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Christian Meditation in Asia

John Main Seminar with over 400 participants in Hong Kong, the new Meditation Centre in Indonesia and a day of interfaith dialogue in Malaysia



John Main Seminar in Hong Kong



Christian Meditation Centre, Indonesia



Interfaith Dialogue, Malaysia

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A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

Whenever wisdom guides us it takes us to an encounter at the heart of reality. At first the way it leads us can seems a bit off-centre, not what we expected and yet strangely recognizable just for being so true and balanced. In this way we see how wisdom is more than common sense. We invariably meet this distinction in the wisdom of the desert monks whose spiritual descendants we are.

When Abba Romanus was dying his disciples gathered round him and asked, 'how should we conduct ourselves?' Its natural enough to want to extract wisdom from those whom we see to possess it, in the same way that thirsty people will squeeze water from a likely source. What were they asking? Were they saying 'what are we going to do when you, our teacher, have gone?' Or simply 'give us some tips we can say we got from you as your last words?' Until the heart is truly opened beyond the grasping of the ego, there is always some self-centredness in the guestions of a disciple and even in his way of serving his teacher.

The dying abba's reply is a master's shrewd and gentle response to the mixed motives of his disciples: it succeeds in meeting the questioners where they are at but without compromising his own integrity. Jesus replied to all tricky questions in this way. Romanus says simply (and at first sight in an off-centre way): 'I do not think that I have ever told one of you to do something without having first made the decision not to get angry if what I have said were not done. And so we have lived in peace all our days.'

The brilliance of his mind and the gentleness of his wisdom here is worth reflecting on. We see, even on his deathbed, how clear, fresh and calm is his mind. His reply is focused on those who are asking him the ques-

tion not on any impending fear or his own sense of loss. His compassion and his wisdom both flow from the same source and merge in the sharpness and generosity of his careful words. Unexpectedly, too, he replies not with the sententious moralising that his disciples may even have piously wanted. Instead, he speaks from experience – all the more authoritatively because it was personal experience but experience of what he had shared with them over a lifetime. It was practical wisdom, first-hand not remembered from books or articles. It was personal not egocentric. And it gave them pause for thought and something to think long

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and deeply about – how to avoid the great temptation and pitfall of the idealistic mind - sadness and resentment at failure.

When a child is safely brought into the world, after months of tests and the parental struggle with fears that can never be rationalised away, there erupts a very rare kind of joy. A joy that is entirely contained in the event. Yet it is without – as yet – any possessiveness or any projection of hopes born from our own failures onto the new life that has so far known only success, having simply succeeded in being born. This primal joy of new life is at the heart of the Christmas story.

Religion is more concerned with symbols than dogma. And so, in the Christmas season it is a set of symbols, passed down the centuries though often now interrupted in their transmission, that capture our imagination and emotions. The family seeking shelter. A baby born in an animal feeding trough. Three exotic visitors. Angels. Shepherds. A silent mother and protective father. Emigration to a safer country. These symbols come together as a story that bears constant re-telling and pondering. But at its heart is this undisputed joy that accompanies birth even in the most difficult circumstances, and even if only for a moment before the cares and fears of life return. With each new life hope is reborn and the world is changed.

The Magi came to do homage, laying down their millennia of accumulated wisdom before the Word become flesh. They did not ask advice, as Romanus' disciples did of their dying master. If you cannot read the selfauthenticating truth in a new-born child's presence there is no point in asking questions about its meaning. The shepherds, like Mary and Joseph before, were disturbed and scared, by the own special annunciation from the angel that a momentous event had occurred so near them. They were marginal people, untouchable, excluded from normal society. Why, in all the lopsidedness of wisdom, should they be the first to hear the news that would for the rest of time penetrate the minds, hearts and social organization of the 'whole people'?

So the Christmas story, in its charm and terror, enters the memory of the human race. If we find it dull or dead we are reading it with dead eyes, as a past event or as a relic of a dying religion. The connection with the interior birth of wisdom has been lost. The story touches awake the deepest concerns and hopes embedded in the human mind. Listening to it clarifies

the mind and releases its twin rivers of wisdom and compassion. From his first silence Jesus awakens us to the meaning of this simple, irreducible humanness.

As Romanus taught in his last words, becoming (truly) human is a life-time's training. This is the essential meaning of our lives, just to be wholly human. Within it, though, there are many other kinds of training we do - learning to walk and talk, to read and write and pass exams, to handle emotions and desires, to make and repair commitments and to play our multi-faceted role in life with changing job descriptions. All these secondary trainings enhance or improve us. We need all the help we can get to master these trainings. But the essential training is not to improve but simply to be our selves. Isn't this why the story of Jesus begins with seeing him as a baby that can do nothing except be himself.

The paradox is that this symbol of a totally dependent and helpless infant eventually becomes the great metaphor of human maturity at its peak. 'Unless you become like a little child, you will never enter the kingdom of God.' This doesn't mean what it says – remain dependent and helpless. Yet it means exactly what it says.

This becomes absurdly and obviously clear as soon as we have begun to develop the training of the mind, including the heart, that we call meditation. This used to be seen as a highlevel, late-entry practice for a few people who had preserved the necessary passion for truth and freedom of will to embrace it. The mainline Church thought contemplation was reserved for these chosen few. And even today many spiritual teachers in Asia believe that meditation is not really meant for lay people.

If there is a sign that we are entering

a new era of human self-awareness it is that so many people now are seeking out the training that meditation once offered to a few. We also know that children, at their own level of awareness, can and like to meditate. In Sydney a few weeks ago I listened to Cardinal Pell, one of the Pope Francis's inner group of reforming Cardinals, speak to a large gathering of teach-

ized by a variety of scientific approaches. The most prominent of these came in the cultural revolution of the sixties with Transcendental Meditation – from the Hindu tradition 'secularized' and given a kind of scientific explanation. Most recently, Mindfulness Training, as pioneered by Jon Kabat-Zing and others has brought 'meditation' into the institutional mainstream with medi-



ers that he had invited me to speak to about meditation. He was urging them to build meditation integrally into the children's education. A few days later he did the same talking with a group of his priests about clerical spirituality. The contemplative dimension of religion was clearly back, at least in his vision, at the centre of the church's life. And when this happens, when the offcentredness of wisdom is rebalanced, everything looks different, clearer and more hopeful.

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Although meditation was born and is embedded in the spiritual wisdom traditions, it has recently been popular-

cal and commercial credibility. As TM secularized dhyana Hindu meditation, Mindfulness secularized sattipatthana one of the Buddha's eightfold path. Many would say Buddhism needs less 'secularisation' than other religions because it has a fundamentally rationalistic basis and is therefore already closer to the spirit of the western scientific method. In both these movements religious wisdom is kept outside the evidence-based results of the technique.

For many people, especially Westerners distrustful of 'mainline religion' but also for many religious people unacquainted with their own contemplative spirituality, these secular-scientific forms of meditation have been welcome. In both TM and Mindfulness the approach is presented as a technique that is kept quite distinct from a spiritual or religious interpretation and is motivated by the desire for (measurable) individual well-being, especially for those suffering from stress or other psychological disorders. Both have significantly contributed to the relief of suffering and to the sum total of human happiness. They have also significantly influenced the profiles of religion and the meaning of spirituality in our time. Not least, they have challenged religious leaders to examine the shortfall in their own churches' spiritual depth and accessibility. Why, with the help of such 'secular' movements, have so many felt it enough to see themselves as 'spiritual not religious'?

In a few years, according to the estimate of their bishops, two-thirds of Dutch Catholic churches will be closed. Yet, meditation is not a band-wagon to jump onto in institutional desperation; and there is no guarantee that the teaching of meditation in the churches will reduce the numerical decline of these bodies. New forms of Church and worship are already emerging. The most famous theologian of the 20th century, Karl Rahner, said that the 'devout Christian of the future will be a mystic or there will be no such thing. The obvious mistake for the Christian world would be to turn meditation. taught from its own spiritual tradition, into a technique designed to save the Church. Its meaning is the saving of the world from its obsession with techno-science. One significant difference is that if it is taught from its original spiritual context it will be presented as a discipline rather than as a technique. Techniques may lead to disciplines. Disciplines are meant to lead to freedom from the ego.

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TM and Mindfulness have helped

many whom the churches were not able to reach. They accessed ancient spiritual wisdom and packaged it brilliantly in secular ways in order to help those suffering from the extremes of the imbalances of modern culture. Research results have also shown how real are the psychological and physical benefits. For the Christian this illustrates, rather than explains away, the sacrament of the body. But what happens when the imbalance of life has been redressed and a new measure of peace and well-being, indeed a new dimension to one's humanity, has been revealed? It is here on the frontier of science that the measuring tools yield to the pilgrim's staff. Meditation, however it was first understood, may now evolve from a technique for wellbeing into a spiritual path towards that

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fullness of human experience that is reached only through the transcendence of the 'objectifying mind' and its ego-consciousness.

Science itself now points to this new frontier. We know that atoms are not solid, that matter and energy are inter-changeable and that what we call permanence is a trick of the eye or a self-delusion. The question of consciousness, of 'mind' as distinct from brain function, is now a central question of science. When we say in the modern tone of voice 'what I think is.,' or 'it seems to me' we are required to ask who or what is the I or the me in those statements.

Mindfulness was taught by the Bud-

dha. It was also addressed by Jesus -'stay awake, be alert, pray at all times, set your mind on God's presence before everything else'. It begins with simple attention to the immediate experiences, both physical and mental - rather than to the opinions or symbolism we later construct from them. In a chronically distracted culture like our own this simple first step - being present to ourselves - may seem like a mighty or esoteric leap. But even if it is harder for us now than in the past, it is still simple. Once achieved it quickly introduces us into a new series of steps that lead to the progressive expansion of attention beyond the self-centering gravity of the ego. This is where meditation becomes not only therapeutic but wondrous.

This elementary power of attention has enormous potential to liberate us from old patterns and return us to the direct awareness of a child. For religious people it gives new meaning to prayer – this was the discovery of the desert teachers. It also rejuvenates the understanding of the scriptures, which speak about God in terms of real presence and direct experience rather than through thick conceptual or cultural filters.

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As all dialogue shows, the differences are as important as the similarities. Teaching meditation as a spiritual practice, we are urged to move beyond the 'observing', self-investigating, curious self and to take the searchlight of consciousness off ourselves in pure attention ('worship in spirit and in truth'). In Mindfulness, for example, a variety of techniques are presented. In meditation in a Christian tradition the different forms of prayer are an accessible and rich context for spiritual practice; but the central simplicity and perseverance in the contemplative discipline taught is foundational. Certain Mindfulness practices can no doubt be included in the spiritual life of the Christian meditator. In Christian meditation the emphasis on a sustained period of silence in the practice is fundamental, as is the faithful attention to a primary

into the equation, as the Christian doctrine of grace well understands Or as Confucius did, who said 'our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall'.



discipline that serves progressively to take us beyond thought and self-consciousness (in our case, attention to the mantra). Above all there is the mysterious evidence that meditation creates community; and that this community then becomes the company in whose friendship the personal journey goes further and deeper over time. What seems like a means to an end at the beginning – the group – evolves into a heart-opening manifestation of the goal itself.

Meditation as a discipline of a spiritual path may seem to be more demanding or to set the fences higher. But this very focus on transcendence and the fullness of being transforms the fear of failure that keeps us back from the audaciousness inherent in any spiritual journey. Failure is predictable and for that reason can be brought

capacity for direct and immediate perception of reality through enhanced attention – is always part of a continuum. Experience produces personality and forms character. Ultimately it makes culture. So when culture goes wrong – and we have seen many examples of that in modern history and today – only a return to purer consciousness, deeper attention, on a large scale will put it right. We need to emphasise

what was once taken for granted in

families and institutions. And we need

to practice and train in what people

once absorbed by example and tradi-

Experience is experience however,

wherever we find it. Experience - the

tion.

Habits and assumptions need constantly to be subjected to investigation. That is Pope Francis' call today to

all Christians. We then discern what are good, conscious habits and what are bad, subliminally driven habits. When habits are reviewed honestly we see new patterns emerging as signs of the nature of the reality that we are growing in and also passing through. Wisdom then comes with this new perspective; and the 'hope for the salvation of the world lies in the greatest number of wise people'.

So a curious meeting takes place now between the different channels by which the wisdom of meditation is exchanged. The gulf between the religious and the secular is doublebridged. The secular approach to meditation leads to levels of experience that awaken the spiritual sense. The spiritual approach to meditation becomes accessible to the secular world whose fear or antipathy to religion has been reduced. Provided there is no competition and much good will, there will be no winners and no losers in this evolution of contemporary spirituality and science.

As the Church and society at large becomes more mindful - and so more contemplative – the old stories by which humanity has expressed its furthest vision will revive their power to teach and guide us all. The shepherds and the wise men on long journeys, the homeless saviour and the silent parents pondering this vast meaning in their hearts will bring the inaccessible mystery into concrete experience. And we will look on each other with new eyes as we see whose Mind it is we all possess.

May the New Year be a milestone of clarity and peace in your life's journey.

Ocamens

With much love

Laurence Freeman OSB



Voices of the John Main Seminar 2013

The John Main Seminar 2013 was a historic moment in the life of The World Community for Christian Meditation. In September, China hosted the event in Hong Kong for the first time. It was a gathering of 400 friends from 17 countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Fiji, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, Mauritius, New Zealand, Philippines, Portugal, Singapore, Taiwan, UK, USA and Hong Kong. The Camaldolese Benedictine monk Fr Joseph Wong was the speaker on the theme "Desert Wisdom & Oriental Spirituality, Inner Silence."

Below, some impressions of the Seminar:



"I feel privileged to be standing here today and see hundreds of you from local places and different countries and see your interest in deepening your methods of prayer (...). Please be sure of my support for the practice of Christian Meditation, so it may benefit more Christians in Hong Kong and in the whole world". (Cardinal John Tong Hon)

"These days have been beautiful, both at the pre-seminar retreat and here at the JMS. I feel maybe this was one of the best conference I ever had. With people so much involved, you feel the effect of many years of meditation, people really interested. Thank you very much. I certainly will remember the World Community for Christian Medita-

tion in my Daily Prayer, and I ask you to also remember me in your prayers." (Fr. Joseph Wong OSB, Cam)

"The community of Hong Kong and Asia experienced peace and intimacy with Christ. Weren't we, led by the Spirit, treading Fr. John's footsteps with meditators globally where he learned meditation in Malaya? 'Meditation creates community!' We marveled at the wisdom of Fr. Laurence at the pre-seminar retreat. His teaching about paradox and life's binaries, including East and West, gave us hope of ultimate unity. And Fr. Joseph Wong OSB Cam, , helped us see the similarities and differences between Christian and Buddhist meditation, underscoring how the prayer of

Jesus brings us compassion and healing through the presence of Christ,, whereas Buddhist meditation aspires to purify the heart to bring out one's `Buddha nature..' How enlightening! Deo Gratias!" (Lina Lee, WCCM Coordinator, Hong Kong)



"The JMS is fabulous because you have the sense you are in a world wide community. Sometimes when you meditate in your group at home you also can find a sense of community, but when you attend the JMS you realize that it is really a "Monastery Without Walls". It gives you a great connection with the diverse community that WCCM is". (Mary Anne Gould, from United States)

"This meeting is very good. I can meet all the other meditators from many countries and get more inspired to do my own meditation". (Johanna Wisoli, Indonesia)

Before the JMS

The Pre-seminar Retreat also happened in Hong Kong with hundreds of participants. Fr. Laurence Freeman spoke on the theme, East-West: The Two Halves of the Soul.

There was also an ETW School Event for meditators from China, led by Fr Laurence and generously sponsored by the National Coordinator for China, Liz King and her husband Albert. 16 meditators came from mainland China, Shanghai and Taiwan (representing laity, religious and clergy) to deepen their practice and understanding of the teaching, and to learn ways to share the teaching more effectively with others. They are deeply committed to introducing meditation more widely, sometimes under great difficulty.

ONLINE: you can watch a summary of the talks of the JMS by Fr. Joseph Wong in our website (www.wccm.org).

New John Main Centre in Indonesia

By Johanna Wisoli



The Indonesian community celebrated its 10th anniversary in September. They have now 112 groups. The celebration was even more special because of the opening and blessing of the new John Main Centre for Meditation in East Java, built thanks to the generosity of meditators, Mr and Mrs Suhendro. The centre has a chapel, conference rooms, a John Main room, dining room and accommodation for 60. The centre is located at Cikereteg Village, Province of West Jawa.

"As a Catholic, I had a dream for a long time to have a prayer house for church members. This was the idea long ago before I came to know Christian Meditation. After I became a member of the Christian Meditation Community, I began to perceive this idea as God's plan for me. I saw the rapid growth of the community over the last few years, and I started to think that we needed a new place dedicated to support and accommodate our needs" said Mr. Suhendro.

"I believe the existence of this center will bring many benefits to the community. In addition to being a learning and meditation center, it will also serve as a national library and gallery for the Indonesian Christian Meditation community, a gathering place for meetings, school of meditation events, such as ETW, or a place of retreat for both groups and individuals. I hope the existence of this center will greatly contribute to the development of human resources and will benefit the community at the local and national level" said Florentina Kindawati, WCCM National Coordinator for Indonesia.

WCCM Regional National Coordinators Meetings



The last four WCCM Regional National Coordinators Meetings took place in the last few months: in September, in Hong Kong for Asia and the Pacific; in October in Italy for South Europe; in November for North America and the Caribbean in the US; and in Argentina for South America (photo).

New National Coordinators



Celina Chan and Liz King

Liz King, who has dedicated the last 10 years introducing meditation more widely in China, steeped down from her role as national coordinator. Celina Chan of Hong Kong has accepted Fr. Laurence's invitation to take on the role for China going

forward. Fr Joe Pereira has stepped down after leading the Indian meditation community for many years, and Fr Laurence has appointed Bernadette Pimento from Mumbai to assume the role.

Monsignor Manny Gabriel, national coordinator for The Philippines, will be succeeded by Mitos Santiseban, who has served as assistant coordinator for the last two years. We thank Liz, Fr Joe and Msg Manny for their dedicated leadership and welcome Celina, Bernadette and Mitos.

In the UK and Australia, the Community welcomes Roz Stockley and Jan Wylie and thanks Janet Robbins and Stephen Holgate for their service.

News

Cardinal Pell addresses a conference for teachers in Australia



In November, Fr Laurence gave a National conference in Australia to 450 meditators. He was invited by Cardinal Pell to give a talk to Sydney Clergy, and led a 2 day Conference for Meditation in Schools to more than 400 teachers, principals and catechists organized by the Sydney Catholic Education Office and the NSW Christian Meditation Community. Fr Laurence led the conference with Dr Cathy Day, Director of Catholic Education Townsville. Cardinal Pell opening the Conference for Teachers stressstressed the importance of meditation as a way of prayer in Schools.

Some excerpts from his opening address: "I'm delighted that Fr Laurence is here, and I'm absolutely delighted that so many of you are here. Because I think that what Fr Laurence is doing and you are doing is a good thing. But also I suspect that it not only will be useful, but I think it could be one of those activities that young people respond to instinctively and are grateful

for.

We follow the one true God, the mighty transcendent spirit of Love, who is the Father of Jesus Christ. And that's one reason why I'm so keen in encouraging this form of meditation, precisely because it's so God centred and it's so Christ centred. And it's a beautiful activity. And I've seen it work. When I go out into the schools, sometimes I'm taken to the meditation classes and they'll meditate for me. And you know how you have to close your eyes, well I nearly always cheat. Because before it starts I will identify what I think is the most fidgety young man in the group, and then half way through the allotted time, I'll open my eyes to see whether he's quiet and composed and meditating or whether he's fidgety and distracted. And overwhelmingly he's praying".

South America



Retreat in Ecuador

Fr Laurence had nearly a month on a Latin American teaching tour in Argentine, Brazil, Uruguay and Ecuador where he led seminars and retreats, gave talks to business leaders, teachers and catechists and a panel on Religion and Neuroscience. It was Fr Laurence's first visit to the beautiful country of Ecuador

where he led a retreat at 10.000 feet with the developing enthusiastic Quito community led by the Coordinator Raul Guzman and his wife Ana. The National Coordinators' Nth America and Caribbean Regional meeting in Jacksonville began the tour and was followed by the Latin American Regional meeting in Buenos Aires.

New Zealand School Retreat



The second New Zealand School Retreat led by Kath Houston from Australia and New Zealander, Fr Peter Murphy, in October, was held in a small convent and church, six hours from Auckland. During the seven day silent retreat, 17 meditators formed a small community that revolved around the daily rhythm of prayer.



Meditatio

Meditation with Children Tour in US and Canada



Dr. Cathy Day, Director of the Townsville Catholic Education Office in Queensland, Australia, and Ernie Christie, the Deputy Director, went to United States and Canada in September and October to lead a tour on Meditation with Children. St Paul, MN, San Francisco, CA, Houston, TX, Phoenix, AZ, Jacksonville, FL and Toronto, ONTO.

"People were very interested, enthusiastic. When you have these full day seminars, people are very quiet in the morning and by the end of the day, they just could not stop talking, they want to chat with us. They want to know more and more about, not just teaching Christian Meditation in schools, but also for themselves. We had a lot of "first-time-meditators" coming, and the experience for them was something remarkable. (Dr. Cathy Day)

"It was a great trip, so many warm people, and there is a "happy hunger" for meditation; they really want to do this. We met about 600 hundred new people and we feel we have 600 new friends. Hopefully we will came back one day and we will see the fruits". (Ernie Christie)

Meditatio Seminar on Breaking the Cycle of Violence, Mexico City



James Alison

Meditation is a way of breaking the cycle of violence, starting at the personal level. This was the central idea of the Meditatio Seminar held in Mexico City. in October. , Fr. Laurence Freeman, Fr. James Alison and three Mexicans, Pastora Rebeca Montemayor, Eduardo Garza and Alberto Athie were the speakers in this event at Universidad Iberoamericana.

"I liked the simplicity and the directness, each one in his own way, Alison and Laurence – speaking to people like me who are not knowledgeable in theology. But now I can understand and indeed believe many things that before I could not". (Susana Clavé Almeida, from Mexico)

"The teaching that we have received here has been very enriching and very substantial because it has brought us, through meditation, in a very simple way, to an intimacy, to a meeting in prayer, with the heart, with God. In this way, practising it, doing it, we can begin to make the connections that allow us to continue growing in this way, and to break the cycle of violence. Why? Because we grow in peace, in tranquility, and the love of God that is inside us expands over all". (José López Esquer, from Mexico)

"It was a very rich sharing, because we had teachers and educators from different branches of life with real experience of what it is to live through the trials of violence over political, religious and ideological issues. And the three Mexican speakers gave us such enriching life lessons because they allowed us to see the importance of developing a more contemplative spirit in the way we treat each other. That is to say, they allowed us a glimpse of ways of creating links between a more meditative practice and another way of engaging in the creation of a less violent community. So I have realised that the Mexican people here have great interest in the practice of meditation and have plenty of desire to learn how to create the connection between meditation and a spirit of presence in the face of the violent realities that mark their country. (James Alison, speaker)

"The conclusion is that we have a level of violence in Mexico that we cannot face. It is all conveyed through statistics, and we are no longer bothered when we hear about 30, 40, 50 people dying in one day. It becomes just a number. We have to become aware that we are violent people, too, and once we have managed that we can reach out, like the Meditatio project is doing, , touching the community, engaging us and others, and beyond this, beginning meditation with children, so that when a child becomes 15, 20, a teenager or an adult, he or she has the ability to remain calm. Having realised a personal relationship with Jesus, there is no need to fear questions of identity and the daily problems of life". (Enrique Lavin, National Coordinator for Mexico)

Malaysia celebrates their 20th Anniversary with interfaith event Awakening to Oneness

By Sara Lee Turner, WCCM Singapore



My meditation practice has awakened in me a wish to know people from other faith traditions who meditate so that we can pray together. I believe in the power of silence. Where words are often inadequate to discuss beliefs, silence allows us to reach deeper levels together with respect and love. Spending a day with over 150 Malaysians from Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Bahai, Sikh, Christian and indigenous backgrounds, I was filled with gratitude to those attending and especially to all those who worked so hard to make this day right in every way. The venue was The Pure Life Society where John Main, then a young diplomat, first met its founder Swami Satyananda before rediscovering meditation as part of his own Christian tradition. Mother Mangalam, the President of the Society welcomed us to The Temple of the Universal Spirit.

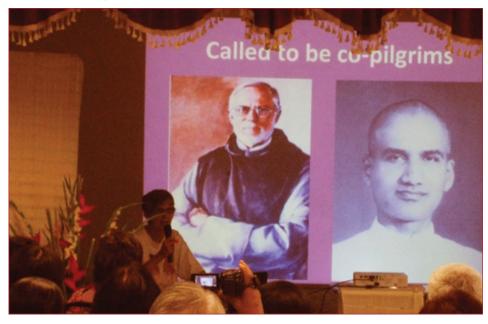
The opening ceremony was performed by a group of Malaysians of indigenous backgrounds with a blessing of the earth. The speakers each described their own tradition and af-

firmed the goodness of our merging into God, Allah, the Creator or any of the many terms that are used to denote The One in whom we dwell and who dwells in us. The distractions of the political and social world to prevent this were also given some attention to highlight the difficulties of people of faith coming together to form community. There was hope ex-

pressed over and over again that we can overcome these difficulties in our own countries, in our region and in the world.

All in the spiritual life is not talking and meditating together so we were treated to a meditative dance performed by a graceful and talented dancer. In the afternoon when we really needed to move our energy, we were brought to our feet and clapped our hands to the song medley performed by the Sahaja Yoga Group. Instructions on how to breathe rounded up the day followed by a final blessing in song, taken from the Book of Numbers 6:24-26 by Fr. Gerard Theraviam, of WCCM Malaysia.

The entire day was designed to carefully lead us through several different experiences that were unified around the theme of Oneness. The participants included meditators from the north, Penang and Ipoh and old friends last encountered at the John Main Seminar in Penang (2006).



In Focus

by David Rees

I had recently completed presenting an Autumn season of Sunday evening performances of small scale programmes with leading actors and musicians. One of the highlights was based on Lorca, the great Spanish poet with a spectacular solo performance by a rather crazy actor. Earlier in the Autumn I had had some dealings with his Australian manager, Reg Luckie. As the performance drew near Reg was missing. At the end of the season I learnt poor Reg had been nursing his dear wife dying of cancer. On hearing of her death before Christmas 1987 I wrote to Reg. After New Year I heard from him saying that he was living with a Benedictine Community in Kensington. He would love to see me and invited me to Campden Hill Road. I was not then aware that I was spiritually seeking because I had been so busy that concerns about myself seemed far removed. On a wintry Wednesday night I climbed the steps to the dark blue front door, rang the bell and waited. Quietly the door was opened by an elderly lady with such a radiant smile and eyes that I felt connected completely with my own.

She was dear Sr. Madeleine Simon, a Sacred Heart nun and Director of the Christian Meditation Centre. After supper I met a young Fr. Laurence. Sr. Madeleine said 'now we are going upstairs to meditate. Would you like to join us?' The room was jam-full

with many young people. There was soft music playing as we quietly took our places. Fr. Laurence led with a 20 minute talk after which we went into complete silence. I left on my bicycle back to Battersea knowing I had to complete the course I had begun. I thought, "yet again God moves in a mysterious way". Towards the end of the 8 weeks course Sr. Madeleine asked me if I would like to move to



the Monday evening group at which there was always a talk but frequently no questions or discussion. This I liked - and still do - as I prefer to go back to the outside world with the silence of the meditation intact. As with many meditators, after about a year I dropped out for 6 months. I was working on an arts project and building my own programmes. When the project came to an end I somehow felt bereft of something. When I realized what it was I instantly jumped onto my

bike and headed for Campden Hill Road, never to leave the teaching and indeed the way of life it opened for me, though often facing the challenges of the desert. I can say now that meditation is essential to my daily life. I get quite cross with myself and the world on those rare occasions when something prevents my time of meditation. How true it is that 'as breathing is essential to the body so is meditation to the spirit'. I would like to say how through the initiation of Laurence in 2001 I had such a rich time running the meditation house in Cockfosters along with my"sisters" Rita McKenna and Jo Chambers for over 4 happy and blessed years.

These days I am not as involved with the wonderful work of the community worldwide. But I am happy to lead the lunchtime weekday groups with three other team leaders at St. Paul's Bookshop, at Westminster Cathedral, a new weekly group I started on Tower Hill and my weekly Wapping group in my home. As a Londoner I feel proud of the Meditatio Centre at St. Mark's and in particular Meditatio House in Ealing. It is wonderful for me after all these years to see the essence of that place identical with with the Centre at Campden Hill Road where I began this journey.



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Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is March 5th



Videos

Meditatio Seminar on Justice

This Meditatio Seminar explored the spiritual dimension of justice.

Price: US\$ 30

Where: Meditatio Store (www.meditatiostore.com)

DVDs

John Main Seminar 2013 – Talks in Cantonese

Price per set: HK\$50.00 (3 Discs) Language: Chinese (Cantonese) illustrated with powerpoints (mainly in Chinese and some parts bi-lingual Chinese and English).

For orders and enquires email Lina Lee: jms.infojms2013@gmail.com

Books

Fully Alive -The transforming power of prayer

By John Main OSB

Fully Alive is a new, previously unpublished collection of talks by John Main OSB, edited by Laurence Freeman OSB

Price: US\$11.22

Where: www.wccm.org (go to Resources and Amazon Store)

Retreats & Events in 2014

Bere Island Easter Retreat



Holy Week Retreat led by Fr. Laurence Freeman

April 12 – 20

Bere Island, Ireland

More info about the retreat: hobbstl@gmail.com

More info about Younger Meditators group: ym.bereisland@gmail.com

Monte Oliveto Retreat



Silent Meditation Retreat led by Laurence Freeman OSB and Giovanni Felicioni. The theme of the retreat will be 'Health, Healing and Wholeness'.

June 14 – 21

Monte Oliveto, Siena, Italy
More info: monteoliveto@wccm.org

John Main Seminar 2014

Muslims and Christians: Listeners for the Word

With Daniel A. Madigan, SJ July 24 – 27 Chicago, United States

Pre-seminar Silent Retreat Changing Patterns: The Power of

Stillness and Silence in Meditation with Laurence Freeman, OSB

July 21-24, 2014

More info: Sharon@mediomedia.org

Our world is dangerously divided about where and how God has spoken the Word in a defining way. The John Main Seminar 2104 goes beyond this division to focus on a shared belief that binds Muslims and Christians together: God is a speaker and His word continues to inform and transform us. This is an ideal opportunity for Christians to understand the truth about a Muslim's faith and its relationship to our own.

The presenter for the JMS 14 is a world authority on Islam, Fr. Daniel Madigan, SJ, Australian Jesuit and Director of Graduate Studies in Theology at Georgetown University. He is also Senior Fellow of The Al-Waleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding.

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

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