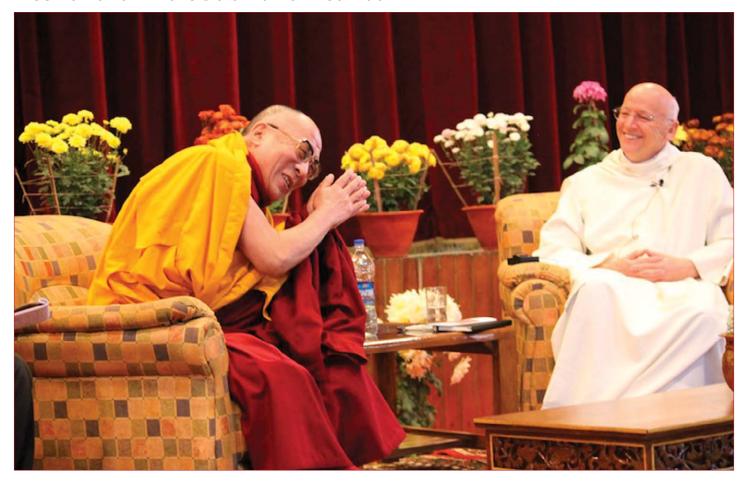
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A Journey of dialogue and silence in India

The WCCM Pilgrimage and a powerful meeting between Fr. Laurence Freeman and HH the Dalai Lama in Sarnath



This issue



The simplicity of the essential teaching makes meditation available for all kinds of audiences

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John Main's Collected Talks: the power of the oral teaching now available in a new set of CDs



A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

"Who invented meditation?" I had heard many questions over the years about meditation. Is it Christian? Does the Pope approve? Is it the same as selfhypnosis? But no one, before this eightyear old meditator sitting with his twenty schoolmates at their little desks in the Bere Island National Primary School, had put it quite like this. There is something wonderfully clarifying about meditating with children. The ease and immediacy with which, with a little of the right encouragement, they slip into the silence and stillness itself effortlessly reveals the stillness and silence of the presence we call the Spirit. Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, Spirit of Love, Spirit of Peace.

I wanted to answer the questioner - more important sometimes than the actual question. So I tried my best and said 'God'. Human beings so often get it wrong, make mistakes, get violent, forget who they and God really are. And so God kindly invented meditation as a reminder to get us back to the truth the easiest and shortest way. God gave it to everyone freely and we just have to tell each other about it. And then, of course, we have to do it. I didn't need to tell the children that. The teacher in the school had told me that the children love meditation and many of them report meditating on their own at other times. This reinforced research that is being conducted in Australia that suggests that about seventy percent of the children who learn to meditate at school also freely meditate at home or elsewhere. With children we don't emphasize the discipline aspect of daily meditation as we do with adults. We just say 'you can meditate anywhere at any time'. The rest they discover themselves.

As I answered him the boy listened with that piercing look of open curiosity and discrimination that makes children such great judges of adult integrity. So in touch with his own experience and so little conditioned, as yet, to modify it in order to please others. I hope I gave him the answer he needed.

As I reflected on this learning experience I remembered a session I had led a few days earlier for a national group of distinguished physicians. They were interested in meditation as far as it might help them and their colleagues in the profession who were suffering increasingly from stress. The pressures induced by medical technology, budget cuts, dissonance between doctors and between doctors and patients, the incidence of drug abuse, depression and suicide – these gave rise to different questions from those I dealt with from the Bere Island schoolchildren.

I tried to present the teaching and respond to the questions in a way that

This unity of the essential teaching in diverse settings shows that simplicity is the great revolution the world is waiting for

kept it in the big picture - not only what medical research said about meditation but also the mystery of its origins and who might have invented it. The doctors were healthily skeptical but openminded and sincere. It was a stimulating adult exchange, not as charming as the children but maybe leading to a greater influence on more lives. But again it was clear that the experience of meditating together was the crucial validating factor. You can say a lot about meditation from many points of view - theological, historical, psychological, neurological. But if the talking doesn't stop at some point and if the entry into the inner room doesn't begin, none of the talking gets anyone very far.

Nevertheless, I console myself with the thought that, even if the talking doesn't go anywhere in practice, which is perhaps much of the time, at least it's better to know about meditation – the new horizon on human life that it reveals – than not to know about it. Both of these encounters, the school-children and the physicians, are reflected in the priorities of our community's Meditatio program – the outreach, as we call it, of the World Community. It is designed to bring the fruits of meditation to the secular world – which means the world as it actually is today. We may not like it but we had better see the world as it is. Better to engage with it and its contemporary languages than try to rewind history or fast forward.

We are all secular - or dealing with secularism - today. Fundamentalists see it as a threat to religion; contemplatives tend to see it as an ally. To meditate in faith today is therefore to be a contemporary contemplative as much as any true saint of the past ever was. It is to be involved with both ends of this spectrum; and so the action that faith always demands will be either inreach or outreach depending on your audience and point of view. But the essential teaching remains the same in both cases. This unity of the essential teaching in diverse settings shows that simplicity is the great revolution the world is waiting for.

In many ways Meditatio is nothing new. Over the years we have responded to requests to teach meditation from many quarters and we have tried to respond to them all with our limited resources. It is a work worth doing and there is undeniably a great need, a great hunger and a great potential. Meditatio simply helps us try to meet this need, to focus our resources and share the essential teaching more effectively and promptly.

The new Meditatio Centre in London that opens this month is an example of this growing in-out reach. I hope that you will be able to visit it and, even if that is not possible, that you will benefit from the teachings and dialogues that will be held there. It is a centre for the whole community. A great deal of hope and effort has gone into its design and program and a wonderful group of young meditators are energizing it, so

please hold it in your heart as it begins its work.

A few weeks ago I led a School Retreat with Pauline Peters and Kath Houston for the meditators of the Asia-Pacific rearrived and slowed down sufficiently to have caught up with themselves.

There is an obvious question, the sort an eight year old might ask somewhat challengingly. Why intensify the practice

and in the next world, eternal life. If we sell everything we have and give to the poor, we will have treasure in heaven. If we take the lowest seat at the banquet table someone will come and lead us up



International School Retreat in Chiang Mai, Thailand

gion. These retreats are more intensive, eight-day experiences of deepening silence. We have one talk a day, seven or more meditation periods, a contemplative Mass and an individual daily meeting with the participants.

Some experience of meditation is necessary of course before embarking on this kind of retreat - enough, at least, to have got over the worst effects of the virus of perfectionism with which most of us are infected after, if not before we leave primary school. Naturally there is a certain anxiety on the first day of the retreat because for all of us it calls for a guick change of gears. Body and mind take time to adjust and synchronize to the new environment and routine. By the third day most of the people who started say they feel they have finally

like this at all? If the twice-daily norm is sufficient and guides a natural and deep process of integration, doesn't it betray a sense of impatience or egotism to think that more is better? Do you get more rewards for more effort? These questions take us to one of the most important paradoxes of the gospel, one that has troubled Christianity as a religion since the beginning and one that it is especially wrestling with today.

Is the way that Jesus taught and that we are called to follow, a way that rewards and punishes? If so, isn't it primarily an ethical rather than a mystical teaching? At first sight this seems to be the case. If we leave everything, house, family and possessions for the gospel's sake, we will receive a hundredfold in this life (although with persecutions)

to the highest. Love your enemies and your reward will be great. The Father who sees what is done in secret in the inner room will reward us.

This seems fairly clearly about reward – and, by implication, punishment. Ethically, the fundamentalist who thinks that eternal hell is an expression of divine justice might then be right. But the heart of the gospel is not as dualistic as this. There is a paradox at the living core of the good news that works an unpredictable transformation of our minds as soon as we run into it.

The paradox is already suggested by a counterpoint made up of the Master's teaching on prayer and his teaching on non-violence. The contemplative nature of his doctrine on prayer, that underpins meditation in the Christian tradition,

balances his injunction to love our enemies and bless those who persecute us. Placed beside each other we see how deeply they in fact intertwine and are interdependent. Without the moral command to non-violence, the teaching on prayer would become merely a pietistic escape from life's troubles. Without the teaching on going into the inner room and shutting the door, setting our mind on God's kingdom before everything else, and leaving self behind, the moral command to turn the other cheek would be empty idealism. We cannot love our enemies without doing so from a profound contemplative source of energy. We cannot meditate without becoming more loving and less violent.

In the same way the reward and punishment language of the teaching is offset by a call to follow and serve without any promise or suggestion of reward. If anyone comes to him without separating from family and indeed her own self, that person 'cannot be my disciple'. No one who looks back is 'fit for the kingdom'. Like the Son of Man the disciple has 'nowhere to lay her head'. There is a radical, even austere disinterestedness and unconditionality in the call to follow the gospel way of life.

How can we reconcile these opposing points of view? Could we say Jesus was appealing to our self-interest and spiritual egotism just in order to get us to sign up? And then he hits us with the truth? Is he stoking up our false motives in an attempt to be a best-selling teacher? Either we failed to read the small print; or we missed the truth that half the meaning of the teaching lies in the white spaces between the words.

Some people discover this soon after they start meditating, thinking that within days they will be levitating into the kingdom. Then they feel let down and disappointed by their own efforts and the results. They either just give up; or they give up and start again remembering what John Main said about letting go of their demands and expectations. The answer to the paradox is not, however, about different levels of

motivation. Self-centredness and self-forgetfulness cannot be reconciled. Nor is it enough to conclude that Jesus is saying that virtue is its own reward. Be virtuous and then you will be naturally rewarded. You soon find that the same chains of egotism are attached to this answer as well.

The ego's conception of desired and deserved merit, which so often lies at the core of religion, is in fact strongly rejected in the gospel teaching. The great summons to discipleship is to renounce everything 'for my sake and for that of the gospel', not for any expected personal reward. The expectation of merit in the minds of the labourers who worked in the vineyard all day were rudely shattered when the employer gave the same recompense to those who came at the end of the day. Not fair, the ego murmurs.

The Cross liberates us from the violence of the ego simply by exposing it in its true colours

More effort does not mean more reward. However well or badly you perform, 'we are all unprofitable servants'. Reward, then, is not reward at all. It is grace. This clearly does not fit well with the ethical system of reward and punishment. The simplistic ego that likes its answers in yes and no terms reels at all this. In an attempt to get control of the paradox, rather than be sucked into it, the ego has one more attempt. Alright, it says, let's aim to be completely disinterested. I won't think of a reward at all. I will try really hard to forget and renounce myself. (Actually, I am doing it quite well already..)

This approach is as counter-productive as the other one that more crudely expects rewards. It also underlies some very false asceticism in all religions and perhaps even a distorted understanding of celibacy in some Christian circles.

Discipleship cannot be reduced to

strategy.

The idea of reward is strong in the gospel. But it is there to be ignored. The Cross liberates us from the violence of the ego simply by exposing it in its true colours. Similarly, the exposing of the teaching constructed on the reward-punishment model or the self-renunciation model sets us free from spiritual egotism. Exposure is liberation. Both are extremes but the way is a middle way, narrow but leading to life.

If we can avoid looking for reward and give up trying to look holy we stand a very good chance of getting onto the wavelength of the spirit. Like the bigger phone networks this wavelength operates globally, connecting our spirit to the spirit of Christ and his to the spirit of God. And so eventually we see how we are all connected and then real ethics can begin to work. 'In this breakthrough,' said Meister Eckhart, 'I discover that God and I are one.'

We learn from our first class in meditation that saying the mantra is learning to take the attention off ourselves. There are other ways to learn to meditate but this is the most direct. One could not say for sure that another, more reward-oriented way wouldn't take you there also or perhaps even more quickly. To say it would reduce discipline to technique and replace the liberty of grace with the mechanics of karma. But, accepting this radical simplicity of selfless attention as the basic principle of meditation from the outset, also means we will soon run into the brick wall of failure. Actually, the sooner the better.

Looking for rewards means that we are living in the past. We expect that the kind of reward we got last time will come our way again. Many people who have had spiritual experiences long for them to be repeated. The ego lacks the higher imagination of the spirit that lives in the present. If the ego had three wishes, as it does in some fairytales, it would blow them. In fact, the kingdom does not repeat itself because it never ceases. It renews itself continuously. Perhaps, in the deepest mystery of the Godhead,

the presence that is the kingdom stays eternally fresh through us and perhaps it is our discovery of it that makes it possible. But it doesn't come and go and come again.

When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, Jesus says. Giving to the needy deserves merit. It is an action produced by our right-hand. But the left, the contemplative side, is not concerned with the merits of the action. The king in the story of the Last Judgment rewards

Then, perhaps, we stumbled across a path that might have first shown itself to us in any number of guises, secular, scientific, religious, spiritual, therapeutic, medical. It offered itself to us as a way back to innocence without abandoning our hard-won experience. It defied our ways of trying to reduce it to a tool that we manipulated. It taught us the wisdom to be harvested from failure and how to handle loss and disappointment. It showed us that self-knowledge lies deeper than self-analysis. Above all,



Talk on meditation at the Royal College of Physicians in Dublin

those who had not know the full meaning of what they were doing.

What we are called to, then, is a kind of second naïveté. The first naïveté was really naïve, innocent of experience and operating on trust and intuition. Often it led us to flashes of wisdom and insight. ('Who invented meditation?'). But it was not adequate for the greater challenges and losses that come with maturity. When we left Eden and lost that primal innocence of childhood we wandered a long time in the wilderness, in scepticism and isolation. We rejected what seemed like the childish promises of religion that were further exposed by the moral failures of their official representatives. We searched for a religion-less religion, a doctrine-free spirituality

it helped us to take the attention off ourselves and get there without trying to get anywhere, to be ambidextrous but not let our left hand know what our right hand was doing.

Amazingly we discovered that this was all absurdly simple. Without knowing it we had become childlike (again).

That was a long answer to the question about the School Retreat and I hope it was clear enough to see why this time in more intensive silence and regular meditation reduces rather than expands the ego. After a time it becomes a discovery of being in a total experience, where the absolute and simple reality of God is lived as if it really were central to our daily life. Of course it is total experience but for a limited time. On the seaward side

of Bere island there is a wilderness at the edge of Europe, looking out across the vast Atlantic. It is a relatively small island. But a wilderness doesn't have to be huge to restore us to ourselves. It just needs to be recognised and willingly entered.

At the end of the School retreat I have never known anyone cry and want to stay longer. We feel a certain sadness the time is up. We had learned to live from hour to hour in peace, equanimity and good purpose. But we also now have a strong wish to go and test what we have learned in the marketplace of life. This is very similar, I think, to what the disciples of Jesus might have felt after their first experience of the Resurrection. We never hear that they ran after him when he disappeared, feeling desperate because they had lost him again. Instead they ran back to the city, to their lives and their purpose in living with a new experience of meaning and energy.

As I wrote this there was white smoke coming from the Vatican chimney. Hopefully, it indicates a new era in the church's long life. The pain and domestic violence in this transitional era may be interpreted as signs of an emerging new naïveté in the global Christian mind. Let us pray that with Pope Francis leading the Catholic Church but serving all Christians, a simplified religion may emerge, with an authority flowing from deep spiritual experience at all levels of its life. A church that is aware that its morality derives from its mysticism. This church will be a light to the nations without trying to blind them with it. It will see the light of the world, that it recognises as its own, reflected all around itself, dancing in a thousand places. In the simplicity of a child asking a new question, the concern of professionals struggling to serve others better, and in all those who discover grace in silence and stillness.

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With much love,

Laurence Freeman, OSB

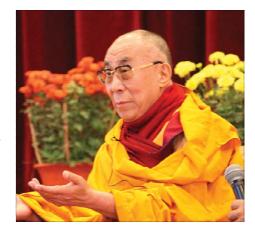
Days of sharing in faith

The WCCM Pilgrimage in India was an opportunity for meditators to deepen their experience of silence. The highlight was the day of dialogue with Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB and His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Sarnath, where the Buddha gave his first teaching



"When we speak about Jesus in our life, for many people today that sounds strange, or weird, about somebody that died 2000 year ago. But that is the essence of Christian faith. We know, we believe, that life does not end with death. The life of Jesus continues in a new way, with a new body, a new consciousness. And this new body, new life, new consciousness we call Christ, the Christ. For me the connection between the historical Jesus and the inner Christ is the most interesting and mysterious connection in my life. And to feel connected with that makes me feel connected with everything in this world".

"I Think it is very interesting see Jesus, "The Christ", not just as a kind of historical symbol, but as each of us carrying something like nature of God, or a blessing of God. That is what Christ symbolises. We carry that cross in real sense in our heart. Because God blessed it. That is, in a different sort of words, but quite similar with Buddha Nature".



"The cave resonates with the inner room of my heart"

By Henriette Hollaar



The murmur of voices died out, I managed to remain on my own for a while. Only a small batch of sunlight lightened the Cave, one of seven in the Barabar hills, 30 km to the North from Bodhgaya. For a few minutes I said my mantra

and besides that, nothing. Outside, in the sunlight, I realized how this cave resonates with the inner room of my heart, where the echo of the mantra has become familiar after 13 years. It was quite a long journey to my heart, and a lot of cutting, excavation and the chiselling to a high polish is still going on. Or as Fr. John puts it in 'Word into Silence': "We began to say the mantra in our mind. For modern Westerners there is no other way to begin. But if we progress with simple fidelity the mantra begins to sound not so much in our head, but rather in our heart'. A gentle hand took mine, and I was taken by our Indian guide to a side track, He wanted to show me another cave where an ascetic was living and praying. He had not said a word for 25 years. So many people over the past years have been my guides and have taken me by the hand for a while. I am not excavating on my own anymore, and more and more I can let myself be carried by the word and it's echo, and am less dependent on my own willpower.

"It is not enough to turn our minds to changing the image of the Church in the world, to be constantly thinking what effect will this have, what impression will that make. We have to begin not by changing the image of the Church, but by re-discovering ourselves as the image of God." (John Main)

Mixed feelings under the Bodhi tree By Roger Ferguson

At Bodhgaya our group went to the place of the Bodhi tree. There was a contrasting silence as hundreds circumnavigated the bodhi tree and temple. Others sat in rows, led in their devotions by the chant of a monk amplified to fill the acres of this holy place with overpowering holy monotony. Dozens of muscular young Tibetan monks in maroon vests and robes prostrated continuously on prayer boards. Our own group made its own act of devotion. We celebrated the Eucharist. Then there was a long silent meditation.

Humble pilgrims of any and every tradition and persuasion are accepted in this place. I walked with a steady tread back through the crowds. In the dark, beggars crawled towards me, mutilated by their parents at birth for pity's sake. So I left with a mixture of unease and peace. This contradiction is typical of so much of India, yet held together in this extraordinary location of ancient pilgrimage. Enlightenment as the Buddha taught is the understanding of suffering and its release.

Happy silence with friends

By Pat Nash



There were 38 in our group from seven different countries. We had a great deal of laughter sharing our different modes of transport - cars over very bumpy roads, an amazing train journey - especially the getting on and off, a precarious race of 10 rickshaws rushing to see the sunset ceremony on the Ganges, and plane journeys with endless amounts of security checks. We shared meals experiencing different foods, and were warmed and comforted by the discovery of delicious lemon and ginger tea. In Bodhgaya at bedtime it was so cold our teeth chattered and we had to wear every bit of clothing we had, including Buddhist blankets bought in the local market.

All fun to recall but the life changing experience came with the times of silence. Meditating together in many different surroundings – ancient caves, temple gardens, and the awesome place of 'enlightenment'. The highlight

for me was the sunrise boat ride on the Ganges witnessing the moving ceremony of the dead and the bathing of the living. With no spare hotel rooms we meditated together in gardens, corridors, bedrooms and for me a first - in the bar! In Bodhgaya we meditated under the Bodhi tree with monks and pilgrims of different traditions and from many countries. The day of dialogue with the Dalai Lama and Fr. Laurence was very special. We had the privilege of meditating with His Holiness and 100 pilgrims sat in respectful. This depth of shared silence is a gift to ponder and truly difficult to explain. So what is the nature of a pilgrimage? I have heard it said that 'it is with a true friend you can sit in happy silence'. Our pilgrimage to India gave us an abundance of this shared intimacy and for me it was a life changing experience.

"We are all in this journey together"

By Cathy Nobleman

I had the opportunity to share the beautiful devotion of Hindus, Christians and primarily Buddhist pilgrims who had made their way to some of their religion's most sacred sites. I carry with me images of thousands of prayer flags silhouetted against the sky at the Monkey Temple in Nepal; the memory of a woman moving, again and again from standing position, hands extended above her head in prayer, to a fully prostate position on her prayer mat at the Boudhanath stupa

in Kathmandu; the cacophony and colour of the thousands of monks and lay people praying at the Temple of the Enlightenment in Bodhgaya, India.

There is nothing more beautiful than people humbly and intently living and growing their faith. This trip served as a beautiful, colourful, noisy reminder that we are all on this journey together, no matter what form our worship takes and no matter where we are in the world.

Like prayer flags

By Kit Dollard,

We were an unusual group, aged 30's to 80's, eleven nationalities. We had never met before and yet that awkward silence was easily broken and we began talking to each other as old friends. We shared each other's stories, experiences and lives. One image I shall never forget: the Nepalese prayer flags that are hoisted up high, on lengths of twine so that the wind carries the prayers written on them up to God. "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going." [John 3.8] So it seemed to me, that we as pilgrims, represented those prayer flags. Each one being carried up to God.

And the gifts we received? From the increasing duality of thinking so present in our culture, we found the freedom of plurality, of acceptance, of forgiveness and kindness. Over our time together we surely became Christ for each other.

Meditatio News

Meditatio Centre is opened in London Forum on addiction



The Meditatio Centre was opened on 19 March in London. Fr. Laurence Freeman gave a short talk and led a meditation session for a group of about 100 people. Based in Islington, the Centre will offer a rich program of workshops, talks and groups.

- When I was a little boy I was fascinated by the idea of centres. I started to keep a list with all the centres in London. So I am very happy to be here with you to celebrate the opening of this new Meditatio Centre. I am sure it will lead us, and those who come here, to their own personal centre.

Because any physical centre is simply a symbol of that.

- We all hope the Meditatio Centre will provide a space for people to offer and share gifts and talents. So we can develop our work in different outreach programs - said Briji Waterfield special projects coordinator for WCCM.

The Centre is located in St Marks, Myddelton Square, London EC1R 1XXTel + 44 (0) 020 7278 2070. See more photos of the opening and more information at http://www.wccmmeditatio.org/ or contact meditatio@wccm.org

Forum for schools in Poland



The Meditatio Forum on Christian Meditation in Your School was held in Warsaw 31st January to 1st February.

Fr. Laurence Freeman, Dr. Cathy Day and Ernie Christie (from Australia) and Bogdan Białek (psychologist, from Poland) were the speakers. The event had about 150 participants, mainly teachers, psychologists and principals from school of all over the country.

"The general reaction was very positive. Ernie and Cathy gave a wonderful witness how meditation can be introduced to children in schools", said Andrzej Ziolkowski, national coordinator for Poland, adding that they were planning a follow up for this year in Warsaw.

Forum on addiction in Thailand

By Mike Sarson, Founder Director of UK charity East West Detox



Father Laurence visited Wat Thamkrabok in Thailand on the 25th January to meet the Abbot, monks, nuns and community and observe the various stages and elements that make up their unique holistic approach to treatment and recovery from addiction. The visit started with a tour around the caves where it all started followed by a visit to the 'Sajja' temple where a sacred vow of abstinence is taken by everybody before they can commence treatment.

A group of school children from St John Mary International School in Saraburi were invited to the Monastery to partake in drug preventative education. The children accompanied us to the treatment area to observe a group of patients partake in the herbal detox purging and cleansing ritual and afterwards engaged in meditation practice led by Father Laurence.

The following day began with meditation led by Father Laurence before the start of the Meditatio Forum on Addiction & Recovery. A dialogue followed on the importance of taking a vow in the recovery process between the Abbot, Buddhist monks of Wat Thamkrabok and Father Laurence.

Retreats and Events

International School Retreat in Asia



The first WCCM International School Retreat for the Asia Pacific region was held from 17-24 January 2013 at the Seven Fountains Retreat Centre in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Thirty nine retreatants from seven countries representing Australia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand shared this spiritually enriching experience, led by Fr. Lau-

rence and assisted by Pauline Peters, Kathy Houston and Leonardo Corrêa. Complete silence was the order of the seven days. The daily programme included seven periods of meditation, four sessions of walking meditation, Fr. Laurence's teaching each morning centered on the theme Who am 1?". Interviews with spiritual companions and celebration of the "Eucharist every"

evening.

"Silence, stillness and simplicity. Words that I have heard before. Experiencing it in a group in TOTAL SILENCE is another thing! Being bonded to a group in SILENCE is a further experience. My experience in these areas has given me hope and has empowered me to realize that in our world"

Fr. Eugene Fernandez CSsR

• • •

"In this week

I have been called to gentle solitude In the embrace of community In an oasis away from frenzied activity

To experience deep within- in myself, others, creation.

Rest and respite,

Healing and re-creation

In the silence of God's gentle love

To be sent out again

To live out my vocation of love"

Fr. Gerard Theraviam

All the talks of the School Retreat 2013 are available on our Meditatio Store (http://www.meditatiostore.com/)

Laurence Freeman and Richard Rohr in Chicago



Nearly 600 people attended the "New Thinking for a New Era" conference with Fr. Laurence and FR. Richard Rohr, in Chicago February 15-17,

2013. Laurence and Richard spoke on how the practice of contemplative prayer can change our own consciousness and can have the power to transform our world into a more loving, peaceful place. In addition to the teaching, there were seven periods of meditation, and it was powerful to experience the silence with so many in one place. Many were touched and transformed by the teaching and prayer. It was not just a conference, but a wonderful contemplative experience.





Love & Silence: Amour, by Michael Haneke



There were times while I was watching this miracle of a film that I did not know whether the breathing I could hear was coming from me, the person sitting next to me in the dark, or the characters up on the screen. It is that intimate; it is that silent; it is that inclusive. Not inclusive in a tired, politically-correct way, but in the simple and direct sense that this film - more than any I can remember seeing - is about you and about me. The point is subtly but profoundly made in the first few minutes of the movie. After a brief, heart-stopping prelude, we are confronted with a screen filled with an audience looking at us. Rows of expectant, fidgeting, settling faces - they are a mirror image of us. The performance, the playing, the story is about to begin. But, as always with Haneke (his film Caché in particular) the guestion hangs unsettlingly in the air: who is looking at whom here? And who is

this really about?

The story, as offered to us, is pared down to the bone. It couldn't be simpler and there could hardly be less going on, compared to say, Skyfall, Life of Pi, Argo, Zero Dark Thirty - indeed almost any film you can think of. The action – such as it is – takes place almost exclusively in the apartment of an ageing Parisian couple who are retired music teachers. Anne endures a number of strokes which render her progressively incapable and finally utterly dependent on her lifelong partner Georges. We watch as the machinery of their lives, like the elegantly grubby apartment itself, ceases implacably to function. But because this director (always the one watching us watching) refuses the ready-made tricks of the cinema trade (stock characters, manufactured suspense, the reflex impatience of most visual storytelling) it is easy to be overwhelmed by the sense that actually everything is going on here. We are being shown our life and our death.

Early in the film the couple's daughter tells her father how, as a child, she sometimes heard the two of them making love. It reassured her, she says. She knew they loved each other. This subliminal image of the couple's passionate grapplings of the past informs the way we see each of their new awkward embraces: hauling her up from the toilet, inching her into a chair, turning her over in bed, and then the final coming together of their bodies. This too is love.

In the hands of nearly every other director - especially one taking the Hollywood dollar - we know how this would play out. Can you think of any films featuring older characters which have avoided the swamp of sentimentality? Quite. And the chief offender is usually the soundtrack; the music that tells us what we are supposed to be feeling. But Haneke knows that the undoctored soundtrack of our lives of love - is silence. We hear music in this film only as heard by the characters themselves, either performed at a piano or played on a CD. Each time - just as we anticipate the transformative epiphany with the couple listening and the Schubert Impromptu working its redemptive alchemy - the music is cut decisively short.

There is to be none of that ready consolation here. What redemption comes, if any does, is won by getting through each impossible moment, working out what new embrace is required of us now, not averting our gaze. This film teaches us how to do that by, in Matthew Arnold's words, "seeing life steadily and seeing it whole". Quietly telling someone a story as they cry out in pain – this too is love.



A Journey into the Heart

The last three years of my life have been for me an extraordinary adventure. I left a very good job in South America, packed all my stuff away and went off travelling around the world. It was truly a journey into the unknown, since I did not have much of a plan for what I would do. I simply knew that I needed to shift perspectives and priorities in my life. I had recently gone over the mythical line of turning 40 and, while in many ways I was very happy and thankful for the opportunities and the life that I had built up to that point, I knew deep inside that I wanted the next 40 years to be fundamentally different at the core of my being.

I would go on to follow a very exotic itinerary - from Venezuela to Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia, Nepal, India, Egypt, Turkey, France and England - before finally settling down in Toronto, Canada, where the rest of my family lives. However, the more meaningful itinerary was really a spiritual one, a journey one can make without ever leaving the living room of our house. It is the journey of discovery of our True Self, which is a process that requires that we rid ourselves of all concepts and ideas that we may have about who we think we are, and allow ourselves, perhaps, one day to stand truly naked under the Light of Creation, the Spirit of Life, God. For me, the path to follow in

this journey would be the practice of pure prayer, the prayer of the Heart, or Christian Meditation, as it was taught to me by Fr. Laurence Freeman, OSB.

I took the practice of meditation with me in my travels, and every morning and every evening, wherever I was, I would sit down in silence and stillness and sound my word into my heart. When I did this nothing ever happened, but somehow I felt I was learning something about letting go. Then I accepted Fr. Laurence's invitation to spend a year at the Meditatio

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House in London, living in contemplative community, deepening my practice of meditation and welcoming others to our daily practice. It was then that I began to discover another dimension of my journey, a deeper and far more powerful one: it is the sharing of the journey with other travelers. Sitting in silence together or sharing the simple tasks of keeping the house in order, welcoming visitors or working for the broader Community around the world, my time at the Meditatio House took me to another

place of understanding of my spiritual life. But as I found joy in the simplicity of this life and in the sharing with other fellow meditators, I also found myself not very able to explain what I was experiencing.

It was during the recent Christmas holidays, when I joined other meditators in a unique pilgrimage to India, that I would finally find the words to express the revolution that was taking place inside me. There in Calcutta, we went to do volunteer work with the Sisters of Charity, Mother Theresa's remarkable organization dedicated to look after poor people at the ugliest margins of society. And it was there in Calcutta, tending to the most basic needs of people who no longer could properly look after themselves, without any hope of ever achieving anything great or being in anyway rewarded for what I was doing, that I finally understood the great mystery that gives meaning to the practice of meditation and to everything else in this life: God cannot be understood as a concept, it can only be experienced in relationship.

So I have now come home to my family, which is my oldest relationship in this life. I have come home after a very long journey, to begin everything again. From the silence and stillness to the daily acts of love, I am learning every day to be truly myself.



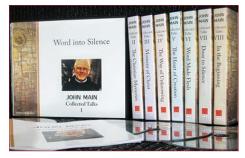
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Releases

John Main's Collected Talks

All of John Main's talks have now been technically enhanced and their order reconfigured, by Peter Ng, to correspond directly with the books of the same title.



"Although it is more than thirty years since he died, as I re-listen to John Main's talks, I am still amazed at the power, clarity and radical simplicity of what he taught. How luminous they are. How fresh and joyful in their directness. How unchanged by the passage of a generation is the urgency of his message. I know of no other teaching in this form that carries the spirit of the gospel, as a living Word, so directly and purely into the heart".

Laurence Freeman OSB.

"It was these talks of John Main that inspired me to start meditating. There was a certain power and persuasive authority in his voice. Listening to the talk time and again sustained me in the wobbly early stages and has kept me steady on the path. I have put together this collection of John Main's talks so that both beginners to meditation and ongoing meditators may be encouraged

by the authoritative and yet gentle guidance of this contemporary master of prayer".

Peter Ng, Trustee WCCM

"Something in me knows that Father John knows what he is talking about, it doesn't always happen which may be my inattention, but often enough listening to his talks I have a sense of "yes, this is true and I need to hear this for my life, thank you!"... it is rare to find this in my experience".

Judi Taylor, Australia

"John Main always speaks with the authority of one who is able to access the depths of his being, he speaks from the same place where he prays, simple clear authentic".

Paul Taylor, Australia

John Main's spoken word is powerful because it resonates from 30 years of commitment to the daily practice of meditation. In addition he speaks not from the head, but from the heart, and his own lived experience. With his fine English diction, pregnant pauses, and teaching from the heart, John Main's spoken word continues to spread around the world."

Paul Harris, Canada

The Collected Talks on CD (and books with the same title)

I Word into Silence
II The Christian Mysteries:
Prayer and Sacrament
III Moment of Christ
IV The Way of Unknowing
V The Heart of Creation
VI Word Made Flesh
VII Door to Silence
VIII In the Beginning
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The new titles are being launched for the Meditatio Series, pocket sized books: The Prayer that Jesus Taught (Gerry Pierse), Meditation With Children (Laurence Freeman) and From Anxiety to Peace (John Main). You can order it through WCCM Amazon page (http://astore.amazon.com/w0575-20)

To order: Please contact your resource center or supplier for the price in your local currency

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