

Meditatio

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Reforming humanity

Laurence Freeman reflects how meditation restores the wisdom we have lost in the link between asceticism and love



One of the springs at Bonnevaux where an ancient presence resides

Bonnevaux



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John Main Seminar 2020

Photo: Enrique Carrasco, SJ



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Dearest Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

There is a memorable scene in the movie 'The Two Popes' which describes the crisis of the Catholic Church through the conflicting personalities of Pope Benedict and his successor Pope Francis. Despite deep differences of opinion and temperament, they discover a unique kind of friendship, a commonality of concern for the wounded church and a way of collaborating with their contrasting gifts for its healing. The scene I have in mind happens at a back-door to the Vatican, where Benedict is saying goodbye to the future Francis having told him he intends to resign and so open the way for a new and radically different leader. They are both old men. Impetuously the hot-blooded Argentinian takes the stiff German intellectual in his arms and teaches him to tango while the Swiss guards look on in amused astonishment.

Real change occurs, not with solemn pomposity, clinging to all our old kinds of self-importance, but in a spontaneous rush of abandon where joy recklessly sweeps us over the watershed moment. We hardly dared believe we could survive. But we did and everything we knew has changed.

For me, these lines from WH Auden capture something of the relief and freedom of such unexpected, undeserved redemption:

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.

How can we approach this new decade with this freedom of the spirit and hope and yet be rooted in the sharpest realism? Today there is a lot we should be intellectually pessimistic about - because otherwise we drift in denial and false hopes. But there

is also a source of optimism found only through true, that is to say ever-surprising, faith born and reborn through doubt and struggle.

At a time when so many are rootless and untrusting of all belief, can we find a new innocence, a way both



The Bonnevaux Chapel (Photo: Sean O'Malley)

to believe and to belong? It is an important question. (A young visitor told me recently he had grown up in a comfortable home that was also a 'spiritual orphanage'.) If we don't listen to the question we may drift into the cynicism and isolation that underlies much of the bitterness and self-destructiveness of our time. W.B. Yeats, the poet on whose death Auden wrote those lines above, saw our cultural crisis originating in the desolation of civilisation after the First World War: 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...the best lack all conviction while the worst are full of passionate intensity'. In this dangerous, chaotic period of human evolution, can we re-centre ourselves, reuniting conviction and intensity, to reform not just the church, but humanity?

This is the time of the year, after the excessive consumption of the

holidays, when gym membership surges. Good resolutions abound. We are preoccupied with competing life-style choices. How can we make ourselves healthier and happier? These manufactured choices create products which embed us in even more

consumption, which is a large part of the problem they are trying to solve.

A healthy lifestyle may – or not – include working out, diet and career changes. But it must include the spiritual dimension. By this I mean that aspect of human experience, which is open to the transcendent while remaining rooted in the material world and the body. Spiritual experience is betrayed if it becomes a consumer product, a tool or life-style ingredient. If we truly recognise the spiritual realm, our life in all aspects is transformed. We do not 'construct' an authentic lifestyle as we choose a haircut or a new car. We find it. It finds us. Finding happens when we risk. The greater the risk, the greater the authenticity. If we are not prepared to lose our life (this is the risk), we may mistakenly seek refuge in the lives and social patterns of others. fleetingly it may feel like a good fit, but we do not find our own life, our true self. Faith is another word for this existential risking of ourselves, in obedience

to the call to wholeness, to transcendence and self-knowledge, that is at the core of all human identity.

Christian lifestyle, then, is not a brand. It is all-demanding and all-fulfilling. In risking ourselves we find the kind of life we can and are meant to follow, the kind we are best suited for even if it is not the easiest. Opting for this, we can handle the inevitable doubts and failures that follow every choice. But we also find that everything we need to complete the process is already given, often creeping up from behind us and tapping us on the shoulder. When we turn around we find what we are looking for. And what we need. On this path we find the teachers we need. We meet fellow-pilgrims, and discover not just new friends in abundance but new forms of friendship we had not previously even imagined. Not least, we discover the work we are meant to do.

The younger generation today often seems better able to grasp these aspects of the Christian life than their parents. They can see inspirational vision in the gospel revelation, but are less interested in orthodoxy or belief than in orthopraxy, right action that harmonises with faith. They connect to a vision of human wholeness and meaning in an incarnational transcendence that brings God and humanity not only into relationship but into union. There are glimpses of this in the early church communities, the monastic movement and in the array of uniquely holy people who illustrate this – human beings who became fully their unique selves, saints like St Benedict or St Francis, Mother Theresa, Simone Weil or John Main.

There is no single brand of Christianity. It is not an ideology. It allows truth to emerge. It does not compete: it completes. But, with all the institu-

tional baggage and social upheaval to contend with, how can the spiritual tides of the Holy Spirit be released? Not by a church that conforms to the corporate model and wastes its energies on the trivia of religious politics. The spiritual search can so quickly descend into complaint and bickering. Ramana said 'People come to the ashram looking for enlightenment. Within two weeks they are preoccupied with ashram politics.'

What Bonnevaux has been teaching me these past few months is that the way forward is a new style of collaboration between the generations. It is not about 'reaching out to young people' or 'getting the message over to them' as it is often described. Lis-

ing the wisdom of the elders. The world needs both, one specialising in risk, the other in forgiveness and recovery. Our world is horrendously deficient in all wisdom. The major religions should be wisdom channels, rising from the unbounded dimension of interiority, speaking from silence and yet pouring into our mundane, daily world of measurements and limitations.

At Bonnevaux we have a number of springs. One I always feel especially present to is at the end of the valley, beyond what we call the Easter Tree. It bubbles up through a tiny aperture in the ground; it is visible only as a mi-



Gathering at Bonnevaux after the Camino, in August 2019 (Photo Enos Mantoani)

tening to the young people who come here, I sense it is about a partnership that has nothing to do with the stereotypes of the generations peddled in the consumer culture. Bridging the generations is essential if there is to be continuity, continuity across the river of time delivering stability with radical change.

Collaboration between experience and innocence generates different streams of wisdom – the wisdom of the young (the theme of this year's Monte Oliveto retreat) complement-

ing the wisdom of the elders. The world needs both, one specialising in risk, the other in forgiveness and recovery. Our world is horrendously deficient in all wisdom. The major religions should be wisdom channels, rising from the unbounded dimension of interiority, speaking from silence and yet pouring into our mundane, daily world of measurements and limitations.

Religions where the spring of wisdom has been blocked become mere structures of dogma and ritual, competing with each other or secretly thinking of each other as enemies.

Jesus spoke prophetically – and paid a high price for doing so – against such religion. Yet he did not reject ritual or the belief systems of religion in themselves: he wouldn't have said 'I am spiritual not religious'. We need living symbols and intellectual clarity to guide us to the cliff-edge of silence. At that frontier silence absorbs them. But Jesus did call us to 'worship in spirit and in truth' as a higher goal, as he put it, than 'this mountain or that mountain'. The meditator, practising in any religious tradition, inevitably comes to understand this truth and strives to balance the contemplative with the external forms. At Bonnevaux, for example, we have simplified the divine office which is the frame in which we meditate during the day – except for the first meditation of the day which stands by itself beginning and ending only with the sound of the bowl. At the other sessions we have chant and short scripture readings, from biblical and sister traditions, to highlight that meditation is within the contemplative tradition. John Main said we enter this tradition every time we sit to meditate.

Bonhoeffer said that today we need to focus intently on prayer and righteous action. The collapsing model of institutional Christianity is an opportunity to make this a transformative re-focusing. The collapsing and the transformation are undeniable and unpredictable. But they are not instantaneous and so we have the time to select wisely what we need to save and what we need to let go of. Some things are essential to continuity. But nostalgic attachments to old religious forms are not the same as the core eternal. In our period of Christian history we are learning to sift the wheat from the chaff so that a new and potent expression of

Christian unity can emerge. The old denominational labels in which so much religious ego is still invested are coming to seem outdated, even small-minded, beside the panorama of the universal Christ which is already appearing as the next stage of our evolution.

Christ influences the course of history: not by supernatural interference with the laws of the cosmos but by the unaggressive intervention



of his presence through the sources of wisdom. Wherever there is a living wisdom stream Christ is active. It enters our world of time and space especially through the example and the deep, silent passion of people of faith and good will. These are the true teachers of wisdom, most of them hidden. They do not look for acclaim, for security or status or even for certainty. They live the secret of servant-leadership which is the only way to exercise power in a way that does no evil. They embody discipleship as the most intimate and complete of human relationships and through self-knowledge see how we are chosen before we can choose. They learn to handle uncertainty with humour, confidence and joy. Even in suffering they are not wholly separated from the eternal fun of the spirit. And when they risk themselves in total commitment they find the unique set of skills

and talents allowing them to flourish beyond the limitations of their ego.

Not everyone has the same degree of talent, but each person has the genius of uniqueness and an unlimited capacity for selflessness. This is uncovered not in the self-cultivation of a lifestyle but by hearing the call that unites us uniquely to the whole. By

accepting our calling we find our authentic style of being in the world and of working with others for the greater good. We can hardly be ourselves outside the community of seekers we call the body of Christ. 'He comes to us hidden and salvation consists in our recognising him'. For this recognition we need to feel the connection between love and ascesis.

What we often call love can be the hungry, craving of our loneliness for comfort and possession. When it is disappointed – by whoever we projected it onto – our self-centred 'love' can quickly turn to anger and despair. To navigate beyond this cycle we need ascesis, the personal discipline of exercising our capacity for attention. Eventually this capacity becomes ego-transforming love. Paying attention to the real, not to our illusory version of reality, illustrates why truth sets us free, equally to love

and to be loved.

The connection between meditation, (the essential ascesis of the Christian life) and love (the source and goal of wisdom) is like a cord that draws a curtain in a darkened room and allows the divinising light of a new holiness to flood in. The new holiness for our time is the recognition of God in all the conditions of our age, without nostalgia and tuned with all we have learned about human nature and the laws of the universe. It is a universal not parochial holiness. It doesn't depend on human approval but on the mutual recognition that occurs between ourselves and God in the contemplative state. Its offspring is the ecumenism of all faiths.

Based on the pattern of history, we can guess that the renewal of Christian life will be achieved when a critical mass of disciples has learned how to navigate the perfect storm of our present crisis. The crisis is our oppor-

ceitfulness of the gospel of prosperity that blasphemes against the Holy One.

What allows us to commit to the way of truth and renew the gift of self? How do we start any good work and prevent the ego from hijacking it?

By discovering the true nature of love. We cannot find this without going into the desert of solitude, renouncing possessiveness and triumphing over the demon of loneliness. Over time this is the work of contemplation leading us through failure into humility. Meditation leads us directly into the wisdom of the twin process of transcendence and incarnation. If it were less than this wouldn't everyone meditate just for the benefits they get out of it. It is discovering how much we can gain that cannot be possessed, how much

truth that sets us free from illusion we need to see ourselves in others and others in ourselves. Jesus insists there is nothing to fear in this. Rumi saw it too when he wrote 'In the ruin of heartbreak you find the diamond of divine passion that can resurrect the dead'.

If the different generations of the human family can join hands, collaborating in this deepest and most human of all types of work, restoring the meaning of good work, a revolution will happen. The inner-outer revolution that Jesus initiated will be taken to its next stage. To highlight this we have called our new weekly WCCM Podcast 'Contemplative Revolution' because it is not less.

John Main said that the greatest need for our time is for men and women of deep prayer. Meditation creates the community in which young and old can relearn the meaning of pure prayer. In mutual support we can begin and complete all stages of a journey of personal transformation that leads to the transformation of the world. By degrees and at different speeds, to be sure - but for sure.

May our daily practice this New Year 2020 provide us with daily insights into what wisdom is doing all around us and for us. In our meditation groups and in all the ways we share the gift, may we grow a little wiser, for the sake of others, as we learn through love to embrace the grace of discipleship frees us from ourselves so that we can be ourselves.

With much love

Laurence

Laurence Freeman OSB



Bonnevaux Community Christmas

tunity for breakthrough. Seeing this allows us a glimpse into the process of reform unfolding within the collapse of the old structures. It builds confidence to deal with the massing powers of darkness because we see not only their capacity for havoc but their intrinsic superficiality and falseness: the brazen denial of truth, the eye for eye, tooth for tooth politics that undermines justice, the de-

we can shed and be freed from that makes the pilgrimage challenging. Meditation restores the wisdom we have lost of the link between ascesis – training in the discipline of selfless attention – and love.

This is the lost chord in the music of humanity we have continuously to recover. Quite simply and directly, learning to meditate teaches that to find we need to lose. To know the

Bonnevaux

Visit www.bonnevauxwccm.org

2019 in Review

The first phase of community life in the Abbaye

From the very beginning Bonnevaux started as a project of a place where the WCCM vision could be incarnated: a physical home for the "Monastery without Walls". Also a Centre of Peace and for peace in the world. In 2019 this vision became more visible with the opening of the Abbaye and the first events and retreats.

New life at the Abbaye



Paschal Vigil

March and April were dynamic times: the Meditatio House Community in London moved to Bonnevaux. Just before the Holy Week Retreat, the

core community - who were living in a provisory way in what they named "the farmhouse" - moved into the Abbaye. Bonnevaux hosted for the first time the Easter retreat which in the past few years had been held on Bere Island. A group of about 20 people, took part in the retreat, which comprised of talks by Fr Laurence, yoga led by Giovanni Felicioni and all the Easter liturgical rituals which were conducted in a special way - the Stations of the Cross around the lake and the Vigil procession from the "Easter Tree" to the Chapel.

Bonnevaux and the Young

As a place to plant the roots for the future of the Community, Bonnevaux also concentrates on the special care of young people. A group representing 15 countries took part in the first retreat for Young Adults during the summer, with Fr Laurence speaking on the theme "Living Differently". It was a time of silence, meditation, community life, work, sharing and friendship. After the retreat, a smaller group of 11 people participated in a five-day walk on the French part of the Camino to Compostela. The same retreat and a similar walk are also planned for July and August in 2020.

Activities taking shape

The second semester was a time when Bonnevaux started to hold events, retreats and receive visitors, in a more consistent way. Even without the ideal structure to accommodate people the retreats took place with some people staying at the Abbaye and others in nearby accommodation. There was a workshop on Watercolour and Contemplation (led by Tilde Carsen), Learning to Meditate Retreat, an Essential Teaching Weekend (led by the French Community), an Advent Retreat, a Yoga Retreat, a pilgrimage and a WCCM Hong Kong group retreat. Different meetings were also held and there were visits from small groups and individuals. Many of the newcomers really felt that Bonnevaux was a peaceful and healing place.

Blessing Day

The day to celebrate the blessing of Phase 1 of the renovations was a moment to gather meditators from far away, neighbours, friends and core community. It was a collective act, as Fr Laurence emphasized: "A blessing is not only something that comes externally but comes from within. I think we are all here to bless this place of prayer, this place of hospitality, this place of healing." The ceremony was conducted by the Archbishop of Poitiers, Mgr Pascal Wintzer and also the Abbot of Ligugé Christophe Bettwy. The Monastery of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, mother house of Fr Laurence, was represented by Dom Ugo de' Sangro. During the day, the visitors were of-



ferred tours around Abbaye. Another important moment was the planting of roses in the garden at the back of Bonnevaux. Dom Ugo planted a French rose and Peter Ng (National Coordinator of Singapore) planted an English rose in memory of his beloved wife Patricia.

Bonnevaux

Work in Progress

Core Community & Renovation Project

Bonnevaux is more than a retreat centre, it is home for WCCM and for the core community living in the Spirit of work, meditation and hospitality. This group has also evolved over the year, maturing, finding its way in the mission of service. Many volunteers have shared in the life and work of the community. The core community takes responsibility for different areas: Fr Laurence (Director), Giovanni Felicioni (Associate Director), Catherine Charrière (Programme & Abbaye Manager), Sébastien Brissette (Special Projects Manager), David Simpson (Estate Manager), Henriette Hol-

laar (Liturgy), Mary Katherine Allman (Guests).

Renovation Project

Good news in 2019 was that the design for Bonnevaux by DP Architects was awarded Gold at the London Design Awards. The Abbaye has been completed and the Conference Centre will open in January. The next goal is finishing the work on the Retreat Centre. It should be ready in the second half of 2020. For more information visit the website: bonnevauxwccm.org



The Conference Centre

The 2020 Programme

These are some of the upcoming events at Bonnevaux (visit bonnevauxwccm.org for more):

The Tightrope of Moderation - Lent Retreat - 24 Feb-1 Mar: Lent is a sacred season giving us the opportunity to find and hold the joy of balance - good for us and good for the world. Led by Laurence Freeman and Giovanni Felicioni.

Heaven in a Grain of Sand: The Universal and the Particular

20-22 March: During this week the renowned Buddhist teacher, Alan Wallace, will be a Bonnevaux Teacher-in-Residence. With Eva Natanya and Laurence Freeman, both Christian teachers, Alan Wallace will lead conversations on the way a dialogue between both mystical traditions can lead to the great unity to which our world aspires.

Leaving Fear Behind - Holy Week Retreat 5-12 April - Led by

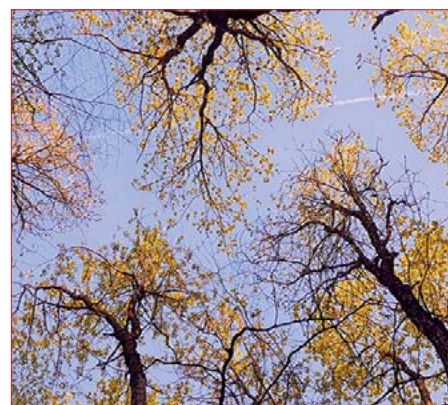
Laurence Freeman: Through talks and discussion, meditation together and the ancient rituals of Holy Week, the mysteries of death and resurrection, the life of Christ, come into the greater intimacies of our own lives.

Meditatio Seminar on Meditation & Ecology - 21-24 May: This unique event is organised by WCCM France at Bonnevaux and is open to everyone concerned for our world. It will highlight the emergency the planet faces through an experience of natural beauty, meditation, and solidarity. Contemplation will clearly be not an escape from the truth but a way of clarifying and sustaining the right kind of active response appropriate to each of us.

Photo: Axel Brintzinger (CC BY-SA 4.0)



Alan Wallace



News

John Main Seminar 2020 in Mexico will reflect on the Indigenous Wisdom and the Future of Humanity



Photo: Enrique Carrasco SJ

The John Main Seminar 2020 will be held in Mexico City (22-25 October) with the theme "One Heart, One Hope - Indigenous Wisdom and the Future of Humanity". Fr Laurence Freeman, as always, will lead the pre-seminar retreat from October 19 through 22. The seminar will explore the wisdom and spirituality of indigenous cultures toward advancing common understanding and building a common ground for the future. Experienced speakers from around the world will share spiritual insights and customs practiced and sustained by small groups still present but often overlooked in our world. These groups embody vibrantly and with courage their

own wisdom, unique to them but tremendously relevant to the rest of the world. Workshops will also be offered during the seminar.

Fr Alex Zatyryka SJ, will be the keynote speaker. He holds a doctorate of theology and also an MS degree in agricultural economics. This will be his focus for the Seminar:

Native peoples live immersed in the reality that Divine love leads us to be one "without division and without confusion." They have grasped this

fundamental truth of the human condition, exercising it fully and they are deeply concerned about transmitting it to each new generation. It is as if they live the paradox of "we am" or "I are" in its truest and fullest form. This echoes the Trinitarian mystery, of the God who speaks in the singular and in the plural at the same time (Gen 1: 26). In our reflections we will try to delve into this perspective that helps us deepen the mystery of the Christian God as a community of love.

Other speakers include:

Vanessa Eldridge (Ngāti Kahūngunu and Rongomaiwahine): from New Zealand. She manages Day Services at Mary Potter Hospice in Wellington;

Fr Pedro Arriaga Alarcón SJ: from Mexico, he devoted most of his life to defend the rights of the poorest people;

Puleng Matsaneng: from South Africa, a member of the Jesuit Institute. Researcher of Ignatian Spirituality in an African context;

Ana María LLamazares: from Argentina, Anthropologist (UBA);

Rev Ron Berezan: from Canada, is a permaculture and organic farming teacher;

Ivan Rosypsky: from Canada, is an artist and a member of the Heiltsuk First Nation;

Tau Huirama, Tainui: from New Zealand, is a Maori cultural coach;

Fr Enrique Carrasco SJ: from Mexico, Jesuit Priest and photographer;

Fr Laurence Freeman OSB: Benedictine monk and director of The WCCM.

For more information visit: www.johnmainseminar.org

Laurence Freeman visit to South Africa



In September Fr Laurence visited South Africa for ten days and took part in twelve events, with over 800 participants. He gave several public talks and also addressed several specific audiences including teachers and business leaders. According to Paul Faller, WCCM South Africa Coordinator, Fr Laurence also visited with three bishops: Stephen Brislin (Cape Town), Cardinal Wilfrid Napier (Durban) and

Auxiliary Bishop Duncan Tsoke (Johannesburg). All recognised the value of meditation. He also visited three schools. At Holy Family College, Durban & Loreto Convent School (Pretoria) he met with staff. He meditated with students from Holy Family College and St Henry's Marist College, both in Durban. Fr Laurence also addressed a forum of principals from the Pretoria Catholic schools.

News

Catherine Scott, WCCM Head of Operations

Catherine Scott started in November as the new WCCM Head of Operations. She has a long history of working with Catholic development organisations, including 23 years in various roles with the Catholic Institute for International Relations/Progressio, and more than 20 years serving on CAFOD's Asia and International Programmes Committees. She is a former board member of the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign and the Ai Kameli Trust, and more recently a volunteer manager with the Papal Char-

ity, Missio (England and Wales). She travelled widely with CIIR/Progressio, particularly in SE Asia and Africa, supporting the organisations advocacy and skillshare programmes.

She's the mum of Natalie, a 21 year-old student at London's University of the Arts. Catherine belongs to three choirs and relaxes through swimming. She's part of a small, close-knit extended family and cares for her 82 year old mum. Catherine will be supporting Laurence Freeman in managing both office operations and staff.



Leadership changes in the communities in France and the UK



Pascale (left) and Sandrine

In November WCCM France organised a meeting with group leaders at Bonnevaux. The Community confirmed the change over to a new National Coordinator: Pascale Cal-

lec takes over from Sandrine Vinay. Sandrine: *"I feel very lucky to have been be part of the team with such beautiful people. I have tried to infuse the sense of an international community, and I am happy to have been part of the initial team of Bonnevaux".* Pascale: *"I just hope to follow the Spirit, thanks to meditation and the community of love that it builds. I hope to serve and continue to work in a collaborative atmosphere, to organize the Meditatio Ecologie, implement new developments in the School, strengthen the network of groups and create stronger links with Bonnevaux."*

Transition Period in the UK

Richard Broughton retired as UK Coordinator in the end of 2019. The Community will have an Action Group providing leadership until a new Coordinator is pointed.

Richard: *"I'm stepping back at a time when the UK Community is lively. New meditation groups are forming and new people are coming forward to take on roles. Personally, I've found my faith to have been deepened and my perspectives widened by my time of service; I've met and worked with many remarkable people, and for that I'm truly grateful."*

Meditation in Schools in East Timor

The Community in East Timor is developing the work of teaching meditation in schools. The WCCM contact person in East Timor, Salvador J Ximenes Soares introduced Christian Meditation to teachers, students and staff of schools run by Cristal Foundation. Salvador is happy to announce that after the latest series of meetings, the Foundation announced the decision to officially incorporate meditation into the classroom beginning in 2020, as well as form meditation groups for teachers.



News

"Division 'diabolical' as it destroys our core unity in God" says Laurence Freeman at the Australian National Conference

By Roland Ashby



Unity is at the heart of the teaching of Jesus, and it is this knowledge of unity the world craves for, said Laurence Freeman in Melbourne in October at the national conference of WCCM Australia: "the most important thing we have to remember in the challenges of this time is the unity that we share – the great mystery of humanity – and that despite our racial, cultural and religious diversity there is a core unity, and that is at the heart of the teaching of Jesus and of his aspiration for humanity".

This is expressed, he said, in Jesus' farewell discourse, in which he prays that "they may all be one as you Father are in me and I in you". But knowing we are one, is not just theological or intellectual knowledge, it's essentially contemplative. "We can only know this [unity or oneness] in contemplative knowledge or consciousness which transcends the dualism of the ego, and which [enables us to] know from within this experience of unity. We can't know it from the outside. Knowing it means we have to enter into a silence in which the dualistic mind is, as it were, left behind or integrated." Contemplative knowl-

edge is not dogma, nor does it arise from analytical or speculative thinking, "but from the experience of oneness itself, which is very simply the experience we allow ourselves to taste... in meditation."

"[Meditation] is a simple wisdom that can be practised by every person, that awakens in us this knowledge of unity, and it's out of that experiential knowledge that community comes." It's this contemplative consciousness, this knowledge of unity, that the world "craves for... and needs most urgently... we're all well aware of the problems that we face at this point in human evolution... how un-unified we are, how far away we are collectively from this truth of our human nature, that Jesus reveals... that we are essentially one. Despite appearances he affirms that this is our true nature, so don't give up on it."

Fr Laurence said it is very challenging to believe at this time in the oneness of human nature, "and the possibility that human beings can love, forgive, can be just, can refrain from violence." "It is very hard to believe in that divine nature and potential of humanity, when we see how we behave and the failures of the leaders that we frighteningly sometime seem to deserve... and [when] so many of our structures that we felt secure in, politically, religiously and economically, are dissolving and collapsing around us." This is why we need a contemplative consciousness "and why we both need to respect our Indig-

enous traditions - because they remind us of how ancient, deep and essential this contemplative wisdom is - and also to see as Christians [this wisdom] as the heart and soul of our own tradition".

Division destroys unity because, "as the word suggests, it is diabolical, it splits" he said. "The intention to divide and conquer, the political game that unscrupulous people play... cannot be of God... because God is one". "God is not fragmented into a pantheon of little gods competing with each other which are projections of our own imagination and desires and fears. But the three great sister religions, for all their differences and conflicts, have understood... and grow out of the same insight into human and divine nature, that God is one."

For Fr Laurence, the deep unity of the human being "comes from God within us - Christ in us, St Paul says", and that "this oneness within ourselves, within our nature... is the only way we can heal the wounds of violence and division." Meditation is the work of discovering this unity within us and among us, is the work of "being, and becoming fully human, discovering the glory of God in us". Following the talk he was asked "how, in this era of 'alternative facts', can Christians embody unity with those who believe the alternatives?". His reply: "we have to speak out, to speak the truth in love... [but] without anger... and without demonising them or polarising the situation more."

In Focus

Edward O'Connor, New Zealand

Photo: Enos Mantoani



I've been practicing Christian meditation for about 14 months now. It has completely transformed my life. I followed a Buddhist practice for a couple of years before returning to Christianity and remain strongly influenced by eastern traditions. On paper, Christian meditation is no different to other iterations: you sit down, close your eyes, and hone your attention on something other than your thoughts. This is not an easy thing to do. When I look at the WCCM logo I see that right hand (inner) dove dipping into the same pool of water that is available to everyone, regardless of your religion. It is the universality of meditation that makes it so important in our fragmented times. You cannot argue during meditation for the

same reason you cannot argue underwater. Trying to separate different forms of meditation is like trying to wall off different sections of the ocean; you're going to waste a lot of time and potentially injure yourself in the process.

Dying is what we fear the most, but in my experience it's rebirth that causes all the pain. Coming back to Christianity has been a painful experience for me. It started with a profound, unexpected, and undeniably Christian experience in the middle of a Buddhist retreat. This led to a drastic realignment of how I perceived myself and my experience of the world. I thought that I was in control of my life and I suddenly knew this to be an illusion. I struggled with this for some time and may still be floundering had I not stumbled across the School of Meditation website and started a regular Christian meditation practice.

I should make a correction: it hasn't been Christian meditation that has changed my life, but meditating within a Christian context. This is why the left hand (outer) dove is just as important as the right; it's the one that symbolises your orientation

to the world and other people. I see now that my Buddhism was not actually Buddhism at all. It was a way I could have a spiritual practice while keeping genuine spirituality at arm's length. My inner dove was dipping into the pool while the outer dove was focused on controlling reality to match my personal preferences. I was orientated towards getting what I wanted and furthering my own agenda. I had weaponised meditation as a way to 'mindfully' live a self-centred existence.

My Christian meditation journey has been focused on developing a relationship between my inner and outer dove. My daily practice brings myself in line with the present moment and asks what is required of me right now? This has been a gradual process of letting go, and I feel like I've only just begun. Starting a Christian meditation practice has coincided with me leaving my job, moving city, completing a Masters of Writing, and travelling to Bonnevau. I'd never have done any of these things had I not trusted in God to guide me down the path, and I'd never have trusted God had I not been meditating.



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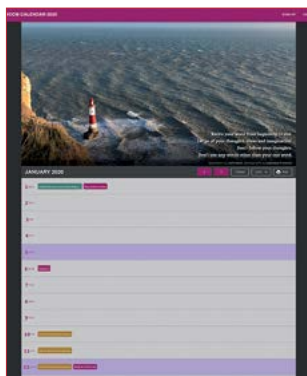
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Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is 10 March .

Resources

Calendar 2020



The WCCM calendar with quotes by John Main and photos by Laurence Freeman now is online and you can add your own private events. Visit now: <http://wccmcalendar.org>

Audio & CDs

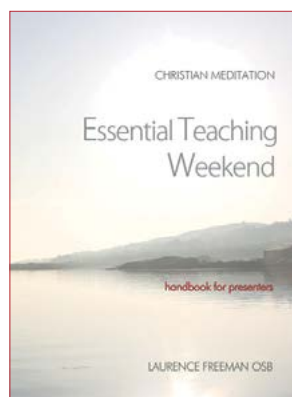


The latest Meditatio CD Series. Listen to or download the tracks: <http://tiny.cc/Med2019D>
Download the transcript: <http://tiny.cc/grcaw>

Changes in the Meditatio Talks Series in 2020

The format for the quarterly Meditatio Talks will change in 2020. From June the talks will no longer be sent on CDs. We will provide simple ways you can access the audio files for personal and group use: via the website and via our WCCM app. You will be able to click on a link and play the talks, or download the talks in advance for use in places without internet. We will provide clear instructions on how to access and use the talks very soon.

Books



This handbook is a step-by-step guide for conducting an Essential Teaching Weekend (ETW). The book offers all the materials necessary for

running the programme including templates which can be adapted to suit particular circumstances. The guidelines methodically cover every aspect of the work from preparation to final presentation. The guidelines are clear and precise yet allow enough flexibility and spontaneity to make presenting the weekend personally enriching.

Christian Meditation: Essential Teaching Weekend

Handbook for Presenters

by Laurence Freeman

More info: <https://tinyurl.com/ethbook>

The School of Meditation: new resources page

theschoolofmeditation.org/resources/

The resources section on the School of Meditation website is now divided into three parts: Meditation, Teaching and Contemplatives in Action, where you will find a selection to support the journey of meditation.

The Meditatio Centre Programme 2020

The Meditatio Centre London launched the 2020 Programme. You can download it and book for events online: <https://tinyurl.com/MedCLondp20>

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



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