

# Meditatio

Newsletter of The  
World Community  
for Christian Meditation



Registered Charity No. 327173 - INTERNATIONAL EDITION, Vol. 39, No 1; March 2015

## John Main Seminar 2015: the reconciliation of religion and spirituality



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## Dear Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

During our pilgrimage to the Holy Land some years ago we spent time and meditated in the Garden of Gethsemane. I remember gazing at the olive tree that, we were told, was 2500 years old. Even when Jesus was there in prayer on his last night, while his three most intimate disciples fell asleep, to him this tree must have looked old and gnarled and yet shimmering with that same, beautiful silvery olive green. I wanted to see it as he saw it. We have to exert ourselves and our imagination beyond our habitual, egocentric view of the world to see things as others see them. But we have to do it effortlessly - only then can we see things as they truly are.

When I opened my eyes after the meditation and looked around at this still and sacred place which had the depth of presence I have sensed at Lourdes, Bodhgaya and Auschwitz, I saw carpets of red flowers covering the ground, looking at me. I realized they were the same flowers - the 'lilies of the field' - that covered the mountainside we had visited in Galilee where Jesus delivered his great teaching. These are in fact Palestinian anemones, scarlet poppies that bloom for a day after rain and whose beauty is greater, Jesus said, than the glory of Solomon. After their brief brilliance, when they withered, they were burned to raise the temperature of clay ovens.

*But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! (Mt 6: 29)*

I strained to imagine what Jesus might have felt if he had looked at these flowers in the moonlight and remembered how they had clothed the hillside on the great day of his teaching in Galilee. What an abyss of failure and rejection separated him on the night before his execution from that moment when it must have seemed that people

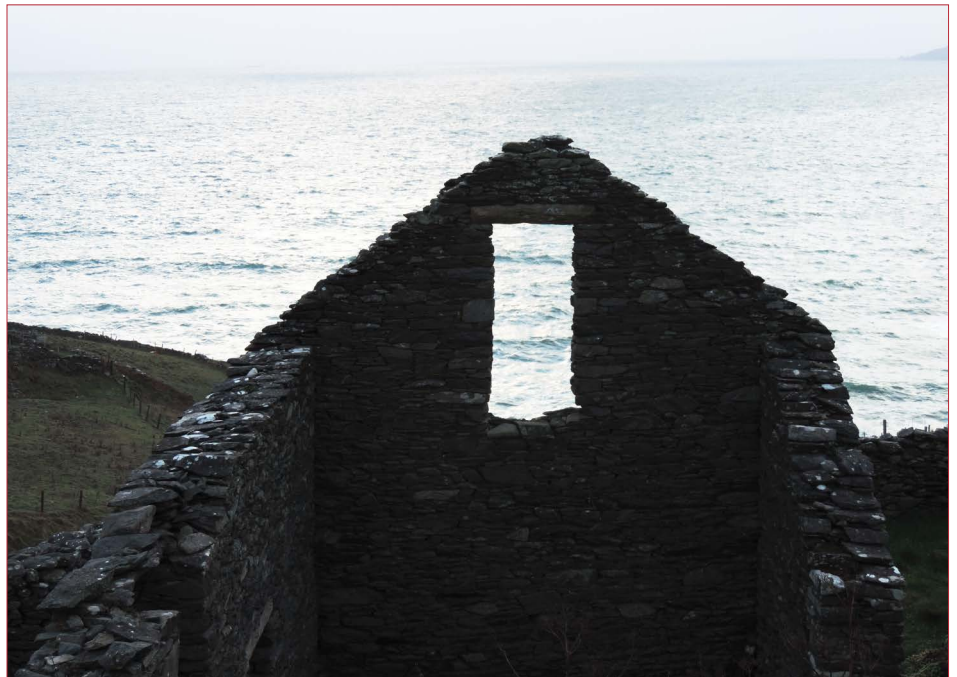
had understood him.

But who knows what he thought? Our mind yearns to find concrete knowledge of its intuitions and insights but also continually runs against the walls its own limitations. When we reach what we cannot know we have to learn the art of unknowing, to find the real beyond thoughts and imagination; if not, we drift into fantasy, the wrong use of imagination.

My mind was making these neat connections between Jerusalem and

He fell face down on the ground and surrendered his will to the Father's. We cannot do that in a crisis without an internal heaving and traumatic inversion. When he returned to his friends for comfort he found they were asleep; and he saw with a bitter sadness how the human is always conflicted between flesh and spirit, between our painful longing for truth and love and our terror of finding what we are looking for.

He advised them to 'watch and pray';



Galilee on very little evidence. But we do know from the gospels that in that garden Jesus was plunged into a chasm of disconnection as he faced the imminence of his mortality.

*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death (Mt 26:38)*

Meaning is the experience and consciousness of connection. But there are passages in our lives where we are moved unwillingly to deeper levels of experience and knowledge even while we are disconnected - and forced to drink the chalice of the vinegar of meaninglessness - before a new world of connection emerges.

which is what we have been especially trying to do during Lent. Someone I know did it by trying to be nice to his staff at work. (Knowing I couldn't do this, I just gave up desserts). But as St Benedict reminds us, the monk's life is a perpetual Lent, so we have to keep on trying to stay awake and to enter that level of prayer where there is no longer an 'I' - my old 'me' - but where flesh is absorbed in spirit.

After a third attempt to connect to his disciples Jesus withdrew into an even deeper solitude and prayed 'using the same words as before'. At this level of human powerlessness words,

and the thoughts they clothe, wither and must be burned. They cannot deliver what we are looking for and what we need to survive the abyss. They are good – and it is a good thing – only to lead us into silence. It is then that the many words Jesus told us to avoid in prayer are reduced and funnelled into the ‘one little word’ that the Cloud of Unknowing advocates. It is then in that kenosis – self-emptying of the self – that incarnation happens. Then we become real as we can only do in God’s silence, beyond thought and imagination, as the word becomes flesh. Word into Silence. If we don’t see this through to the end, when we give up or retreat into the ego-consciousness again, we fall asleep or drift back into fantasy.

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It is impossible to imagine the chaos into which the mind of Jesus descended in Gethsemane. Our own experiences of this – when our hopes have been shattered or we have lost what we loved – give us some point of reference. It is at this point that we may begin to connect to his experience and then, if we can, to realise how his experience enters and transforms our own. But for this we must, like him, let go.

This is especially hard for us as modern people living in a culture of increasingly absolute control. Science – the proud science of technocrats not the humble science of the explorers on the boundaries of knowledge – has actually contracted our range of consciousness while claiming to have expanded it. No wonder our culture is veering so wildly around extremes and descending into barbarity and self-destructiveness, into betrayal of the young and of our earthly home. This dehumanising technoscience has ridiculed and pushed out of the landscape of our mind those vast dimensions of knowledge that constitute the wisdom of the great Sermon on the Mount and of the Agony in the Garden.

It has dismissed love as a merely subjective and ego-driven force that is irrelevant to the way we teach, make money or practice medicine. Yet only love can bridge the abyss between the chaos and the cosmos. And do more: unite them in the exuberance of creation.

But who’s doing this and what are the signs of it? We are doing it to ourselves of course because we all participate in the culture we share. However much we complain and condemn it we are part of it. Greed has obscured the meaning of growth. Education

### *Simplicity exposes reductionism as an attempt to bring everything under the control of a controlled system*

has obscured the meaning of learning. Medicine has obscured the meaning of health. The wondrous advances of science and knowledge in all these fields have been hijacked by the false sense of control which they awakened in the collective ego. There are individual sinners – bankers who refuse to be accountable for their misdeeds, educators who pursue league tables, medics who see the patient as a distraction from their test results, clergy who regret their loss of control over the masses. But it is the pervasive sin, the rampant virus, not scapegoats that we have to identify.

One of the signs of this cultural and global crisis is the suffering it has caused. But it has also produced an awareness of the power of awareness itself. For example, the world’s best expert on medical safety says that ‘situational awareness’ – being present in the moment – is the single most important factor in reducing the hundreds of

thousands of patients who die yearly through avoidable medical error.

But what is this awareness and how can it be recovered in a culture whose mental landscape has been so damaged? Even psychology has suffered from the reductionism of science with many in this profession arguing that the medicine of the mind is no different from the medicine of the tissue. Mental health is frequently seen as a bio-medical issue; the fields of relationships, context, values and meaning are seen as distractions from practising psychiatry as clinical neuroscience.

The world and the self are bigger than that. All suffering has many layers. In the individual there are historical and generational levels as well as the cultural contexts which shape our sense of self. The great, funny and wise Sufi poet Rumi saw the human being as a guesthouse – ‘every morning a new arrival’. Not a computerised system in which the human is subordinated to those powers of control that aim at an ever-greater uniformity and punishment of the personal.

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So, no reductionist solution, except that which reduces reductionism to an absurdity, will work. I mean, that to respond effectively and respectfully to the whole person we need a true simplicity, not an easy or arrogant reductionism. Simplicity exposes reductionism as an attempt to bring everything under the control of a controlled system. It is an absurd illusion, of course, because, as with so many collapsing systems of reductionism today, it fails while claiming it is succeeding. This is very similar to the mindset of the addict and our culture has become addicted to reductionism as a means of total control. The more it fails, the more powers of control it demands: isn’t this what addiction means? Control is an illusion (when were we ever really in control?) and our desperate grasp for it



is a by-product of our reluctance to risk reality.

There is, however, a way through. It is healing and transcendence.

There is a single path of healing. Healing is the host in the guesthouse of the self. Like Rumi, Simone Weil understood that the guest who arrives unexpectedly may be clothed in joy or in grief, in pleasure or in pain. But 'each has been sent as a guide from the beyond'. When problems arise they can be solved – when possible – but they always have to be understood as well. Consciousness is part of the cure. Taking pain medication continually without understanding what the pain means or what is causing it is not healing. Similarly, expecting all healing to come from outside yourself is reductionism and reflects an absurd reliance on externals.

There are many pathways to recovery. But there is a single power of healing that arises from the same deep unity and simplicity of the self that is the deep structure of all reality. Just as the autoimmune system has many surprises – the 'miracle of self-healing' as the Irish poet Seamus Heaney calls it – so a culture can identify solutions to the problems it inflicts on itself. The 'consciousness movements', as we call them today, reflect this impulse to self-healing. Yet sometimes they become part of the problem they are trying to solve. Often these solutions offer an incomplete picture both of the problem and of those suffering from it. They deal with the symptoms of reductionism – the amputation of essential limbs of consciousness – with reductionist tools. They are superficial and short-lived solutions to a deeply embedded problem of consciousness. Our simple choice today, to put it starkly, is between wise wholeness and absurd reductionism. But we have – and this is a problem too – to see the choice before we can make it.

The Canadian Supreme Court recently chose to legalise euthanasia and assisted suicide. The reductionist at-

tempt to control everything is visible here. Law is by definition about control, what we should and shouldn't do. But there is a difference between tax law and a law that defines what lies beyond definition, the mystery of life and death and how we respond to them. Is euthanasia something that should be legal or illegal at all? Can the issue be reduced to a statute?

The wisdom of the palliative care

urrection. It continues in the mystical body of Christ. This spiritual body cannot be reduced to a doctrinal formula because it exists in an expanding universe of experience. The Body of Christ is, ultimately, the whole material world, including the evolutionary peak achieved in human consciousness. It has become radiant with the conscious experience that its own source, course and destiny are one.



dimension of medicine, rooted in all the great wisdom traditions, says that we should kill the suffering not the sufferer, that quality not quantity of life is the important question. To reduce it to 'rights' is to equate the gift of life with consumerism. Not to see this betrays an ignorance of what medical science – at the service of wholeness – has learned in past decades and what it does day by day to protect the most vulnerable in society who are put most at risk by this legislation. Some vital dimension of the mental landscape is missing in a culture that can produce this situation.

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The spirit has material dimensions and the material has a spiritual dimension. Jesus experienced this in Gethsemane and realised its complete expression in the garden of the res-

How can we recover what we have lost without losing what we have gained? Like hospital safety, the answer is simple. Watch and pray. Be awake and turn your attention from yourself to the other. To develop the art of contemplation takes us forward in our evolutionary journey, not backwards in time in retreat from the stresses of the present. But for this more is needed than being merely aware in the present. Mindfulness (I am saying what many Buddhists believe also) does not take us far enough although it can certainly start the process.

But for doing this, all the spiritual traditions in our culture should be grateful to the teachers of secular mindfulness. It has opened the door to a dimension that the reductionist movement had seemed to shut in the face of medita-

tion as the radical simplicity it is. Yet mindfulness, without meditation, often remains locked into the reductionist approach by excluding that larger context in which consciousness expands, the largeness and transcendence of the spirit.

By becoming mindful in the present – of our feelings, states of mind and responses – we can take the first step. But the deeper and more transformative processes start when we move into meditation itself and learn the simplest but most demanding of all human arts: taking the attention off ourselves. Through profound empathy the story that we are absorbed by in this liturgical season, the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, shows us what this means. It means to leave self behind and find ourselves in God through a transformation of our relationships with others.

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There is a still a fear of the explicitly spiritual and even more of any association with religious traditions in modern secular institutions. This is the legacy of both extremes of religion – the lukewarm, external religion of the past and the violent fundamentalism of the present. If this reduction of religion to a failed social force condemns us to going no further in the journey of consciousness than to be aware of ourselves, we will not have enough power to boost us out of the cultural crisis we are passing through.

This is why this is the age of contemplation, something the great scientists have intuited before many religious leaders. It will help bring science to its next frontier of time and space. But with or without religion, we must enter it. This is the age of heartfulness, the integration of the consciousness of both centres of the self, when the mind is brought into the heart and our whole self becomes engaged in the radical simplicity of love.

The practice of meditation speaks to the heart of modern people as we languish in the shallows of consumerism

and social dysfunction. We may start to meditate for what will later in the journey look like self-centred motives; our reasons for persevering will be different from those that got us started. As experience teaches us, through practice, and as the awareness of community with all around us grows, we will relate differently to tradition. We will not need the written texts of the past except to affirm and explain what we are already learning for ourselves. We will not – as so often happens with religious people – be seeking second hand experience or being voyeurs of the spiritual. We will be explorers.

*We meditate to learn that,  
just as we are, with our  
faults and failures,  
we are still drawn into  
the divine vortex*

Culturally we will see that meditation leads us into a contemplative consciousness that transforms body and mind. It is not, as our over-active minds fear, the extinction of the self in the end of thought. Distractions and desires will continue. But we will learn detachment from them. It will lead us into that poverty of spirit – non-possessive, non-controlling liberty – that is the foundation of peace and justice and of compassionate action. We will taste the delight of the cessation of craving and of the freedom from the compulsion to be perfect, successful and approved.

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas (Hab 2:14)

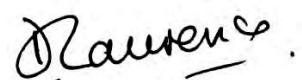
The great wisdom traditions – as the death and resurrection of Jesus illustrate – offer us a way to die by letting go of everything – now – in every meditation and increasingly in every moment of the day. Then the ‘second death’ – our bio-medical expiring – will have no power over us. Free from the fear of the death we become free to live fully. The way to this is not the way

reductionism promises – control over everything by taking everything apart. It is a narrower way but it leads to life.

The way to self-fulfilment is the way of self-emptying. In Gethsemane and on Calvary Jesus entered the great self-emptying that had been his own birth. As God had to let go of Himself in order for the Word to become flesh, so Jesus had to let go of himself humanly in order to return and blaze the trail for us to follow. ‘Where I am going... you will follow later’ (Jn 13:36)

Contemplative experience transforms religion because it makes it obvious how humble God is. He does not need our praise, just our love. It transforms the world because it restores us to the direct, personal experience of God. In Jesus we see how God always takes the lowest place. Contemplative religion exposes – as does the occasional great religious leader – the redundancy of the hierarchies and power systems of control that are regularly built on that divine humility and obscure it. What reductionism does not understand, but what poverty of spirit does, is that the greatest power in the cosmos comes from powerlessness, from kenosis, from self-emptying.

Why are people drawn to meditation? And why is it so important to teach it? Because it feeds us on truth, not illusion. And because it shows that we do not meditate driven by the desire to be enlightened. We meditate to learn that, just as we are, with faults and embarrassing failures, we are drawn into the divine vortex. We are transformed into what we are coming to see. The ego shrinks. The reductionism by which we tried to control the world is reduced to ashes in the fire of love. Then the ashes we used on Ash Wednesday will have served their purpose.



Laurence Freeman OSB

## JMS 2015

# David Tacey: "Religion and Spirituality can come back together again and the WCCM is part of this"

The John Main Seminar 2015 brought together about 220 people from 10 countries in January at Waikato University, in Hamilton New Zealand. This is WCCM's most important annual event and was once again a wonderful opportunity to experience silence, community and reflections by the speaker, Emeritus Professor David Tacey, Melbourne, Australia. The theme was "Spirituality and Religion in a Secular Age". Fr. Laurence Freeman led a retreat before the seminar, on "Meditation as a Modern Spiritual Path".



Seminar in Hamilton had participants from ten countries

## David Tacey and the JMS 2015

*One of the things to say about the "spirituality revolution" is that it gets a lot of positive hype, particularly from young people. But under the hype a lot of them are actually lost and one of the reasons they are lost is because they have no roots. No ancestral background. No rich soil in which to grow their spirituality plant. And the roots are tradition. Without traditions, a lot of spirituality, and a lot of young people, will fade like flowers in a vase. It needs something more. But what they are experiencing I think is genuine. It is not just new age*

*fantasy it is the return of the Spirit in a secular age. So, having described the situation of spirituality and religion, I do not believe the situation is permanent or irredeemable. I think spirituality and religion can come back together again and I think the WCCM is part of this and very much at the forefront of the reconciliation, of these two separated continents, of religion and spirituality. Which is why I was so pleased to get this invitation to speak here because I feel this is one of the key positive signs of where we need to move to.*

## Comments on the Seminar:

It was a wonderful experience for me as the seminar leader. It gave me a chance to prepare my thoughts on a range of topics that have occupied my mind for many years. It provided focus for those thoughts, and I was delighted to meet so many fellow travellers with open minds and receptive hearts. It was my first engagement with The World Community for Christian Meditation and I hope it will not be my last. For me the highlight of the Seminar was the wonderful, spontaneous outbreak of the Maori waiata (song) at the end of my talk on youth spirituality. It was a moment of grace for me, which I will remember and cherish. **(David Tacey)**

It was a real leap of faith to host the 2015 John Main Seminar in Hamilton, New Zealand. We knew from the very start that for the event to be a success a significant number of participants would have to come from overseas. Some 270 people registered of which nearly half came from other countries. Being with Christian meditators from 10 nations made me realise more than ever that we are a community based on love and hope and the recitation of that sacred word, maranatha. It was such an amazing experience! **(Vincent Maire, New Zealand National Coordinator)**





## JMS 2015



Walking meditation each morning

A week of quiet reflection, spiritual stimulation and wonderful New Zealand hospitality. **(Richard Cogswell, Australia)**

During the seminar and meditations in NZ, as a meditator since Nov 2004, unpredictably it was like what Saul of Damascus had experienced: a ray of warm light pierced warmly into my soul: the two continents there, one of rationality and another of the craving for the Lord which dissolved as one in the love of the Lord, with my fears, doubts and uncertainties having subsided. Deo Gratias! **(Lina Lee, Hong Kong)**

This JMS was both revisiting my past studies in literature and philosophy and integrating it with my pres-

ent spiritual journey. It is also a reminder that spirituality and religion are one and only one, namely two sides of the same coin. On one hand, it is sad to see its separation today. On the other hand, it is good to know that Christian meditation will be the path for this reunion. **(Celina Chan, Hong Kong)**

I felt the "community consciousness" of our Meditation Community (WCCM) at JMS in Hamilton. It was truly made visible with the fruitful outcomes of the Seminar, Retreat, fellowship and the total organisation; cheers to NZ Team. It has to be the inner power of love and creativity working from our daily meditations. Even at the post-JMS Pilgrimage, we were comfortable

sleeping as a community; no barriers. Praise the Lord. **(Patrick Prakash, Singapore)**

The John Main Seminar is always a moment to refresh the experience of meditating in Community and going deeper in study and knowledge. This was the fifth time I participated and I am always amazed by the generosity of people and the richness of cultural diversity. David Tacey gave us many insights and for me reinforced the role of Christian Meditation in the world. **(Leonardo Corrêa, Brazil)**

I was delighted to have had the opportunity to attend the Seminar. The venue was superb with modern buildings in a spacious campus with beautiful sunny days. Fr Laurence highlighted the need of creating the right environment for being alert and attentive in preparing for meditation. He also emphasised that Meditation enables us to be permanently connected to the presence of the Spirit of Jesus who is within us.

Professor Tacey's experience of living with the aborigines in Australia helped him to clarify that "westerners" have their knowledge of religious beliefs in their heads and the aborigines having their beliefs in their hearts. He proposed that 'head knowledge' and not 'heart knowledge' is probably the cause of falling attendance in the churches of the western world. **(Sam Eathorne - Fiji)**

## Online

All the talks (Pre-Seminar Retreat and JMS) are available in audio and video here:

[http://tiny.cc/jms2015\\_AV](http://tiny.cc/jms2015_AV)

## News

### Fr. Laurence meets Mother Mangalam



On the 21st January, John Main's birthday, Fr. Laurence visited the Pure Life Society in Kuala Lumpur. This was the place where John Main first learned to meditate 60 years ago. Above, Fr.

Laurence and Mother Mangalam, President of the Pure Life Society. After the visit, Fr. Laurence led a retreat in Penang on the theme "The Eight Big Problems of Life".

### Canada

Fr. Laurence visited Canada in February and saw the expansion of the work of teaching meditation to children, especially in Hamilton Ontario. He gave a Seminar to over 250 principals, teachers and educational leaders, a retreat for School Boards and a keynote address at St Jerome's University Waterloo. You can watch a video (with Spanish subtitles) about Meditation with Children in Ontario here: [http://tiny.cc/children\\_canada](http://tiny.cc/children_canada)

### Poland

WCCM Poland held a Christian Meditation retreat in November 2014 with 120 participants from all over the country. The theme was Silence: The

Desert, the Monastery and Modern Art. The retreat was led by Fr. Bernard Sawicki (OSB), former Abbot of the Benedictine Monastery in Tyniec.

### Changes in our team

National Coordinator in Switzerland Catherine Charrière passed the role of Director of Liaison for National Communities to Kath Houston from Australia. Kath comments "My hope is to support the National Coordinators in the work they are doing for the mission of the Community, to get to know them better personally and strengthen the relationships among the national coor-

### Milestones: new series at Meditatio Centre

The Meditatio Centre in London held the first talk of the series "Milestones" on 18th February, Ash Wednesday. Fr. Laurence Freeman spoke on the theme "Childhood". You can watch the video of the talk or download the audio at:

[http://tiny.cc/childhood\\_LF](http://tiny.cc/childhood_LF).

The other talks will be: Maturity (21st May), Ripeness (3rd September) and Transformation (3rd November). You can know more information about registration at the Meditatio website: [www.wccmmeditatio.org](http://www.wccmmeditatio.org)

All the talks of this series will be webcast live (details of how you can join in will be available at [www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org))

dinators in order to strengthen our vision for the World Community in the future".

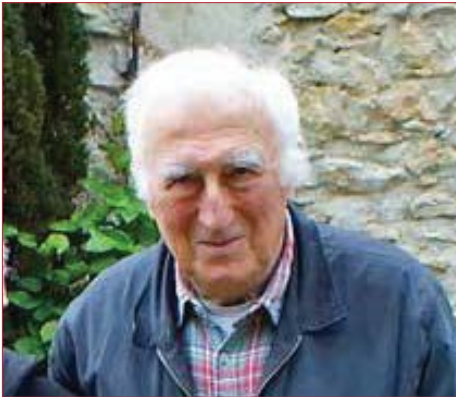
Other changes in the International Office in London: Rachel Sharpe (Director of Development) and Jeroen Koppert (IO Coordinator) completed their term and left an enduring legacy to the community for which we will all be grateful.



## News

### Jean Vanier

*Retreat with Laurence Freeman, France, 3-7 June*



Jean Vanier, recently awarded the 2015 Templeton Prize, and Laurence Freeman will lead a weeklong retreat together in Trosly, the International Centre of 'Arche, France, on the theme: Entering into Silent Prayer. For all information about this retreat go to <http://tiny.cc/trosly>

### Meditation in the Monastic Tradition

*San Anselmo, Rome, 28 June - 5 Jul*

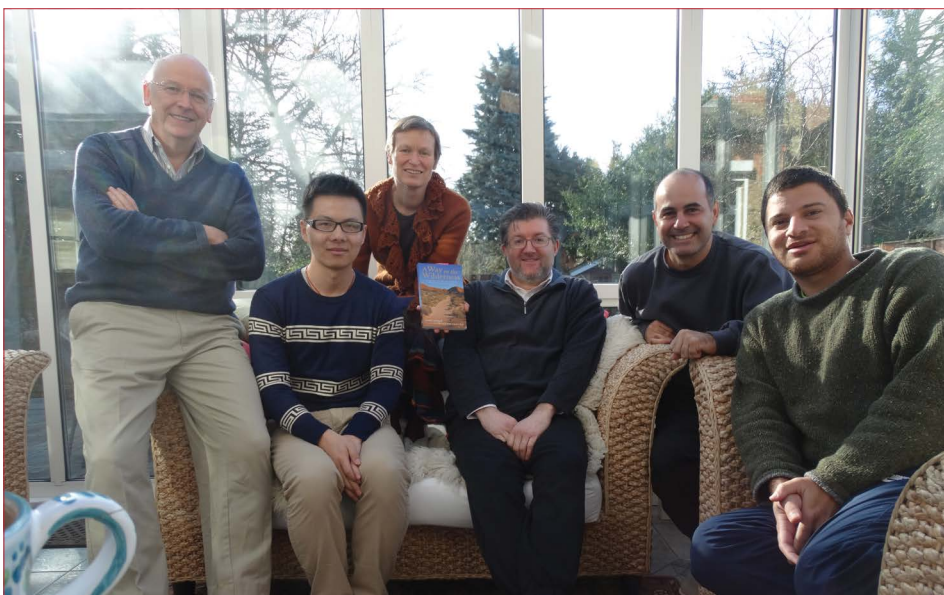
This exceptional week is open to all, who – as St Benedict says – are 'truly seeking God'. It brings together monks, oblates, scholars and a wide range of people concerned with integrating the contemplative and active dimensions of life. Each day blends study and practice, silence and discussion, solitude and fellowship. The day will follow the monastic rhythm of the Divine Office, Eucharist and periods of meditation which will be incorporated into these times of prayer. There will also be times of lectio and communal silence. **SPEAKERS INCLUDE:** Laurence Freeman OSB, Bernard Sawicki OSB, Joseph Wong OSB, Paolo Trianni, Sr Lorella Fracassa, Stefan Reynolds, Tim Casey, Guidalberto Bormolini and



Revd Dr Sarah Bachelard. The opening talk will be by: the Abbot Primate, Notker Wolf OSB.

For more details and registration visit [http://tiny.cc/SAnselmo\\_WCCM](http://tiny.cc/SAnselmo_WCCM)

### New faces at Meditatio House in London



The Meditatio House welcomed two new members recently: Augustine and Fr. Sergio Mancini. From left to right: Fr. Laurence, Augustine (China), Henriette (Holland), Andrew (Australia), Fr. Sergio (Argentina) and Fabio (Brazil).

### UK School Retreat in September

The Community in the UK is organising its School Retreat in September (4-11 September 2015) in the Yorkshire Dales. "The location is a beautiful and peaceful part of Britain, famous for its spectacular walks. The week is being led by Kim Nataraja and we would be delighted to share this opportunity with the wider community", says Jacqueline Russell, School of Meditation UK Coordinator. For more information contact Jacqueline at [jacqrussell3@gmail.com](mailto:jacqrussell3@gmail.com). The School Retreat is suitable for people who have been meditating seriously for some time in our tradition

The international School Retreat this year will be held in San Francisco, US, from 6th to 13th December.

## Article

*By Denise McMahon smsm,  
National Coordinator, Fiji*

## Christian Meditation in Fiji Schools

Although successive generations of children living near the Prayer Centre have learned how to meditate and we have noticed the visible positive effects which it has had on them, Christian Meditation in the schools in Fiji has taken quite a number of years to be accepted and appreciated. Meditation in the schools was started first by Sr. Maura Hennessy SM in a boarding school on the island of Ovalau over fifteen years ago and for some years it was part of the daily school program. Sadly, the practice was dropped several years later when a new Principal took over. At the same time in Suva, a team led by Fr Denis Mahony SM, with the consent of the Catholic Director of Education, gave seminars on Christian Meditation to the teaching staff of the primary and secondary schools in Suva. This venture was disappointing and not much came of it. Perhaps the teachers were skeptical that children could be silent and still. That was the end of the work in the schools for a few years except for Marist Brothers High School where Brother Sam Eathorne FMS introduced it as a daily practice and Fr Denis started here at the Prayer Centre a children's meditation group which met for twenty minutes after each Sunday Mass.

Then, about six years ago Father and I were invited to several primary and secondary schools in Suva to teach meditation. This time we adopted a different strategy requesting to teach the children in their classrooms and insisting on the presence of the class teachers during the teaching. We also asked for the opportunity to speak to the teachers as a group about meditation and its importance for children.

The teachers began to see how easily the children took to meditation and the good effects that it had. The children seemed to like it. All those schools now have daily times of meditation and several schools have two times of meditation, one at the beginning of the school day and the other at the end of the day. Some schools have had sound systems installed so that the meditation can be coordinated from the administration centre with the teachers taking it in turns to lead it. This year the school meditation team has expanded with several generous retired teachers joining us. We have revisited the 12 schools where meditation is already established as a daily practice and, as well, have gone to 6 new schools both primary and secondary which now feature daily meditation. Time did not permit us to accept some invitations to schools on other islands in Fiji but we are hoping to do this now in 2015.

### Inter-faith Dialogue

One very exciting interfaith development occurred in November 2014: the opening of a Universal Meditation Centre at Swami Vivekananda College, a large secondary school run by the Rama Krishna Mission. This project was undertaken to promote harmony amongst the various faiths in Fiji and to teach the approximately 1000 students at the College meditation according to their respective faith traditions. The official opening included a symposium on meditation in the traditions of Islam, Christianity and Hinduism and the importance of meditation to young people. Our archbishop, Pe-



ter Loy Chong, requested me to speak on meditation in the Christian tradition. It was a great privilege to take part and be involved at interfaith dialogue at this level. Swami Tadananda, the overseer for the project believes meditation is important for young people for their own happiness and well-being but has also an important contribution to make to the formation of future leaders for the nation and the world. We are most grateful to WCCM for the support which we have received over the years which has helped us to understand the teaching ourselves and then to be part of this wonderful work of teaching children and young people how to meditate which is one of the greatest gifts that they can be given.



## In Focus

Andrew McAlister



There is a road that runs from my Australian hometown of Bathurst to a small village called Perthville. A part of that 10 kilometre (6 mile) way was once covered by huge trees. On a bright summer's day it was like driving into a cave. During autumn it was like driving into a Van Gogh painting. A deep part of me sings at the memory of this small section of road.

I have never been able to shake off this part of me that sings. As a result, I have always been something of a contemplative 'misfitting' my way through life – like a round ball moving in and out of square holes. To turn from this inner place would mean for me a living death.

Still, like the trees blocking the sun on that road to Perthville, fear has often blocked my experience of this deep place. And yet the sunlight

always finds a way through. Much of my life has been about the search for these transparent, fragile rays; and much has been about the darkness.

I did not give my contemplative vocation to established church in ways that others have done before me. I am thankful for this. I believe that now is the time for the contemplative life generally to be a prophetic presence in the Body of Christ. A contemplative vocation is simply about growing in love and being ourselves. And so, everyone can be a mystic. Many are and they just don't know it.

During the mid-nineties a fellow misfit introduced me to Christian meditation. The WCCM was just new, freshly minted from the John Main Seminar in New Harmony, USA. I was immediately drawn to meditation as a new way to live an established tradition. At the same time, however, I was suspicious of the WCCM and held back from it.

I began the challenge of remaining faithful to a practice being encouraged by the Spirit. For some time I meditated outside the WCCM.

As I moved past 30 I continued to feel the challenge of meditating, sometimes acutely. During this time I struggled to live with depression and anxiety. One morning a fragile ray of light warmed in me as a conviction: keep meditating, don't stop now. This was life and death, the

'choose life' moment of Jeremiah (21:8) and a Wham! t-shirt. This conviction often returns just before my practice deepens in some way (as it did then).

Today my meditation practice stands firm in the grace that mental disorder has enabled in my life. My ego has given up on mastering the world – praise God. It is simply not strong enough.

Seven years ago I went along to a 'young meditators' meditation group in the Sydney suburb of Paddington. I had finally grown tired of meditating without a group. The 'once a week and once a month to the pub' routine of the group was appealing. The people in the group were a blessing.

Contact with this group meant contact with the Australian meditation community and the WCCM at large. This contact meant contact with the oblates of the WCCM. To my surprise and concern I found myself being drawn to being an oblate.

I followed this drawing, this invitation. Soon I discovered that the footprints of Jesus which I tried to follow also had within them the footprints of Benedict. I discovered myself as a monastic living contemplatively in the world.

Now I am living at Meditatio House, in London. As an oblate of the WCCM, and in this house community, I am finding a home away from Home. A round hole.



Meditatio Newsletter is published four times a year by the International Office of The World Community for Christian Meditation, 32 Hamilton Road, London W5 2EH, UK. Tel: +44 208 579 4466  
E-mail: [welcome@wccm.org](mailto:welcome@wccm.org)

Editor: Leonardo Corrêa ([leonardo@wccm.org](mailto:leonardo@wccm.org))  
Graphic Design: Gerson Laureano  
Proofreading: Carla Cooper and Susan Spence  
International Coordinator: Pauline Peters ([paulinepeters2@gmail.com](mailto:paulinepeters2@gmail.com))

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

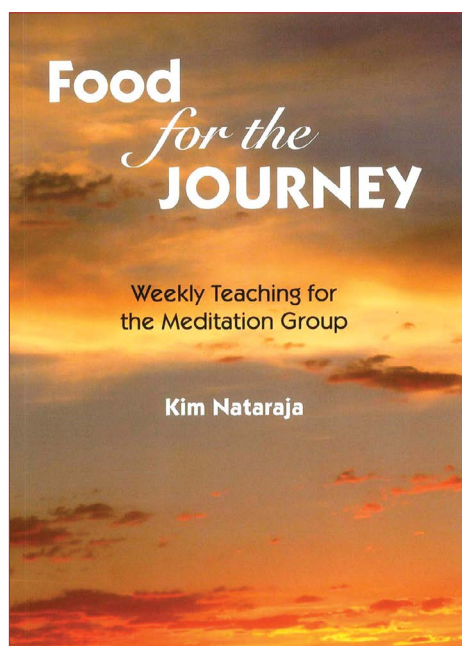


## Resources

### Books

#### Food For the Journey

Kim Nataraja



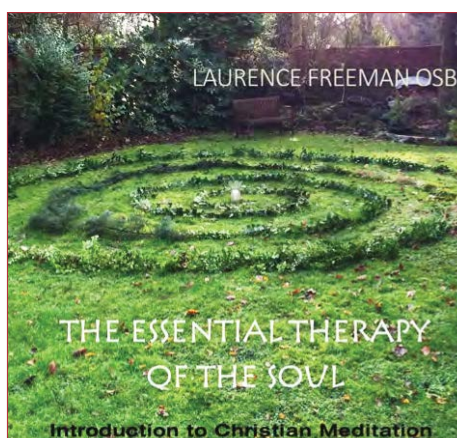
This book is composed of three yearly cycles of the Weekly Teachings. As Fr Laurence OSB says, "The Weekly Teachings form an ongoing series that builds up into a solid foundation of the tradition in which we meditate." The book can be used as the teaching element in a weekly group or form part of the discussion after the meditation.

Price and orders: go to [www.meditatiostore.com](http://www.meditatiostore.com)

### CDs

#### The Essential Therapy of the Soul

Laurence Freeman OSB



Fr Laurence introduces meditation as a spiritual discipline and a way of healing and wholeness. Meditation is the essential therapy of the soul. His simple teaching and lucid responses to frequently asked questions will inspire you to begin and encourage you to persevere.

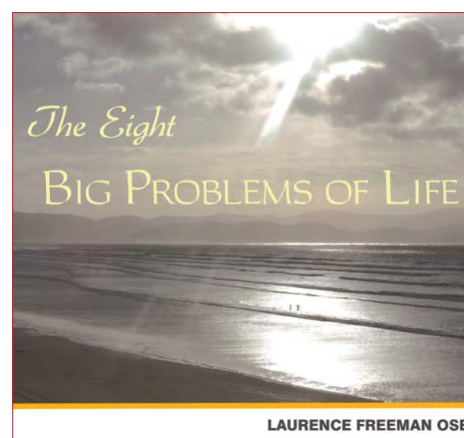
**Price and orders: contact the resource center nearest to you (box below)**

### Blog on the Rule of St Benedict

A new blog has been created by the Meditatio House Community in London. Andrew, who lives in the community and shares the daily discussion on the Rule in daily life among its members each morning,

#### The Eight Big Problems of Life

Laurence Freeman OSB



The seven deadly sins were first formulated by the Desert Fathers as the eight principal faults: greed, gluttony, lust, sadness, anger, acedia, pride, vanity. These patterns can be overcome through the ascesis and discipline of Meditation.

welcomes your participation: "Anyone who is interested in the link between meditation and the Benedictine lifestyle is welcome to read and contribute to this blog". To read the blog go to [http://tiny.cc/blog\\_rule](http://tiny.cc/blog_rule)

**To order: contact the resource center nearest to you. Our centres are listed below**

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AUSTRALIA:  
[jpanetta@ausgrid.com.au](mailto:jpanetta@ausgrid.com.au)  
Tel: +61 2 9482 3468