

# Meditatio

Newsletter of The  
World Community  
for Christian Meditation



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## Christian Meditation flowers in the Caribbean

Laurence visited Trinidad, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Barbados and saw the growth of the teaching thanks to Sr Ruth Montrichard and Bishop Jason Gordon



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A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

The end of the year begins a new story. The Christmas season is about retelling an old story. It is renewed by our listening to it again through the lens of experience we've lived since the last time we listened.

Passed on for twenty generations, the story of Jesus is not – and was not meant to be – a biography and certainly not the kind of journalistic report we are familiar with today. It is not even, primarily, about objective historical events except in so far as they relate to an unusual experience of presence now, a dimension in reality different from any we are aware that we are aware of. It seems such an easy, straightforward story, enticingly layered with all our Christmas memories from infancy. Yet it is so relentlessly subversive of all our false or incomplete ways of seeing things.

Remember how it begins. Mary is betrothed to Joseph, but before they live together she becomes pregnant. Fortunately, Joseph is a good man and takes her in anyway. Jesus thus enters the world on a razor-edge between safe respectability and dangerous marginality. The Son of God arrives almost as a bastard, socially outcast with, for his time, the worst of all labels, illegitimacy, with which to start life. So, we may think, he got through that one; now things can proceed normally, as they should. Conventionality, respectability, predictability, the dream that corporate language today calls 'sustainability', are all forms of the attempt we make to be safe, secure, protected. They seem to help us to deny mortality and ignore the abyss over which our thin lives walk.

But things continue to go wrong in the story. First, there's no room at the inn, although he does get some nice, if rather symbolic presents. Now, surely, he can go home and enjoy a good extended family environment. But Joseph gets another dream and they become refugees, fleeing for their lives while a massacre of innocents, like that at Peshawar, takes place. Eventually it is safe for them to return and there are, we imagine, a few

peaceful, normal years of growing up. But it was an occupied country with terrorist attacks and outrages that the holy family must have at least heard about. But let's assume they enjoyed to some degree what everyone, parents especially, desire: calm, security and safe routines with affordable treats.

Then he loses all that again as his self-knowledge and his mission simultaneously surge up in him. He becomes briefly a controversial celebrity, once again on the dangerous razor edge of social rejection and exclusion. He challenges (like the present Pope) the very securities that leaders and the privileged construct to avoid reality – moral hypocrisy, religion that blocks spiritual consciousness and constructed, well-defended but false images of God, in effect a blasphemy claiming to be sacred. So, not surprisingly, the story ends as it began, in failure, the saviour falling off the radar, universally condemned, a failed prophet, a healer who could not save himself.

What a story. Maybe many parents who feel bad that they have not created a 'perfect family' and have not been able to give their children all the security and love they need should be consoled. It reminds us that there is meaning, or at least a way through our failure to be what we would (or how we should) choose to be. Isn't it interesting, then, that we so readily avoid the liberating meaning of the Christmas story by turning it into a pastiche, a fairy tale? When we do this we are reinforcing the very things the story is designed to expose and dispel and free us from. If we don't get its meaning we remain locked into an image of God which is not only erroneous but actually prevents us from growing into our potential by imprisoning us in guilt and failure. God is seen then not as coming towards us to 'set us free from our sins' but to increase the punishment. Therese of Lisieux, in her profound, hard won simplicity, saw it clearly. She was hurt by seeing how many Christians were frightened of God. How could anyone, she said, be frightened of a God who became a baby?

But we can't just blame others for this. What is really frightening is not the real God but the terror we feel about losing our illusions.

To defend the ways in which we construct the world as a defence against the sharpness of reality, we build systems, over-value institutions and over-confidently strategise. Then, if we can get away with it, we say this is what God wants. Well, life is so short and vulnerable, it's not surprising that we so value our systems and security. And often they work well. Like the airline industry that has woven the world into a space-time continuum and changed our ways of imagining the planet and of relating to our fellow humans. In the process, of course, we have become commercial 'customers' rather than heroic 'travellers' and pilgrims. Planes now replace the long, dangerous, uncomfortable experience of travel, which was the privilege of a few, that took people through different cultures and climates at a human pace, giving time to savour the transitions and gradations of culture, to assimilate and process diversities of language, food, beliefs and forms of worship. Instead we obsess about speed. We have created a culture of astounding barrenness and a feeding frenzy of consumerism in the global airport system. But it is safe. The regulations of the industry have, at a price, created the safest form of transport ever. So, hooray for reductionism and standardisation and technological tools that work.

But when they don't, the illusion of safety, the denial of reality breaks down. Through a small tear in the veil, before it is repaired, we see that the abyss is still there.

As far as I remember I have missed only two flights in the past twenty-five years (many more have been cancelled or delayed). Yesterday I missed two in the same day. When the agitation, the shame of having to cancel a commitment, the sweaty running from gate to gate to salvage the situation, when all that was over, I had a couple of hours to unwind and I re-

ceived a great grace. (All bad things have graces in them waiting to appear, like a butterfly from a shrivelled chrysalis or an angel rising above the rubble of a day of sadness that makes us look upwards above our defeat). Yesterday, the angel of Heathrow didn't appear quite like that. But my grace was that, even with my own agitation and the consumer frenzy of the duty-free around me, I was able to meditate in a quiet corner and be re-set. I saw that, while of course it mattered, it also didn't matter. That peace is deeper than agitation. I was taught yet again what a treasure is waiting for us, always so faithfully, in the human heart. I hadn't forgotten it. I hadn't ceased to believe in it. But I needed to verify it; and it was happy to be found again. This re-finding is what makes life endurable and meaningful and essentially worth living. With every new finding faith grows deeper and our hearts are better settled into a place of gratitude.

We are taught very young that we should be grateful for presents received or for the privileges of our lives. But it takes a long time to be able truly to see and appreciate those things that should spontaneously awaken the spirit of gratitude in us, above all not the things we have but the fact that we are. We easily become focused on our discontents and unfulfilled desires. We take for granted the truly blessed things in life that connect us directly to the gift of being itself. If they are temporarily obscured we may say in disappointment or despair 'that proves they were only illusions'. Yet, to live without this instinctive feeling of gratitude risks descending into the abyss and falling off the narrow bridge we walk between birth and death.

In the end it isn't about being told what we 'should feel'. We soon become good at pretending, even to ourselves, what we are 'supposed' to look like, to be polite and conform to the expectations of others we depend upon. But it is a matter of finding that spring of life that wells up in us from a source beyond the visible cosmos and beyond the mystery

of time that came into existence with the cosmos. That this source is actually closer to us than we are to ourselves is beyond imagination and therefore beyond desire. But it is the gift of Christmas (and of meditation).

Releasing this spring of life spontaneously brings gratitude. This gratitude dismantles the barriers of competition and suspicion that perennially divide us from all true connections. How do we set it free? If only there were a system, a programme we could buy or inject. But

### *What is really frightening is not the real God but the terror we feel about losing our illusions*

it comes simply by being still. In stillness the knowledge arises. We imagine that this knowledge will arrive like a famous person with an entourage or an invading army to occupy us. But it is not found in the storm or the earthquake. It comes with the power of tenderness, with God's infinitely light touch and with a self-revealing sensitivity and respect for what it created. This is why it so powerfully dissolves the storms of anger, fear and addiction.

This treasure, the seed always growing in us, has to be continually re-discovered. Finding it – personally and for ourselves – is the essential aspect of the Kingdom. It cannot be electronically transferred. It is never a commodity, an object of exchange. It is beyond price. If the rich and powerful find it so hard to see, it is not because they are being punished for being well off. It is because their habits of perception and relationship are so often conditioned and entrapped by possessiveness and acquisitiveness that they are merely unable to see it. They are like people trying to sprint on a track event in heavy hiking boots. And yet, it always decides its own time and way to reveal itself. We may find it, wherever we are and whatever our state of mind at the moment, in God's timing not our own. W.B

Yeats found it once as he sat in a London teashop. His poem about this moment reminds us never to be dogmatically prescriptive about where God may be found:

I sat, a solitary man,  
In a crowded London shop,  
An open book and empty cup  
On the marble table-top.  
While on the shop and street I gazed  
My body of a sudden blazed;  
And twenty minutes more or less  
It seemed, so great my happiness,  
That I was blessed and could bless.  
(The Winding Stair and Other poems)

As with the story of Christmas we need always to re-learn both the experience and the meaning of discovering this treasure. Perhaps what happened over the centuries was that we heard the report of what had (once) been found buried in the field. Jesus invested himself totally in telling us that the Kingdom is within and among us, buried in a field, growing like a seed, discovered in the re-finding of what is so painfully lost, whether a sheep, a coin, a son or one's own life. Then great studies of the mystical tradition were published, professors argued their theories, psychologists explained it, theologians noticed but increasingly avoided it. Like Jesus himself, it became marginalised. It turned into an abstraction, a theory, even a privilege for celibate religious. Then, as happens whenever a part of a whole is segregated, it became an object of suspicion, misunderstanding and even fear. The contemplative, the sacramental, the institutional dimensions of Christian life that together form the whole were divided. The most important meanings of the discovery of the Kingdom within and among us – that it is immediate, a grace not a reward, unconditional and uninterrupted – everything about it that could turn a journey from hell into a day of grace, almost everything that would help us be confident during the long-short walk over the human abyss – was obscured or concealed.

We forget the giftedness of life and we lose the grateful heart that makes life thrill. The Incarnation affirms the good-

ness and joyful nature of creation and it does so by incorporating the dark side, the failures and tragedies of inhumanity, not by denying them. As Simone Weil said, and it is not an insight that survives long in Heathrow Duty-Free, both joy and suffering deliver the same message. If the story of the birth was just idyllic, an advertising image for our illusions, we couldn't and shouldn't trust it. It wouldn't be a real gift but one of those promotions that say 'buy two get one free'. It may be a good bargain and serve your immediate needs or desires. But we know it's not free because if we said 'give me the free one, I won't buy the other two' the truth would be revealed. The assistant's smile would fade and we would be asked to leave. That's why living in a consumer society has many advantages over living in a religious society: it gives us so many obvious, easy opportunities to strip life of its illusions. The Garden of Eden temptation is always there, of course, too. It is to try to possess the gift, to make money (fame or power) even out of the experience of God, to put God in a bottle or a programme.

Gratefulness and reality are inseparable and are necessary in any balanced, humane way of life. Experiencing the gift-ness of life – light and dark – and the pure grace of the kingdom is never negative. There are gifts, though, that impose a sense of obligation or demand recognition or even make us dependent on the giver. But whenever they have strings attached they are false gifts. God gives God to us in Jesus. He comes into a broken and violent world without force or threat of force. He came unto his own (us) and his own received him not because to accept such a gift is to be transformed. We would all like to change but transformation, like shedding our illusions, is painful and frightening.

A real gift is given. What is given is also let go of and released fully into the life of the recipient. Such a gift carries the presence, the love, the Self of the person giving. When, however, it is given but not let go of, it cannot carry the self of the giver. So God gives God in Jesus but lets go of Jesus (even abandons him as Jesus felt at the end). God lays down no conditions for

the gift, which is what makes it so challenging and easily distorted. It's easier to write in small print what isn't there in the intent of bequest – for example that we must be good, obedient, conformist, religious, orthodox. To receive the gift of another self is to be changed simply because it so fully empowers us. Not with something we can put in a bank or boast of, but by expanding us beyond ourselves and enabling us to give our selves.

You may ignore or reject a gift merely because the wrapping isn't enticing. For many the gift of Christmas is wrapped up in the Church, which soon seems to lay down many small print conditions for receiving it. The Church will, however, always be part of the gift of Jesus to the world. As a community it is formed by the influence of this gift as it expands through history and culture. But there

### *The gift is to have the bubble burst and the polluted air purified by the freshness of reality*

are many kinds of ecclesiastical wrapping and Pope Francis is showing us that we should shed some of these without delay. His Christmas gift to the Curia was to list fifteen sicknesses of soul and psyche – the ways in which the gift is obscured by clericalism, legalism and hypocritical judgmentalism. Church can do and look better. But behind the visible institution is also the experience of contemplation in which the gift is found and re-found buried – waiting to be discovered – in the field of the heart.

Contemplation – the simple enjoyment of the truth – is essentially a gift or grace, whether in a crowded cafe or busy airport, an intensive care room, the back of a church or a serene cloister. It is radically simple, not easy. Meditation trains us to appreciate this gift at source. As we learn to accept it we learn also to share it and this produces a new life-style designed not by ideology but by the influence of love. No one can receive this gift without falling in love with the source. We can't reflect deeply on the birth of Je-

sus without linking it to the Resurrection. We are not transformed by reflection but by recognition. Not by remembering but by restoration. The recognition, gradual or sudden, of the risen Christ is the transformation of the self.

Meditation helps us in accepting the gift. John Main said it is the way we 'accept the gift of our being' and all that is included in that. But it can be discouraging at times when we see what slow learners we are. Only failure can teach us this and so we shouldn't undervalue the gift of failure itself. We hear and respond to the gift and see the fruits appearing. Yet so easily we snap back into the old default system of egocentricity. The deep breathing of other-centredness is cut short again. Or we make an offer, maybe trying to share ourselves, freely, no strings attached; but when it doesn't produce the response we expect, we pull back, setting conditions, hardening our selves against rejection.

The gift of Christmas and the time we have over these days to reflect on it reminds us not to be unduly surprised when the gifts are refused or the old ego system reasserts itself. We remember the real circumstances of the birth and life of Jesus and how his teaching has distilled into his gift of himself in the indwelling Spirit. Despite, even because of unfavourable appearances and human relapses we see that the gift is good. 'Why do you call me good?', Jesus once asked: 'only God is good.'

Most of our ideas about goodness are caught up in ideas of badness. We judge the good by contrast with the bad. This seems a fairly non-nonsense contrast but it is part of a way of seeing in dualities that the Incarnation transcends. If God becomes human the most basic of divisions has been transcended. When, as the early teachers went on to say, he 'became human so that we might become God' the whole game plan changes. Is goodness just the same as ethical behaviour (keeping rules, doing no evil)? The gift of Christmas says no. A new way of perception has entered the material world and the human realm, which says that the goodness that 'is' God leaves our

usual distinctions between good and bad behind. It doesn't say that it is alright to steal, kill, lie and exploit. But it says that God will not punish us if we do. The punishment for such behaviour is wrapped up in our ways of refusing the gift of true goodness. It is because God does not punish even Herod or the butchers of Peshawar that we are able to see the goodness that is God in a way that exposes and undermines all human darkness. And also gives us the courage to confront it.

Ethical behaviour is at its best episodic. Before long we fail under pressure of circumstances. The real gift of goodness, however, is continuous and uninterrupted. The Word that was made flesh existed from time out of memory. Yet this goodness that is God, and is also the essence of the human, permeates and redeems time with all its failures and faults. Before we can properly see it in ourselves, we encounter this goodness, not in thought, but in persons. When I went to Burma last year with some of our other teachers to speak about meditation at the invitation of the church there, I visited a home for the handicapped run by a group of nuns. There are no official centres or programmes in Burma for the handicapped and many families are unable to cope. In this home the nuns had built a well-run and warm-hearted environment – and more. There was no depersonalising of the individuals. In that respect it had a certain disorganisation. There was no condescension or cold pity but a striking sense of equality and community. I don't think this witness would have been possible without an experience of the gift of goodness that transcended the ethical. It was born not of doing good, in the first place, but by being good.

These nuns and those they cared for were deeply inspiring. The successes and heroism that usually attract the headlines and inspire us for a while usually also fade from memory. The true heroes of humanity, unlike the celebrities of the media, do not make it to the front page or go 'viral'. But they remain in our lives by their gift of self.

They point us back to the gift of being itself and so in the end to the gift of Christmas. So hooray, Jesus has come. But more importantly he has stayed.

His birth in the small, messy and, even then, violent flashpoint of Bethlehem was the beginning of the story whose end has not yet come. The circumstances of his birth make us ask if we are really born good. Innocent, pure and amazingly able to see things as



they are - but really good as only other-centredness is good? We are born with a dominant instinct for survival and grow up conditioned by the attraction to pleasure and an aversion to pain. So far, so good. But very soon this conditioning weaves the miasma of illusion. 'Miasma' is the word that described the polluted atmosphere in which bad diseases were born. We live in bubbles of miasma, illusion, but surrounded by the fresh air of reality. Soon we are educated into thinking that illusion is better than the real.

The gift is to have the bubble burst and the polluted air purified by the freshness of reality. This is why Jesus has popped into the world. Love flows from fullness and it is from the fullness of being called the Father that it has leaped into our human realm. Like beauty which carries in a part of the whole the full experience of the whole, this gift not only makes life endurable, it transforms our capacity for life.

This past year I have been blessed, as usual, to see many parts of our whole community that meditation is daily creating and renewing. I meet the whole in each part, in each meditator. I would like to thank all those who received me during the past twelve months so warmly and inspired me so strongly, for the gift you shared with me and that you share with so many in your national and local communities. Many

generations ago St Augustine wrote of the short 'dart-like' prayer of the mantra that the monks of the desert practiced. Today it has outgrown the desert and the monastic life itself. It is touching the lives of young children, the elderly, students, those recovering from addiction, hedge-fund managers and the homeless, parishioners and those seeking a spiritual home. It is a gift by which we learn what gift really means and it awakens in me at the end of another year a very wonderful gratitude.

All of us at Meditatio House and in our international team that serve the community join me in wishing you every blessing and deepening happiness in the year ahead.

*Laurence*

Laurence Freeman OSB

## News

# The Caribbean Flowers: Fr. Laurence visits Trinidad, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Barbados

By Sister Ruth Montrichard

Laurence Freeman visited the Caribbean from 30th October to 8th November. The tour was organized by sister Ruth Montrichard, with the support of Bishop Gordon, Bishop of Bridgetown (Barbados) and Kingstown (and WCCM Patron). Read below part of a report by Sister Ruth



Children from St. Patrick's Primary School in Barbados

introduce meditation into their schools. A Schools Committee will be established and a pilot project with 6 schools will begin in January. This session was requested by the Archbishop of Trinidad, the Catholic School Board and the Anglican Bishop of Trinidad.

From 31st October to 2nd November, 30 meditators from Trinidad, St. Vincent and Barbados attended a residential retreat at the Regional Seminary for an inspirational weekend with periods of meditation, silence, celebration of Mass, meals and contemplative walking. On the evening of 2nd Nov, Fr. Laurence and I travelled to St. Lucia and, on arrival, were warmly welcomed by the Cluny Sisters.

## How did this all begin?

After 20 years of meditation practice with one or two groups in Trinidad and one group in Barbados, Fr. Laurence Freeman's first visit in November 2012 planted new seeds which led to the message of Christian Meditation being taken to Schools in Trinidad and to the Islands of St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Barbados. At this time, I was appointed as the National Coordinator for the Caribbean and Bishop Jason Gordon, Bishop of Bridgetown (Barbados) and Kingstown (St. Vincent and the Grenadines) became a patron.

## Trinidad

Fr. Laurence's trip saw the flowering of those seeds and left us with new encouragement, motivation and commitment to share this gift with our people. He began his trip in Trinidad on 30th October with an interview on Trinity TV and later spoke to 350 people at a public talk entitled 'Meditation as a way of peace'.

On 31st October 175 teachers from Catholic, Anglican and private schools attended the Church of the Assumption to learn more about Meditation with Children. At the end of the day, 70 Principals expressed the desire to

## St Lucia

On 3rd November the day began with Mass at the convent. We then travelled to the Benedictine Monastery where an introductory session was held for Priests, Religious, Ministers and School Principals hosted by Abbess Mariana Pinto OSB. This was followed by a public talk at the cathedral attended by over 150 people. The session was very well received and resulted in the start of a new group led by a local Sister and Monseigneur – 48 people attended the first session which was held on the following Monday. ▶

"That is the great importance of community, that everyone who comes into your community understands fully, explicitly, clearly, their own lovableness. And the first step to full personhood and to full maturity is that we allow ourselves to be loved." John Main

## News



Fr. Laurence, Bishop Jason Gordon and Sister Ruth

### St Vincent

On the island of St. Vincent we met Bishop Jason Gordon. He introduced us during a luncheon for the business community held at the Bishop's residence. The lunch was attended by 50 locals and resulted in a monthly meditation group being established for business leaders. Each participant was given a copy of WCCM's booklet 'Business of Spirit'.

In 5th November Fr. Laurence spent most of the day with children. He met with: 200 students from St. Joseph's Convent, 500 from St. Mary's Primary, 50 from St. Martin's Secondary for Boys and 180 from Mesopotamia Secondary. After that, there was a final session for the Priests and Deacons, including dinner at the Bishop's residence. We then took a late flight to Barbados. On arrival, we were met by Rosalind Jackson who kindly offered us to stay at her home.

### Barbados

Our first stop on 6th November was at St. Patrick's Primary School where the children had previously been introduced to Christian Meditation. It was a delight to spend time with these 100 children and see the effect the practice had on their discipline, gentle behaviour and their silence as they entered the session was impressive. Later that day Fr Laurence spoke with the Clergy and Religious and an open session was held at the Living Water centre for Civil Society with 60 participants.

Our final day included an early morning trip to the Ursuline Convent School. Here Fr. Laurence spoke about Christian Meditation as a formal part of the girls' prayer life. Our final session for children was with a delightful group of 80 energetic teenagers preparing for confirmation. Bishop Gordon addressed them and they were introduced to Christian Meditation as part of their preparation.

## Future plans

- Expanding our National leadership team in Trinidad and a regional council in each island – Dec 14
- Setting up a Schools Committee to support the 70 schools wishing to train teachers – Dec 14
- Setting up and supporting parishes on each island who will hold introductory six week courses – Jan 15
- Training sessions for teachers in Trinidad, St. Lucia, Barbados and St. Vincent – Feb to June 15
- Organising an Essential Teaching Workshop for Caribbean Group Leaders – late 2015
- Continuing to organise Evenings of Quiet Prayer twice a year
- Developing a new series of TV programmes for Trinity TV
- Visits to schools and parishes on the islands of Grenada, Dominica and the Bahamas in 2015

## Final message

We are so grateful to Fr. Laurence and Bishop Gordon for their support and to many donors from our worldwide community who made this trip possible. With this help, we have been able to share the gift with over 2,000 adults and children. It is our hope that what they have learned will significantly impact their lives. I look forward to updating you again in 2015. (Sr. Ruth Montrichard)

## News

# Like a Child: Meditation with Children in Malaysia

By Niloufer Harben

## Penny Sturrock, WCCM Coordinator for Meditation with Children, visits Malaysia



"Meditate with a child tomorrow!" Penelope Sturrock's compelling invitation touched an inner chord in participants of the workshops she led in Malaysia in November. Some attended more than one of the sessions and started meditating with children the very next day. After the experience, Praveen, a young boy of seven, exclaimed, "I love it!" The glow in his eyes said it all.

The first workshop was a day-long event held in Kepong. About 200 people attended, including catechists, parents and youths. They were enthusiastic in their response. One of the sessions was held in Kuala Selangor. Here

every month a mass is celebrated especially for children. This small chapel was packed and an interpreter translated into Tamil, the local language. At the end, the priest in charge, Father Edwin Paul, deeply affirmed the teaching on Christian meditation. He announced that before the monthly Mass for children, they now would start with meditation.

In Shah Alam, Penny met some catechists and the parish priest, Father Paulino, who is a meditator. His avid support is the reason Sunday school teachers practise meditation in all the catechism classes in the parish. They began four years ago. All the sessions in the Klang valley were very well attended.

While in Kuala Lumpur, Penny visited Pure Life Society, Puchong, where Father John first meditated with Swami Satnayanda. She met up with Mother Mangalam and spent a morning with representatives from the Sahaja Yoga.

In Penang Penny met Father Gerard Theraviam, WCCM liaison with the

bishops of Malaysia, and stayed at the College General Seminary. She had dinner with Bishop Sebastian Francis. The next two days she led workshops in Bukit Mertajam and Ipoh.

Penny emphasized the need for simplicity, patience, perseverance, and balanced daily anchorage in the practice of meditation. Meditation is "simple but not easy", she said. It is radically counter-cultural. It is not about perfection. It is not about success and failure, winners and losers, but humility, faith, love. Penny assured the participants, "The child will be your teacher". She was able to connect easily with the parents, teachers and children.

Given the wholehearted support of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and Archdiocese Catechetical Commission, the visit has been a breakthrough in terms of the local Catholic church. Many doors have opened. This certainly gives much-needed impetus to the mission of WCCM in Malaysia.

## South America Tour



Fr. Laurence visited South America from 10th to 24th November and this

time he had activities in Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina. These Communities were very energetic and enthusiastic:

**Paraguay:** the activities included a retreat and a talk for Christian business people

**Brazil:** in São Paulo Fr. Laurence gave talks (including an event on Neuroscience and Religion) and led a weekend retreat for about 160 people. In Rio, an open session and a day retreat

**Uruguay:** Fr. Laurence met with the new Archbishop of Montevideo Daniel

Fernando Sturla and the Anglican Bishop Revd Michael Pollesel. He spoke at a Business School and led a day retreat in a parish in Montevideo

**Argentina:** The visit started with a talk for teenagers at Colegio Niño Jesús, in Buenos Aires, where a catechist had started to work with students. Fr. Laurence spoke in a meeting for business people (approx. 70 participants) and led a fully attended day retreat.

You can see photos and all the audios of talks from the tour in South America at [http://tiny.cc/wccm\\_samerica](http://tiny.cc/wccm_samerica)



## News

### Portugal: "Ora et Labora is a one-day activity during which we work practicing continuous prayer"

By Gilda Monteiro



Ora et Labora is a one-day activity during which we work practicing continuous prayer. We start the day with a hymn of praise to Jesus and a prayer asking God to bless our day and our work. Then, we give a small explanation of the specific work we will do during the day and we share the Ora et Labora concept, purpose and relationship with our tradition and Fr. John's and Fr. Laurence's key teachings; we also share an introduction to Christian Meditation.

After this very short talk, we meditate

and, remaining in Silence and repeating our mantra, we work until the 'call' for lunch. The lunch time is a period for conviviality, to meet and get to know better our old and new companions, talking and laughing... Each participant brings a contribution to the meal and shares with all the others. After lunch, a contemplative waking brings us back to silence, attention and concentration and leads us to the afternoon working period at the end of which we come together for the evening meditation. We end up the day sharing our insights, thoughts, and what most moved us during the day.

The Work must be simple, handmade and 'humble'. We must do it as a gift, in benefit of the needy. Gratuity is a very important element as well as discipline. Till now, we are working in contact with nature - gardening - and this is wonderful because all our body

is involved and we can feel the effect of the work and of 'everything' physically. We can feel the presence of our companions and that we are in some way totally synchronized. We can also learn, I believe, to 'feel' the Word in our bodies and its growing resonance... and to see ourselves as creatures... in relationship, with ourselves, the others, with all the Creation and the Creator...

We have had four Ora et Labora days till now, and from my experience and the sharing of other participants, I believe that it has the potential to lead us from awareness to attention, especially in our commitment to 'be' Christians. It is a radical and wonderful experience of immersion that we all believe will overflow in our actions and the work of our daily lives. It is an 'open space'; both an outer and an inner open space, for spiritual growth.

### Bere Island HealthCare Retreat: The Power of the Small

The retreat "The Power of the Small" was held on Bere Island in October (17-23). Fr. Laurence led the retreat with an audience of mostly medical practitioners learning to meditate. You can listen to the talks of this retreat here: <http://tiny.cc/psmall>

### WCCM members at IMF Forum on Ethics and Finance

Two members of the WCCM Guiding Board (Sean Hagan and Peter NG) took part in a widely acclaimed forum on Ethics and Finance during the IMF general meeting in Washington DC in October. Other members of the forum and of the community (photo) came to the John Main Centre at Georgetown University for mass and meditation later the same day. You can watch the full forum here: [http://tiny.cc/forum\\_imf](http://tiny.cc/forum_imf)

### Singapore and Australia



Fr. Laurence did the last big trip of 2014 to Singapore and Australia.

In Singapore, on the last weekend of November, 600 people gathered at the Catholic Junior College Arts Centre for the retreat led by Fr. Laurence and organised by WCCM Singapore. The theme was 'The Eight Big Problems of Life' and how we can manage and transcend them and so free ourselves to live more fully and joyfully. You can read a full description of this retreat here:

[http://tiny.cc/retreat\\_SNG](http://tiny.cc/retreat_SNG)

In Australia at the beginning of December, Fr. Laurence taught in Brisbane, Lismore, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne.

## Film Review

By Jim Green

# Ida by Pawel Pawlikowski



Ida (pronounced Ee-da) is the story of a novitiate nun in early 1960s Poland. A specific and seemingly random moment in time. And yet, like every fully-told story, this one is concerned with what came before, what will follow and how the present moment is poised delicately between these mysteries.

Before she takes her vows, Ida is instructed by the Mother Superior that she must leave the convent to meet with her aunt, the only known surviving member of her family. In order to renounce the world, it seems, she must know who she is in the world, where she has come from and, by implication, the future that she is preparing to give up.

The first bewildering piece of self-knowledge with which the world hits Ida is that she is Jewish. In one of the many long-held shots in this short, beautifully textured, black and white film, the central character simply sits in silence absorbing this revolutionary disturbance to her sense of self. This is the beginning of a faltering but determined odyssey through the monochrome shades of the Polish landscape. Ida and her Aunt Wanda – a hard-drinking, troubled ex-state pros-

ecutor – make unlikely companions in this most delicately realised of road movies. Their steady, difficult pilgrimage towards the truth of the family's experience takes them, metaphorically and literally, into the forests of Europe's history, its secrets and its wounds.

It has become a commonplace of popular film criticism (the kind you can hear as you are leaving the cinema) to praise a movie for being "beautifully shot". Often this means that the viewer has been dazzled (perhaps anaesthetised) by wide-screen images with a ravishing depth-of-field, lovingly composed and richly coloured. And all too often these visuals don't take us beyond the aesthetic of the coffee-table photo-book or the Sunday colour-supplement. A particularly classy kind of eye-candy. In the words of the great songwriter, "All this useless beauty".

This is not the case with *Ida*. The visual style of the film liberates us from the limitations of a 'normal' format. We don't know about limitations until we're offered something different. This film has an aspect ratio of 1.33: 1 which means that it is actually a smaller and boxier frame than we contemporary

viewers are used to (all the silent movies were projected in this format). Within this apparently restricted space the characters – particularly Ida herself – are routinely located at the edge, the very bottom or often only just within the frame. It's as if the questioning and the questing - for identity, for truth and for one's right place in the world - are replicated in the formal gestures of the film itself. These radically displaced persons are trying to locate themselves in history, in space and in the given boundaries of this reality.

Paradoxically, there is a great sense of spaciousness and of calm in the telling of this story, even though it is steadfast in confronting unspeakable pain. It also includes a scene of enormous shock which is all the more devastating for being achieved with such restraint.

In this kind-of Bildungsroman, Ida seems to have to choose, in the face of all she has encountered and discovered, whether to stay in the world or return to the convent. In terms of the story-rendered-as-soundtrack (equally skilfully deployed) this becomes in effect a choice between the jazz of Coltrane and the transcendence of Bach. The final shot tracks her from in front as she walks determinedly ahead. The camera – static but eloquent throughout – has suddenly leapt into life. It is hand-held and moving. She is in the centre of the frame. Whether the decision is the 'right' one or not, she seems to have found her place – and her rhythm – in the world.

*Ida* is a film which makes stillness, simplicity and silence not just visible but experientially present. It is an important work, which anyone who has ever asked whether there is such a thing as contemplative cinema, should see.

## In Focus

*Sr. Ruth Montrichard*



My early years of Religious Life were full and exciting with a teaching career that I really enjoyed. Later I became involved in a project working with marginalized kids. My life was full, my days were long and tiring, but I was getting real sense of satisfaction from what I was doing. Then came the conflict between work and prayer: the community structure did not change and I often found myself rushing into the chapel and going through the ritual of saying prayers. Eventually that also became a burden as I was really just mouthing words with little meaning, too tired to care, with my mind racing on what I had to do the next day.

Deep in my heart I knew I could not go on like that. I felt there was a void in me that could not be filled

with more projects. There was something wrong, something missing but I didn't know what to do, or where to begin. Thoughts of leaving Religious Life were whirling in my mind. Saying more prayers was not the answer. I had had enough of words and they had little meaning for what I was going through. I continued through the routine of every day but with a sense of emptiness.

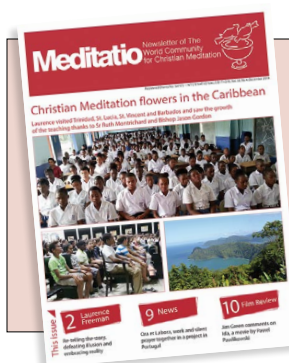
And then it happened. A friend had met John Main and gave me a cassette and told me I should listen to it. I thought to myself - another sermon, more prayers to say - I didn't need that now. I eventually played it, and my life changed forever.

I knew instinctively that that was what I was searching for – a way of prayer where I could just BE: no words, no thoughts, just silence and stillness. I began to meditate and immediately felt a sense of freedom: prayer was no longer a burden. My tears flowed freely at first and then nothing much happened after that. I struggled, but stuck with the practice and I could feel my attitude beginning to change. I knew I had to make a radical change in my life style if I wanted to continue on this path of contemplative prayer. And so I went to make a private retreat and quite unexpectedly met Fr. Laurence who had just given a retreat in Trinidad. I didn't know who he was but somehow the conversation led

to Christian Meditation and before he left the next day we meditated together in the chapel. Then he was gone.

I then took the bold decision to ask to live alone and did so for six years. During that time I was able to reorganise my life and my two periods of meditation anchored me in the Lord with a new sense of His Presence and a new vision of life. My work continued but in a more focused way; my priorities became clearer, my anxieties began to disappear, I coped more calmly with problems and frustrations. I returned to community and have since continued on the "way". Life is still a journey with ups and downs but I have learned to go with the flow and to "let go". I don't think John Main ever thought that his talk on a cassette would save my life and my vocation but that is what happened, and I am eternally grateful for the gift. I have shared this gift with others and I have seen lives change for the better. And so the rest is history. Now as Coordinator for the Caribbean my mission has expanded and has been Spirit led. I simply respond and the Spirit takes over.

Sometimes I think it is all happening too quickly, but who am I to question the ways of the Spirit? I have learned through meditation that His Ways are not mine and that where He leads I must only follow.



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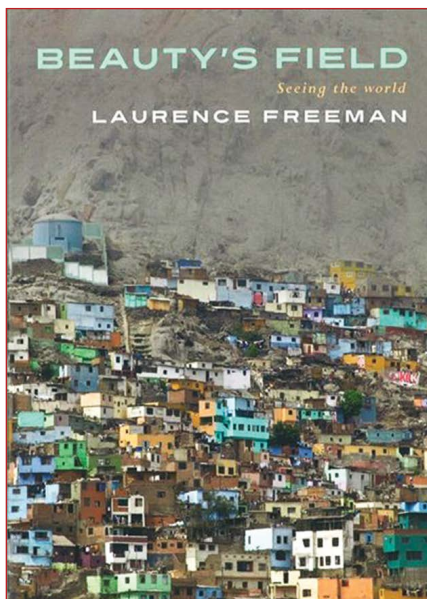
Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is March 5th

## Resources

### Books

#### Beauty's Field: Finding God in Unexpected Places

Laurence Freeman OSB

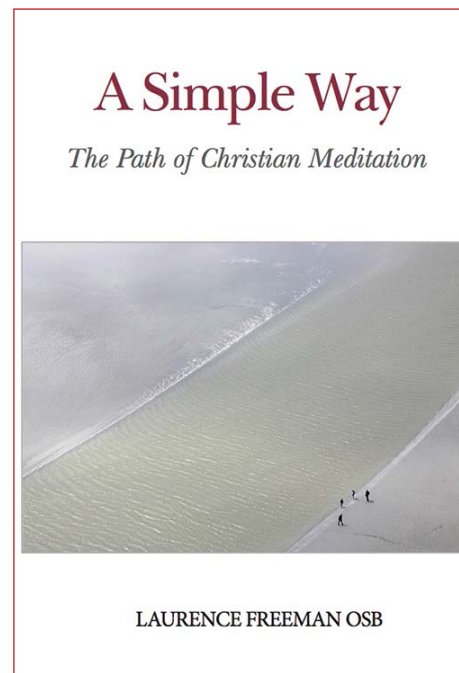


As the leader of the World Community for Christian Meditation, Laurence Freeman's calling takes him all over the world to teach and lead groups who want to practice contemplative prayer. In this spiritual travel memoir, he recounts timeless, memorable and moving stories of people, places and events in which he has encountered God's transformative presence

Buy it on Amazon: <http://tiny.cc/bfield>

#### A Simple Way The Path of Christian Meditation

Laurence Freeman OSB



In this book, Fr Laurence shows us a simple way of reaching our centre, a path that will take us through the noise, distraction and agitation of the mind to the silent, still centre of the heart where we experience the transforming love of God.

Price and orders: contact the resource center nearest to you (box below)

### Events & Retreats

#### Bere Island Easter Meditation Retreat



29th March to 5th April, 2015

More information

Theresa Hobbs: [theresawccm@gmail.com](mailto:theresawccm@gmail.com) or  
(+353) 0861621803

#### WCCM Pilgrimage Pilgrimage to India



26 Nov- 26 Nov-13 Dec 2015

With optional extension to with optional extension to

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More info: <http://tiny.cc/wccmpindia>

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