



WCCM

Newsletter of The World Community for Christian Meditation

Registered Charity No. 1182213

Seeing with New Eyes

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF LIFE? LAURENCE FREEMAN EXPLAINS HOW IT IS TO SEE WHAT IS AND BE ONE WITH IT. MEDITATION LEADS TO A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS WHERE WE SEE WITH THE EYES OF CHRIST.



A view from the ferry, Bere Island, Ireland (Photo by Laurence Freeman)

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Leaver friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

Each morning, right after meditation at Bonnevaux, we listen to the gospel of the day. Today it was just three verses: 'Jesus made his way through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God. With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and several others who provided for them out of their own resources.' (Lk 8:1-3).

The early monks asked themselves 'What is the real goal of the monk's life?' In the confusions of our time, more and more I find it helpful to use 'monk' and 'meditator' interchangeably. With the spreading of a serious practice of meditation in all walks of life, the meditator is, in many ways, the new monk. So, let's ask 'What is the real goal of life?' and see what the monastic wisdom has to say. The Desert Teachers spoke of the goal on two levels. The *ultimate goal* is the kingdom of God. The *immediate goal* is purity of heart. These two levels, like the foreground and the horizon of life's landscape, unite to form a focused vision of human life.

Recently, we had a retreat on 'healing the broken heart'. Listening to the stories people told was heart-breaking: the death of children, the loss of a cherished relationship in which we placed great expectations, accidents that violently threw a peaceful life into turmoil. The meaning of suffering takes time to distil and, as it gradually dawns, it is felt strongly but usually escapes from the net of words. Meaning is more than an answer or an explanation. It is connection, but also perception. Meditating on good days and bad days, what do we come to as we are purified by processing things while performing our daily chores? We come to see what seeing God is really like. Then happiness, which we barely recognise when it



happens, takes us by surprise: happy are those whose hearts are pure because they see God. But God is always surprising: God appears as our ideas about Him dissolve.

The big dilemmas of life are embedded in ordinary daily routines and break the surface wonderfully and terribly in exceptional joys and sufferings. I think this is what today's gospel describes. Jesus is walking from place-to-place, preaching and proclaiming the Good News. The goal of life is being spoken of in a way never heard anywhere before. Truth is telling truth. To those who listen, it is something ultimate. But there are personalities and logistics too. He had companions on the road; people have problems and blind spots. We hear specifically about the women disciples rarely mentioned in the stories and we hear of the finances that kept them all on the road. Jesus did not charge for his teaching, and the price of gas was not a problem, but somebody had to pay for food and board. The details about his companions and their economy point to the 'immediate' goal of life. Purity of heart is gained by our way of dealing with them in the immediate flow of daily interactions, remembering the reason for being there and re-aligning them with the ultimate goal. The 'ultimate' goal is what Jesus is preaching and proclaiming, but even more in how he embodies it moment by moment.

The good news is that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. The hard truth is that it is always closer than we can think or imagine.

The kingdom is here and now, which shapes how we respond to life's immediate goals and problems. The war in Ukraine. Climate change. The degeneration of democracy and the rise of nationalism. Energy prices and unemployment. Being diagnosed with cancer. Failing mental powers. The loss of love. Dealing with these problems, often overwhelmed by them, we can feel we '*have to do something now*' to solve them. We grasp at easy answers and seductive solutions that promise quick success. However, there are no answers or solutions that work for long except perhaps to avoid imminent catastrophe. Every success sooner or later fades into a sense of failure.

The greater the challenge, the briefer the solution. Frightened and impatient, we veer to extremes, as today's politics show. We escape by denying problems, blaming dark conspiracies or in cynical judgementalism. Withdrawing from the social responsibility of citizens, we become consumers and the life of society becomes merely 'the economy'.

The alternative is new perspectives. The best solution is *not* to imagine that solutions are the immediate answer. Only metanoia changes things: a change

of mind happens when ideas loosen their grip. Then new perceptions, seeing new connections, expanding in fresh fields of understanding, the opening of the eye of wisdom whereby God may be seen, connect the immediate goal to the ultimate goal.

Why is this difficult? Because it involves the change we call death: the end of old ways of seeing, liberation from fantasies, and entering the new life, so strange and different it seems unreal, but that we call 'resurrection': it's the life we live here and now, after every death and that turns even death into a grace. Resurrection is turning over the apple cart; everything the cart carried spills on the road. But it opens the way into peace through the door of paradox, terminating the world of endless contradictions and conflicts. In this new world, death is revealed as birth.

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Jesus preached and proclaimed this new perspective consciousness, calling it the 'kingdom of God'. It is not far away. It is within us and amongst us. It is the treasure we stumble across but also the quest we must pursue each day. It is not a solution but a revelation, an epiphany, something always there but now recognised. Jesus taught it within a group of students who became disciples by listening and staying with him, understanding a little more each day until he left them. But then, strangest of all, his absence showed them his real presence.

If the goal of life was an answer or a solution, he would have left books and systems behind. Instead, he left a spoken Word, a remembered transmission of perception, heart to heart. Experience is the teacher. Listening and remembering turn the experience into a seeing of things in a new way. This teaches us to transmit it in our turn, communicating it as a universal truth through the medium of the spirit, across all cultures and time zones.

Obviously, then, the kingdom is not the church. Yet, however frustratingly, the church is inescapable, just as our own body is inescapable. It is the facility for communicating the kingdom, despite all the faults and shortcomings of its institutional forms. Whenever it forgets the distinction between immediate and ultimate goals, the church constructs false ultimates, becoming churchy, self-fixated and even touched by pride and arrogance, contradicting everything Jesus taught. Were it not for the salt of proph-



ets, martyrs and contemplatives, one of its many deaths would be its last.

A church lacking depth of vision dogmatises Jesus and puts him on a pedestal. When the church becomes a school of prayer, guiding the pilgrimage to the kingdom, Jesus appears even to those outside the church as a new way of seeing, a new perspective for every life. When he is objectified, he disappears, yet when we keep faith with him while he is invisible, his nameless presence burns illusion away.

Our face is invisible to us unless we look in a mirror. Jesus is invisible until we see him imaged in the mystical form of his body, the church of the whole cosmos.

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In the perspective of the life of faith he becomes visible in everyone. The single

command to love one another opens the way to understand that 'I am my neighbour'. Every day, this perception changes everything, subverting all constructed systems of power. Seeing it converts life at personal and social levels. Unified consciousness floods the soul of the world with an energy of peace more powerful than all the combined forces of anger and violence. 'For he himself is our peace. He has made the two one.' (Eph 4:18). How can we then wilfully harm another knowing that we are harming ourselves and

the whole we belong in? This perspective explains why Jesus calls us friends. Our friend is 'another oneself'.

To see himself, a person must look at another and focus upon the other

(John Main)

As this perspective grows, life becomes a conversation of respectful equals. It feeds the growth of a just and peaceful society for which democracy, however imperfect and messy, is the best immediate tool. When democracy is practised, the faint shape of the kingdom even begins to be perceptible. On occasions, as in a community or a family, it may even, like a shooting star, flash forth visibly as when a whole people forget their problems and welcome strangers with greater immediate needs. In our John Main Seminar in November, we will affirm the spiritual values of democracy in a conversation

between the generations.

Yet, whatever we do is not a solution or even an explanation. Life cannot be reduced to generalities. Generalising about it doesn't make it real: it becomes real only when a new way of seeing dawns upon us and convinces us of its truth. Dawn comes before sunrise. Dawn itself is a process, sunrise is an event. The event itself is an undeniable, instantaneous, irreversible recognition: a perception that we may have long thought about is real. The dawning of reality is also important because were it not for the event, there would be no process.

Meditation is the immediate process that purifies our hearts daily and brings us into this most intimate and ultimate, unified, state of consciousness that we call the 'mind of Christ'.

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The Christian vision of reality is the seeing of everything as a whole, interconnected and growing together, and it makes no abstract division between the church and the world. The church can become painfully, ridiculously worldly and the world can be holy and sacred. It is a matter of perception, of seeing what is and how we relate to it. This dawning perception of reality is faith, the 'proof of things unseen' (*Heb 11:1*). Which is why in meditation 'we look not on what is seen but on what is unseen' (*2 Cor 4:18*). As it dawns, it moves the mountains of illusion within the mind and heals the wounds of division between ourselves and others.

Many people feel toxic associations when they hear the words 'church, Christian or Christianity', which makes it hard to communicate the essence of the faith. But it is also hard to see how the sickness of the world today can be cured without the spirit of Christianity participating in the rebirth process of humanity through a universal transformation of consciousness. Perhaps the contribution of Christian faith would be helped by seeing the



Fr Laurence during his visit to the Parish of the Ascension in Balally (Photo by Mary P O Connor)

word 'church' more as a verb, a way of seeing and being together, rather than as an institution or ideology. This can happen if sufficient Christians see themselves as part of a contemplative movement of change, part of a mystical body changing the way humanity sees itself.

I felt this strongly during a visit to the Parish of the Ascension in Balally, Dublin, described later in this newsletter. It is hard to describe the experience of the renewal of the community there. Even the word 'renewal' sounds like an insider's word whereas the experience felt equally interior and outward directed. With everyone involved in the process, I felt as if we were being carried up and beyond an old perception of church into something much older, closer to the source from which church-consciousness is born. Being renewed means returning to the wonder of birth and entering the river of life in a different way. It was not just a renewal of an institution but of individuals collectively sharing a deepening vision. I learned from this that the vision and commonality, not buildings or bureaucracy, is the real church, being surprised by the Spirit and their calling to change.

*

What kind of prayer is needed to trigger the new consciousness necessary for our survival and for turning this crisis into a dark night in which humanity will

grow into something different? We need prayer for sure, but what kind? It is the prayer Jesus taught in his great sermon on the mount, the 'pure prayer' flowing from him into the contemplative tradition that connects us to him.

Ancient teachers tell us that prayer itself is good, as necessary to human wholeness as is a healthy environment, diet and exercise for physical well-being. Many as are the styles, forms and expressions of prayer, what is prayer itself essentially? We need to know this to keep all its expressions – sacramental, scriptural, devotional, personal and communal – authentic and transformative. One of the essential elements of pure prayer is that it changes the person who prays. It is not an attempt to numb our anxious mind or to get God to change His mind. We hardly need to label some forms of prayer 'contemplative' because, if we know the essence of prayer, all forms of prayer become essential. Brick by brick, it dismantles the wall of the ego until it crumbles and union can be realised.

Augustine said to love and do what you like. We might say 'meditate and pray as you like.' Meditation gives us the taste of pure prayer and its fruits. It is found in poverty – through the laying aside of thoughts and imagination – then it leads into purity of heart. Purity and poverty lead into each and together become the

straight and narrow path to the kingdom.

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What I am trying to say here is not proposing new ideas. Prayer is more than a tool for church renewal, even though social transformation will be a fruit of personal conversion of heart. It is remembering what Jesus taught as the ultimate goal and that his way of teaching prepares us to realise it as he did it. 'We possess the mind of Christ'. In words, he especially used homely parables rather than dogmatic statements or subtle solutions. His way of teaching forms a particular kind of identity in his disciples. Learning, of course, always makes us see new aspects of the landscape of our minds and lives. To learn anything, a language, how to programme the TV, how to cook a good omelette, how to raise children, even how to make sense of the signs at Paris airport, expands our minds and the world we inhabit.

Learning is not being brainwashed. It demands a change of approach, a shift of perception and an openness to other points of view. The experience of pure prayer that meditation opens will change the way we understand the teaching of Jesus himself. In the parables and in the life-story of Jesus, we will still see the obvious, first level of meaning. But, with the pure and loving attention that changes our minds, we will see other aspects at more subtle and real levels. It is not about finding answers or solutions but of seeing what we did not see before. In this sense, life itself is a parable teaching us its meaning and goal. When it is lived to the full, it asks us to read its joys and losses, changing the way we see it and how we live.

As we hurtle, badly led, through climate change and political storms, we could be tempted to cling to prayer as an escape from reality. It would become a means of numbing fear and reinforcing delusions. We might console ourselves that we can bring about change just by

praying with good intentions. Prayer will change the world when we know how we, God and the world are one. When we are in the state of *metanoia*, the changing of our ways of perception will make us agents of transformation in our world, whether we know how or not.

*

Not long ago, an American state passed a law forbidding the teaching of evolution in schools and imposing the literal interpretation of the biblical myth of creation. Today, Saudi Arabia and Egypt forbid the teaching of evolution and about 46% of Americans (Gallop 2012) now believe the world was made in six days. A belief they are free to hold.

However, it is as unlikely that they are right as that the earth is flat or that Elvis is still alive. People are entitled to believe what they wish, but are governments and other influencers entitled to deny people the right, the evidence and the educational training to choose for themselves? What is the political agenda in manipulating people's minds and trapping them in ways of perception of this kind? This is why meditation matters. False perceptions of any kind limit our capacity to open the eye of a purified heart

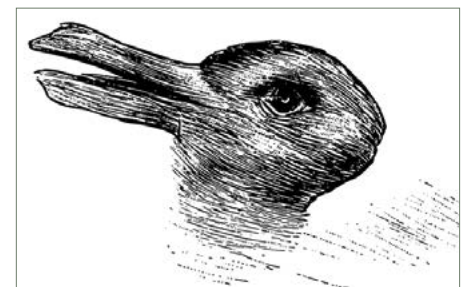
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Take climate change. We have the science and the finances to change our disastrous direction. But we lack the common mind and the will, the perception of human solidarity and, above all, trust in the common good transcending nationalism and greed. How do we help minds to open, to see new and deeper aspects of reality?

This is why our community has asked Herman van Rompuy, a rare meditating politician and statesman, to lead this year's John Main Seminar on the crisis facing democracy. John Main understood why meditation is connected to this question today. He understood how the ultimate goal of the kingdom and the

immediate goal of purity of heart meet *in this world* and in our responsibility to redeem it by love. Contemplation, he knew, is the foundation of civilisation, removing fear and opening a new vision of reality.

Meditation teaches us to learn, to listen, to hold different ideas in balance and to recognise the difference between illusion and reality, deception and truth. It allows us to see, with humour rather than fear, that the truth is greater than we think - as for example in this famous test of perception. Is it a rabbit or a duck?



Is it either/or? Or both at once? Does seeing both aspects frighten or expand you?

Seeing that the 'kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but integrity and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (*Rom 14:17*) is to be on the path that brings the ultimate and the immediate goals of life together in a marriage of contemplation and action, Jesus and the Christ, and all the rabbits and ducks of reality. Unity happens in an expanded space of perception. It restores the lost harmony of wholeness within and among ourselves.

We do not meditate merely to alleviate the stress and anxiety that our dark night has produced but in order to get at their root cause and transform it. As a medieval teacher of contemplative prayer said in the language of his time 'this work of prayer dries up the root of sin within you.'

With much love,

Lawrence

News & Articles

John Main Seminar 2022 - The Challenge TO Democracy: The Challenge OF Democracy

HERMAN VAN ROMPUY WILL LEAD THIS YEAR'S SEMINAR ON 17-20 NOVEMBER AT BONNEVAUX AND ONLINE

The John Main Seminar (17-20 November 2022) will be led by Herman Van Rompuy at Bonnevaux on the theme 'The Challenge TO Democracy: The Challenge OF Democracy'. Laurence Freeman will lead a pre-seminar retreat (14-17 November 2022) on the theme 'Our Conversation is in Heaven'. The option to join in person at Bonnevaux or online is offered for both the seminar and the retreat. Translation into Dutch will be offered to online participants of the seminar only. Because Herman Van Rompuy believes that 'conversation is the life-blood of democracy', he will lead the Seminar in a responsive conversation with other meditators of different ages and cultures from within our community. A diverse group of younger meditators will engage with him, as will a group of women and men from various backgrounds who share a conviction



(Photo by Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona on Unsplash)

tion that meditation makes a difference – both to the meditator and to the world we love and live in.

The talks and responses will explore:

- * Democracy, values and meditation
- * Global rivals: the Cold War between democracy and despotism

* Defending and supporting democracy in times of rising populism

* Government of the people by the people for the people: what changes are needed?

For more information and to register go to: wccm.org

Herman: “A revival of democracy cannot be achieved without a sense of community”



Herman Van Rompuy is a Belgian politician who served as Prime Minister of Belgium and later as the first permanent President of the European Council from 2009-2014. He is acknowledged as a seasoned statesman of stature and wisdom. He also contributes from his contemplative experience in regular talks to his fellow meditators in the WCCM. He reflects on the relationship between meditation and democracy:

“It is paradoxical that a seemingly solitary practice of repeating a mantra in silence transforms people: their ego diminishes,

and they become more open to others, they become stronger as persons, they are being empowered spiritually. A seemingly inactive practice is new energy to actively engage with others. The mantra pushes away fears and can make way for hope. Of course, meditation is not the only way to greater solidarity, but the contemplative path helps. Democracy needs that sense of belonging to the community. A revival of democracy cannot be achieved without this sense of community; new forms of dialogue, of participation at every level of government, can also help to revive the democracy from within.”

News & Articles

Taynã Malaspina on democracy and the young: “It is time for silence and reflection but also for action”

BY TAYNÃ MALASPINA *

We live in a period of democratic crisis. This context in Brazil has generated polarization. We live today in a culture of hate. We need to rescue human rights, which guarantee that human life is not destroyed and for this, we need dialogue and active listening; we need to rescue our capacity to pay attention, attention to the other, and our capacity to live. With the constant scandals of corruption and abuse of power, I realised that many young people have distanced themselves from these issues, from politics. So,

we need to dialogue about democracy openly and sincerely. We young people need to understand our role. Yes, it is a time to be in silence, to perceive the whole, to reflect, to contemplate everything. But it is also a time to act. We don't need reactive action, but contemplative action that comes from within our hearts. That is why it is so important to everyone to participate in the John Main Seminar 2022.

*Taynã, who is Coordinator for Meditation and Young Adults, will be part of the John Main Seminar 2022.



Democracy, an ongoing conversation...

Below are some other reflections on the theme of the John Main Seminar 2022 by meditators from different parts of the world:

Angelene Chan, Singapore: “Democracy is facing its most serious crisis in decades. The values that democracy embodies have been under assault in recent times and are fast disappearing globally. I am glad that these issues will be tackled and discussed in the upcoming John Main Seminar.”

Sean Hagan, USA: “Democracy provides a form of accountability for governments...The difficulty is that democracy needs to be protected, also from itself. Many

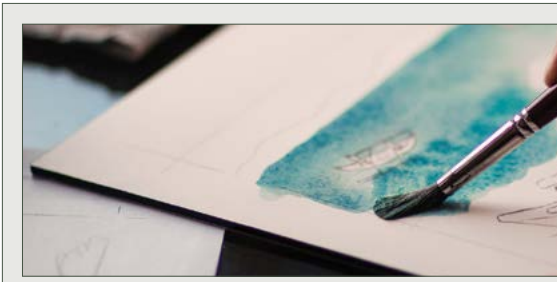
of the darkest chapters in history have involved dictators who have come to power through the democratic process. Democracy can also be an instrument of systemic corruption. Thus, democracy is a constant challenge in terms of effective implementation. This seminar focuses on both the promise of democracy and also the challenges democracy presents.”

May Ngo, Australia: “I think a seminar on democracy is invaluable right now because it goes to the heart of the Gospel. In the Gospel's concern for others is its directive to love our neighbor. It should provoke us to ask: What are the conditions for human

flourishing, both physically and spiritually, and how do we create these conditions for ourselves and for others?”

Kit Lee, Singapore: “What is our response to our world at this time of crisis? Jesus says: love one another as I have loved you. I would suggest that our collective contemplative response can be to understand the meaning of democracy at a deeper level. I believe we as meditators have an important role to play in our world today. To be attentive to the other, and to find a common ground in resolving our differences as a human race.”

Watch videos with reflections on democracy here: <http://tiny.cc/jmsrf22>



New Community Art Space on the WCCM Website

If you are an artist, poet, creative writer, photographer, painter, or some other kind of creative and would like to be featured on the WCCM website, please send your work and a short bio to Nick Scrimenti (nick@wccm.org).

News & Articles

A Parish in Dublin Builds the Church of the Future

BY NICK SCRIMENTI

Karl Rahner famously said, “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.” Fr. Jim Caffrey, parish priest of the Church of the Ascension of the Lord in Dublin, takes this statement seriously. The Catholic Church in Ireland is in a “do or die” moment. Faced with flagging participation, especially among young people, Fr. Jim has set his parish on a path for a remarkable transformation: becoming a centre for contemplative life in Ireland.

Once the “land of saints and scholars”, Ireland is no longer the bastion of Catholic practice and tradition it once was. In the 1970s, just as Ireland was joining the European Union, weekly mass attendance reached more than 90 percent. Today, propelled by many of the same cultural and economic forces that have contributed to the declining influence of the Catholic Church throughout the West, weekly church attendance tops out at around 30 percent in Ireland and even less in the Archdiocese of Dublin. The decline of the Catholic Church in Ireland culminated in the May 2018 referendum in which 66 percent voted in favour of legalizing abortion up to 12 weeks without restrictions, an outcome that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago.

Fr. Jim Caffrey, however, is aware of another reason for the declining influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland, namely the lack of a contemplative spirit. A diocesan priest of 16 years, then a monk of Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina for 5 years, Fr. Jim returned to Dublin in September of 2021 to serve as parish priest in Balally. As his own practice of meditation deepened,



Fr Laurence and Fr Jim (Photo by Mary P O Connor)

he grew more convinced of the potential for the contemplative life to renew the Church at the parish level. “I have always loved meditation, and this grew in the monastery,” he said. Once appointed to Balally, he believed that the parish was “open to renewal” and began to introduce meditation to parishioners and children in the parish schools. Fr. Jim was also inspired by a recent visit to Bonnevaux, where he could see first-hand an example of how a centre for meditation might bring about personal and ecclesiastical renewal.

The parish, with the support of the Archbishop of Dublin, now boasts a new mission statement - “Building Hope through Meditation and Service” - as well as a new Pastoral Council led by Martina Kavanagh and David Healy, two members of the parish whom Fr. Jim likes to call “contemplative elders”. The work of introducing meditation in schools is supported by Noel Keating, the WCCM National Coordinator of Ireland and an experienced leader in the work of teaching meditation to children. Fr. Dermot

Lane, a distinguished theologian and parish priest in Balally for 25 years, is also involved in teaching the practice of meditation. “It is a very special moment in the life of our parish,” Fr. Jim said.

Following a visit from Fr. Laurence, the parish in Balally is energized to become a national centre of meditation within the WCCM and is planning a visit to Bonnevaux. “I believe we are on the cusp of something wonderful, with God’s help,” Fr. Jim said. Fr. Laurence’s talk on Tuesday, September 13th focused on meditation’s place within the Christian tradition and the life of the church and was attended by over 300 people. “[Fr. Laurence’s visit] inspired us and convinced us we are on the right track.”

The parish in Balally is responding to the challenge to become a sanctuary for contemplative life, lest it sputter into irrelevance. With Fr. Jim’s leadership, Ireland can once again become a model for Church life the world over - new wine for new skins - and usher in the Church of the future through the practice of meditation.

News & Articles

Young Adults Retreat at Bonnevaux: a chance to be “surprised by joy”

BY SAMUEL PESTRIDGE, UK



I was fortunate enough to spend a week at Bonnevaux accompanied by the most wonderful young people. We shared times of meditation, yoga, creative activities, work and meals together. My experience of the ‘One in Mind, One in Heart’ retreat is characterised by hope, joy, peace and discomfort. But before I elaborate, a word on the space of Bonnevaux.

As soon as I arrived at Bonnevaux, I had a feeling of peace. A feeling of homecoming; of feeling totally free to be myself, knowing that I was held in the love of community. That’s without mentioning the beauty of the surroundings which cannot be put into words.

As I said before, the words ‘hope, joy,

peace and discomfort’ capture my experience during the retreat.

Hope emerged from my conversations with other young people who vulnerably and courageously shared with me. This showed me that a different path, not that of polarised debate, but of loving conversation, can lead us in a better direction.

If I may steal a wonderful phrase, I was ‘surprised by joy’ during the retreat. A sense of humour, humility and lightness was present throughout the talks, yoga and creative sessions, as well as our conversations and mealtimes. Whilst there was plenty of silence, when there was noise, laughter was never far behind.

Peace became real to me through spending time away from technology and shifting gears towards a slower way of life. Although it wasn’t compulsory to shut off our devices at all times, I felt encouraged by the beauty of my surroundings and the presence of the core community to do so.

Alongside this peace I felt discomfort at times. My attention had been subtly worn away by modern technology, and loosening its grip on my life was im-

mensely challenging. I often failed. More importantly, however, I also experienced moments of greater awareness and self-control. This was mostly thanks to the daily mentoring sessions where I could talk frankly about the challenges I faced as well as celebrate my successes. I was edified by this experience and grateful for the generosity of my mentor to give their time to support me.

Meditating three times a day for thirty minutes was hard, and sitting in silence at breakfast and lunch was initially boring and somewhat awkward. Nevertheless, after a few days of persevering with it (helped by the fact that everyone else was doing the same!), I began to look forward to savouring my meal and the silence of meditation. These are practices that I hadn’t incorporated into my life before the retreat. Now that I am back home, it feels much more natural and necessary to meditate regularly. For me, that is the beauty and power of a retreat. Although we are only there for a short time, the rhythm of life and nourishing practices that we begin or begin again, carry us through the following weeks, months and years. I look forward to returning to Bonnevaux soon.

Reflections from other participants:

Sarah Albino, 25, Brazil:

“Participating in the retreat, even if remotely, allowed me to be in spiritual communion with the whole community. In this modern world where we are overwhelmed by information, it is even more important that we practise meditation and live contemplatively.”

Oliver Mesmer, 27, USA:

“I felt very welcomed by the open heartedness of the Bonnevaux Community. The retreat gave me a structure to balance rest with the discipline of a spiritual practice.”

News & Articles

The Joy of Encounter: a retreat at Ampleforth Abbey bringing two worlds together

BY SUE WESTMACOTT AND KATE MIDDLETON

In our continuing Synodal journey, Pope Francis encourages us to get alongside people from the margins, to walk together and to listen to their stories. The vision for this two-day retreat (21 and 22 June 2022) was to give people from the so-called “margins of society” an opportunity to experience a therapeutic and welcoming environment including meditation and group activities in a beautiful place, far away from their usual circumstances. It was led by Terry Doyle and sponsored through the Eileen Cox Legacy Fund and Meditatio.

A coach brought 21 people from Middlesbrough, drawn from members of the North East Opera (NEO), which uses the power of music to help give disadvantaged people a voice; the Saltburn Addiction Recovery Group; and the Methodist Asylum Project (MAP). In solidarity with them were about 15 self-funded people with some experience of meditation who responded to the invitation extended by WCCM Meditatio to join the retreat.

The schedule was carefully put together to have at the heart the mission of the event, The Joy of Encounter. Communal times of meditation and prayer were interwoven with the timetable at the Abbey. With plenty of time to talk and enjoy other activities together, a trusting bond was formed very quickly between us, and we were able to relax and deeply share with one another. The facilitators of North East Opera, Emily Smith and David Pisaro, came to lead us all in a superb session billed as ‘Freeing the Voice



with The Joy of Singing’. Using a variety of songs they encouraged us all to participate enthusiastically, often at full volume. This uplifting experience reinforced the feeling of being a family. We also had the opportunity to take part in an Art Therapy workshop, making our own mandalas. The repetition entailed in forming a symmetrical pattern was also calming and satisfying.

Another of the beneficial group activities offered was Tai Chi & Zen walking with Terry. People really responded to this embodied prayer, offering us a focus, and enabling deep peace to come. Paul Golightly came too, to lead 2 sessions on Capacitar (<https://capacitar.org>) which focuses on healing from trauma. He taught us a few different helpful exercises as a group around wellbeing.

After Compline in the Abbey, we all met in the Crypt and were joined by a group of sixth form students from Ampleforth College for a time of sharing. We listened intently as several people told us something of

their story. It was so powerful to hear from an ex-heroin addict as he described laying on his bed with nothing left in the world except his mantra, repeating MARANATHA because his life depended on it. We also heard from a refugee from Uganda who told us how meditation had given her so much peace and that she had finally been able to sleep again after years of sleeplessness due to the trauma of losing family members and being displaced. We heard too from the Sixth Formers at Ampleforth about the importance of community life for them to flourish.

The accommodation at Ampleforth, the nature, the weather, the hospitality of the monks, the food, everything was fabulous. The Joy of Encounter was aptly named. A warm and friendly family atmosphere was quickly established, and any initial apprehension was soon banished. The depth of trust and sharing was remarkable and can only be put down to the presence of God in the silence we shared.

In Focus

Johanna Wisoli, Indonesia



Learning Christian meditation is the most beautiful blessing in my spiritual journey. The call to start this journey came through my late mother. When I reflected on this journey, I realised that God had called me many times, but I hadn't been sensitive enough to respond to His calls. Even after meeting Fr Laurence Freeman personally during his third visit to Indonesia, I wasn't yet interested in starting to meditate.

One day in 2013, as I was looking to join a retreat, my mother offered me a seven-day silent retreat at Chiang Mai with the Asian leader community. I decided to take her up on her offer, not thinking about the fact that the retreat programs would be packed with intensive meditation sessions, but seeing it more as an opportunity first to have quiet time and second to travel to Thailand and to visit Chiang Mai. Coincidentally, one participant cancelled so I was able to get the last place.

I landed by myself in Chiang Mai, a city that I had not visited before. Feeling a bit dismayed, I had to travel another few hours from the airport to reach the Seven Fountain Retreat House. Entering the retreat house gave me a feeling of calm and serenity. It was a beautiful place with a big labyrinth in the middle of the garden. I didn't know any of the other participants – everything was totally new to me. As the retreat started, I was overwhelmed by the silence - no talking, no sound - and by the many hours of meditation sessions. I had never experienced this kind of retreat before. In spite of these new experiences, my heart was at peace, and I started to experience the joy and bliss resulting from these long hours of silence and solitude. I was amazed at the simplicity of this kind of prayer. Inside my heart, my soul exclaimed, "God... this is what I had longed for for so long".

After the retreat, I returned home with an indescribable feeling of deep joy and calm in my heart and my mind. I had the thought that something new was about to happen in my life. I started meditating twice a day as often as I could and joined the weekly group that had existed long before my trip to Chiang Mai. My daily activities and my ministry as lector in my parish started to change and gain new meaning and depth.

When I was offered the national secretary position by our national coordinator, initially I was confused about what to do, but my national coordinator said, "Just do it," and so I took the opportunity to serve God, without any background or experience and without knowing what the challenges and my responsibilities would be. I started everything from zero. It turned out that the job was not as simple as I had previously thought; it came with enormous challenges and very demanding responsibilities. I had to split my time between my duties as the manager of my own store and my ministry in the Church, as well as my service to the national community. It wasn't easy at the beginning, especially when my mother passed away and I had to take care of the house and the business, and it still isn't. Whenever I felt sad and overwhelmed by juggling heavy workloads, I tried to stay calm and be conscious of the present moment. I was able to realise how my daily meditation helped me get through those difficult times.

My ministries in my Church and my service to the Community have made it possible for me to stay within my faith environment, and meditation provides me with the strength and courage to overcome challenging situations.



WCCM Newsletter is published four times a year by the International Office of The World Community for Christian Meditation, St Marks, Myddelton Square London EC1R 1XX, London, UK. Tel: +44 (0) 20 7278 2070

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Would you like to contribute to the WCCM Newsletter? Our next deadline is 30 November.

Resources

Online Courses

Meditation - A Healing Response to Trauma

The *Meditation - A Healing Response to Trauma* online course blends teaching videos from an international symposium on meditation and trauma with contemplative practices. It will allow you to design your own meditative healing journey, learn about groups doing trauma-informed meditation, understand how meditation helps heal the human brain and practise a body-centred approach to meditation.

It will include the following:

*First-hand accounts of healing from

trauma survivors

*A neurologist and a neuropsychiatrist speaking about how meditation is healing for humans

*What has worked in groups doing trauma-informed meditation

*How the ancient practice of meditation is an embodied tradition that eases trauma in the body; and

*A body-mind approach to meditation.

Enrol for this online course here:

<http://tiny.cc/medtraumc>

Save The Date Events for WCCM and Bonnevau in 2023



Check out our *Mark your Calendar* list of events for 2023 here:
<http://tiny.cc/stdte23>

Books (available at mediomedia.com)

Meditation: A Gift for Life Guidelines for Meditation in Schools

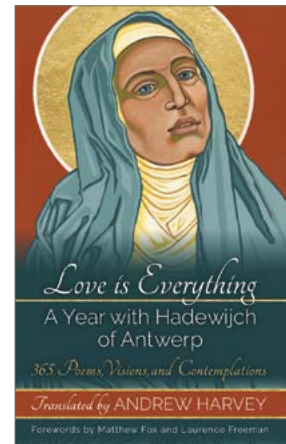
This booklet has been produced by WCCM Meditatio to offer international guidelines for the standardization of programs for meditation in schools. "A Gift for Life" is available in a printed version and as an e-book at mediomedia.com.

It is available in English, Spanish and Portuguese. For more information, contact Kate Middleton at meditatio@wccm.org

Love is Everything - A Year with Hadewijch of Antwerp

By Andrew Harvey (translator)

This compilation of the mystical writings of Hadewijch of Antwerp presents an honest picture of love from every angle, stripped of sentimentality, not disguising the high price love demands if it is to be taken or given seriously. In a world torn by division, indifference and chaos, to read *Love is Everything* is to be awakened to the full potential and dignity of being human, and to be changed.



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