



WCCM

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The Radical Poverty of Helplessness

LAURENCE FREEMAN INTRODUCES THE WCCM THEME OF 2025: THE RISK OF LIVING TOGETHER



(Image by Leroy Skaland from Pixabay)

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Dearest Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

I have been spending this month in the lovely city of Boston. I have been here before but not *dwelt* here. My time here reminds me how every city has a unique personality - or maybe it's a core identity that stays constant through time's constant changes. Cities are strangely like the people who build and live in them.

Every place has its own spirit. You feel it at first sight but savour it when you *dwell* there. Just *passing through* , whistle-stopping through the tourist sights or business meetings keeps you a stranger always tied to the next thing on your itinerary. Cities are unique but also have much in common. Their founders came together for safety, prosperity and cultural stimulation; now increasingly, people come looking for work but perhaps attracted also to the thrill of anonymity, of being absorbed in the crowd. Maybe this explains the bizarre appearance of many people in the crowds of busy cities. Eccentricity of course makes cities fascinating because real eccentrics are not just seeking attention but choose to look and act as they feel, different. Yet they too merge anonymously in the crowd. It is easier to be different in a big city than in your hometown. Cities are fluid, complex places where you can painfully lose yourself but also freely find yourself. As the world becomes urbanised (90% of Americans in the next twenty years), our contact with the natural world shrinks and this has unnatural effects. Here in Boston, I have felt drawn to garden areas, trees, ponds and plants with which its planners richly endowed it and which research shows help us stay psychologically and physically healthier – which I perhaps have come to love and enjoy at Bonnevaux.

Being de-natured is one more de-humanising pressure that affects or infects many individuals with mental health issues, forcing them to become



anonymous by exclusion rather than by choice. Many city-dwellers everywhere in the world have the lonely, abandoned look of being insulated from the human and natural flow of life; they can seem agonisingly or angrily lost in an alien world. You see it in the street “crazies”, as people defensively call them, screaming their pain at passersby. But it is also symptomatic in the “normal” majority whose attention is glued to their phone or who push the world away through their headphones. Another universal feature that cities share is a look of hopelessness found in the eyes of the homeless on the sidewalks or curled up in a shop doorway. A hopeless look coming from deep helplessness. They know how likely their appeals will be ignored; and they feel, as also any of us can, seen but ignored.

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From the beginning, Christianity practiced an option for the poor: a rationale for noticing and responding lovingly to those poverty-stricken and excluded who fall by the wayside. It developed from a deep reflection on the teaching of Jesus about caring for the lost and rejected and became a life-practice. Monasteries too became the catalyst for hospitals, hospices and

relief services. Over time this teaching adapted to large urban needs and the desolation of the poor in industrialisation. In the Christian vision the poor cannot be ignored because Christ has identified with them. The mystical and the social are incarnate together. They long to be connected to the experience of contemplation through both scripture and the silence of our inner room, leading to metanoia under the compassionate gaze of Christ. This connection between the marginalised and contemplation is not a Christian exclusive, of course, but universal religious wisdom. The Prophet Mohammed taught that “your smiling in the face of your brother is charity” and the Torah told the Jews to care generously for the stranger, widow and orphan.

In the fourth century the Emperor Julian, who had been raised Christian and seen the way his Christian relations murdered each other, abandoned Christianity but he remarked that he never saw Jews or Christians begging in the streets. As with Muslims today, caring for those who fall through the net was a personal obligation. It cannot be wholly delegated to an institution. Left to economists and politicians, “social services” soon cease to be an expression of love. But there is also social realism

in the religious obligation to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. They saw a progression from being a beggar to becoming a thief and finally a corpse. Social health demands compassion that respects the absolute and equal value of everyone. "Property rights", so important in modern criminal law, have no mention in the teaching of Moses, Jesus, or Mohammed. The rights of the rich took precedence over the natural rights of the poor and the law hanged the pickpockets for stealing a silk handkerchief or the country-dweller who took a sheep for his family to eat. Julian the Apostate was not the last who lost faith in Christianity when he saw how the core teaching of Jesus could so easily be lost.

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In times of economic austerity, social benefits, like heating benefits for the poor or the cultural warmth of public libraries, are slashed long before taxes are raised on the rich. Bizarre. A recent Conservative minister in the UK suggested that the homeless should be fined for the "life-choice" they had made. Poverty and helplessness become the crime - not what causes them. Helder Camara said, "When I support the poor they call me a saint. When I ask, 'why are they so poor?' they call me a communist."

Yet, the wisdom to be found in all scriptures warns against the crime of hardening our heart, a perverse and self-destructive choice that derives from greed or power. Instead, universal wisdom tells us to lend freely and to forgive debts (Deut 15); to be generous to those whose hard labour made us prosper (like warehouse workers in the Amazon empire) and never to forget the widow and orphan.

The core teaching we associate with Jesus - to love your neighbour as yourself - first appears in Leviticus, a dry

book of religious rules. They may make us smile or cringe today, but their goal was the sanctification of all human life, personal and social. Today, most of us best understand this aspiration to holiness as our inherent longing to become fully human. "The One who called you is holy; like Him be holy in all your behaviour for Scripture says, "Be holy, for I am holy"" (1 Pet 1ff). Jesus's reference to this human aspiration is clear but distorted in the usual translation using the word "perfect". "Be *perfect* as your heavenly Father is perfect." Perfection seems an abstraction but the original Greek word *teleioi*, really means "brought to completion, fully developed, fully re-

... the wisdom to be found in all scriptures warns against the crime of hardening our heart

alised, thorough, whole". That is, all the things we meditate to become, in order to become who we are.

Modern antipathy to institutional religion and our loss of the art of reading scripture have cut us off from essential sources of wisdom. We are stranded in an ocean of techno-science, bureaucracy and fear of our own inventions. This is as dangerous and produces as many negative symptoms as does a major nutritional deficit in our diet of processed food. Therapy, well-being, self-help are all useful approaches in these circumstances. They have their own value, but they don't quite replace what has been lost and now forgotten. The time we spend compulsively checking messages or scrolling social media videos is a symptom of a spiritual deficit but no substitute for healthy communication or spiritual nourishment.

In our stranded state, we have lost

the communication between the ordinary - that is, the real, the daily and what experience verifies - and the transcendent. We peer into the furthest corners of the cosmos for explanations of why we are here or for signs of life. Happily, we are insatiably curious. But we have forgotten to explore the inner cosmos of the heart. "That being, the size of a thumb, dwells deep within the heart. He is the Lord of time, past and future. Having attained him, one fears no more. He, truly, is the immortal Self." (*Katha Upanishad*). St. Augustine turned the telescope into a microscope when he said that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves. If God seems distant to us, then so will our neighbour, especially the neighbour on the sidewalk or in the food bank line. Scriptures teach the humane priority of caring for the poor and needy. Feed the hungry first, then go for growth. This wisdom is immanent, inherent to us, but it is no less embodied and this-worldly. Care for the uncared-for is the portal to the transcendent. God - and therefore our own reality - is found in present embodied truth not in projected speculation. Without this truth we are deluded. Without contact we become isolated.

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Last week a group of WCCM pilgrims visited the entrancingly beautiful Tuscan city of Arezzo: beautiful in its spirit of place and full of art treasures of global importance. In 1945 a British soldier disobeyed direct orders to destroy the city which had been occupied by the enemy. I thought of that, and the justification given for bombing hospitals, schools, markets, infrastructure and apartment buildings because the enemy was hiding there. We applaud military self-restraint to save works of art, why not to save the lives of non-combatants? The mentality that led to Hiroshima and

Nagasaki has insidiously become the new normal, a soulless pragmatism that even medieval warfare rejected as ungodly and inhumane. Such a departure from humanity exposes just how dangerously we are uprooted from the wisdom and compassion that make human beings humane.

Uprooted from our true nature, it is a short step to using statistics to justify injustice. Compare the numbers killed in the Hamas October 7th atrocity with the civilians, mostly women and children, since killed in Gaza, many if not most of whom still lie buried under rubble. Or compare the numbers killed in the 9-11 attacks and subsequently in the Iraq war. Justice respects proportion. How is such disproportionate destruction compatible with the right to self-defence and to exist as a state? Isn't justice imagined, from the Egyptians to the Old Bailey, as a balance of scales? I was told off recently for "taking sides". I partly agreed and conditionally apologised. Taking sides is *partisan* and so a failure of peace-making. Yet when our unity feels stronger than our transcendence, it is hard not to contradict oneself and to take the side of the evident victim. If it is a mistake, Jesus made it too.

I learned a great deal from Musa Al-Hattawi and Yuval Rahamim, a Palestinian and Israeli who spoke at the opening of our online **24-Hour Meditation for Peace**. Each inspired me by the serenity of the level of wisdom they had reached through suffering the loss of loved ones in the conflict. Yuval, who lost his father while still a boy, had vowed and plotted revenge for years. But later together they created "The Parents Circle: Families Forum" for those on *both sides* who had suffered alike. Musa and Yuval, like desert fathers of old, were led into friendship with an enemy by seeing their self in the other.

From this experience of unity – through the grace of the transcendent – they became grounded in the friendship of daily peace-making. They know that no peace comes from taking sides. And as peacemakers, they have renounced the illusory desire to win.

Even as bystanders we feel and are complicit in the collective inhumanities, of the Holocaust, the Cambodian killing-fields, Stalin's and Mao's exterminations or the Rwanda genocide. In all these atrocities the perpetrators and victims were our brothers and sisters. Co-responsibility is more than the contagion of shame and guilt. It is the influence of the *real unity* of the whole

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human family as one Body, past and future. This oneness is a transcendent wonder and also excruciating. (The pain of the Cross was so great the Romans invented a new word for it – *excruciare*.) It is painful to be one with the perpetrator and the victim, but we breathe the same air. Our terrestrial unity transcends our eccentric planet, beyond every horizon of the universe.

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You might be saying, "when is he going to stop being political and start getting mystical?" Actually, I am confident you are not thinking that but have already seen the connections in what I am trying to say.

Firstly, we cannot genuinely meditate without facing the perplexing pains of our world and our personal lives: a medical diagnosis, the loss of a loved

one, the birth of a child or falling in love or a large-scale atrocity. These are life-changing and so, if we fail to integrate them, we resist the unfolding of life's sacred mystery. If we continued meditating but stayed resistant, in denial or rage, meditation would become an individualistic thing, an escape route, a way to "well-being" rather than the more costly "fullness of life". Meditators in the same community will have different political or moral opinions about the dilemmas of our time. ("A community of faith composed of people of different beliefs".) What they share, deeper than differences, comes from their unity. This bestows the contemplative capacity to face life's challenges and to listen to one other squarely and directly. We may disagree on solutions, but we will agree where the hope for healing lies: in the singular point of unity where the ordinary and the transcendent meet.

Secondly, that distant look in the eyes of the homeless is an appeal for recognition even if at one level it may try to manipulate us. If I understand the parable of the Last Judgment (Mt 25), Jesus is saying that their looking into us is his own universal gaze, his invitation to love beyond what we feel is our capacity. Our response is also directly to him as well as to the individual we are looking at. "Anything you did for one of my brothers or sisters here, however humble, you did for me." Helplessness opens us to reality. At some point we too become the marginalised who have no claim to "agency" or control against the oppressive power of injustice. Do you know what it means to be helpless, when all means of self-defence are withdrawn? Jesus did, as part of the Passion of Christ when he consented to fall into the weakest point of the human condition. In doing so, he showed us that to be helpless is *not* to be hopeless.

In fact, true hope – distinct from fan-

tasy – is *conceived* in the powerlessness of being helpless, at the mercy of events or in the power of others. It is *born* by experiencing unity with others when we rise above revenge and blame. (This can be forgiveness.) Shortly before he died, a lifelong politician, a master controller of people and events, began to meditate. He found it hard but a challenge he needed at this stage of his life. He told me he felt he was being asked to let go of his lifelong habit of always being in control. I knew he knew what he was talking about when he said, “The mantra –? It’s about letting go of control, isn’t it?”

For anyone, whether off the radar or at the centre of power, to renounce control and choose to be helpless is at first deeply repugnant. We resist it. Until the end of the long process, we bargain for little ways of staying in control. The end only comes when we can say, with our last breath, “it is accomplished.” In the instant of pure helplessness we come into authentic hope. We reach the goal by a last, effortless renunciation. Until then we learn by repeating the same mistakes, what certainly is not hope. This can be frustrating. But it is the work of mercy. Until the moment when truth dawns, we imagine mercy to be moments of good fortune that seem to give us what we want. Mercy is not indulgent like this, though we may have to imagine it is. It is gentle and kind but also uncompromising.

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Only the radical poverty of helplessness allows us to be fully aligned with the “will of God”. And who can ever say what the “will of God” is until we are fully synchronised with it. This will entail renouncing even our capacity to see God’s and our will as distinct. We must then drop into the cloud of forgetting everything we once complacently saw

as our letting-go. Genuine renunciation just happens; it falls away when the time is right.

We cannot “do the will of God” if we



see or cling to a memory of it as being different from our own desire. To be one with God’s will is to realise that nothing else is real. This happens, not as an intellectual assent but as a whole-hearted consent, as when we love. We become wholly and holy present. It may be in the supermarket queue or in the company of trees or with a thing of beauty or playing with a child, though less likely in a church or reading a newsletter. In just *this* moment, we feelingly know we have slipped, stumbled or been guided into a higher dimension of reality. Or of “consciousness” but it is not about thought only about what we “see”.

In this ever-present dimension we become what we see. Helplessness is a necessary preparation in order to show that this dimension is never far from us. We sense it is there, as the “something more” or “something else” that we feel from childhood. But it is what is always present; the source of everything and of the little we know about anything. The important truth about this *source* is that it is not a *beginning* of anything. It has always been one with everything that it sources (or “creates”). By realising

that it has also always been *one with us* we come to the end of desire. We know for certain that we are in the presence of a reality both complete and nameless.

We can call it love, faithful through all dimensions of reality and in every situation of our short lives.

How ironical that the control and power we strive for, the ruthless wars we wage, all we lust after or become addicted to, praise or destroy according to our imaginary ideologies, despair we will never enjoy, or fantasise we have possession of but deny to others – how disarmingly funny that it gives itself to us so simply when we are helpless. This is the Gospel’s teaching revealed not in complex ideas but in the life-story and teaching of a unique person present in our three dimensions but recognisable only in that other dimension reserved for the poor in spirit.

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Is all this just make-believe? If it is true then how, century after century, do we persist in perverting our creativity by devising new ways of oppression and cruelty? It is by awakening to the nature of evil. Popular ways of entertainment, movies about serial killers or horror films show we are fascinated and repelled by the epic struggle of good

and evil. Those who abuse their power over politics, media, finance or religion also reveal what the dark side is. But we can see its seeds or traces in ourselves as well. In seeing the demon side of humanity, we awaken from the dream of evil in the same instant that we are bathed in the light of the love of God. The Crucifixion brought darkness over the face of the earth, but Resurrection came on the edge of dawn.

Evil does not exist by nature, nor is any person naturally evil because God made nothing that was not good. When in the desire of his heart someone conceives and gives form to what in reality has no existence, then what he desires begins to exist. We should therefore turn our attention away from the inclination to evil and concentrate it on the remembrance of God; for good, which exists by nature, is more powerful than our inclination to evil. The one has existence while the other has not, except when we give it existence through our actions. (*Diadochus of Photike, 5th century*)

Every true seeker, every meditator, is led along this razor-edge path of discernment between good and evil, between the real and the unreal. The path illumines the truth of what Diadochus transmits in these diamond-like words. Each life that follows this path in poverty becomes a transcendent force of good in the world collaborating with the faithful love of the ever-present Origin. We are powerless but we also participate in the glorious beauty and goodness of creation streaming from the horizonless expanse of the Creator.

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The WCCM theme in 2025 is now called “The Risk of Living Together”. This recalls what John Main called the “risk of all loving”: to give ourselves before we have a guarantee of being accepted. It applies to personal relationships and global conflicts. As in previous years, the theme will acquire momentum and richness throughout the year in a series of online sessions. These will be led by a broad range of gifted and original presenters, with discussion forums between the sessions.

This is a practical and engaging way to explore how the themes I have briefly shared in this letter can become not just more words breeding more speculation but insights for a transformed way of seeing reality.

As Diadochus reminds us, the line between good and evil is the same that defines the real and the unreal. The human tendency to prefer illusion, to desire what is unreal, has led us over the line into the kind of darkness we are

experiencing today. But – o felix culpa! – through the grace of helplessness the problem itself becomes the solution. Seeing through illusion dissolves darkness and restores the pure, peaceful light of reality. No human being is unable to feel it because it is the light of the love, the fullness of life, all that our humanity aspires to.

That is why our practice of contemplation offers hope to the world and why the community it generates is capable of taking the risk of living together and growing into fullness.

With much love,

Laurence Freeman OSB

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JMS 2024

Seminar in New Harmony: Listening to the Spirit

THE MOST IMPORTANT ANNUAL EVENT OF THE COMMUNITY WAS HELD IN NEW HARMONY, INDIANA (US), 8-13 JULY

"A special moment for WCCM to remember its foundation and mission." "An inspiring series of teachings by Archbishop Jason Gordon, from Trinidad and Tobago." "A gathering of friends exercising the art of 'Conversations in the Spirit'." These are a few sentences that attempt to encapsulate the John Main Seminar 2024 which took place on 8-13 July in New Harmony, Indiana, US. With the theme of **"Widen Your Tent"**, the major annual event of our Community provided a unique opportunity to learn about what is termed a "synodal process", which can be otherwise expressed as a form of "journeying together". The aim was to initiate a process which will cascade down through the WCCM's National Communities.

The Seminar offered talks by Jason Gordon



Participants of the JMS in New Harmony, Indiana

in the first three days, followed by the exercise of "Conversations in the Spirit", with reflections in small groups of those present in New

Harmony and online. You can watch all the talks from the JMS here:
<https://wccm-int.org/jms24rec>

Some key ideas shared by Jason Gordon:



"There is a realisation that to become a synodal Church, we need to learn new spiritual skills that will serve the Church by unleashing a new vitality within the Body of Christ and in the leadership. The key skills for synodality are the key skills for discipleship and contemplative life. There is no synodality without mature disciples."

"The practice of meditation leads to community and, through God's grace, to contemplation. Because contemplation is a gift from God, which He calls every one of us to. It's not for some and not for others. He calls all of us to it, but it requires a disposition. But the disposition of contemplation is the understanding of God's invitation to abide in us."

"Once we understand that the Spirit has been given equally to all of us, but given for different functions and in different ways, then we understand that every one of us has a part to play in this mystical body of Christ, in this people of God, and in this mission that Christ left for his Church. So synodality, as imagined by Pope Francis, is that we are all so different, but we are all journeying together towards Christ. That's the heart of synodality"

"I don't want to live in a world where everybody is tightening up their ropes and becoming smaller and smaller human beings. I want to live in a world where people are seeing ways to enlarge their tent and experience a God who is bigger than anything my wild imaginings could ever hold. And at the same time, experience... seek to become the person we are called to be, not by thinking about God, but by being with God. That's how the tent starts to open, just by being with God."

Environment

Kaveh Guilanpour: “Humanity needs to fall in love with creation once more”



KAVEH IS A FORMER SENIOR MEMBER OF THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL'S CLIMATE ACTION TEAM AND VICE-PRESIDENT FOR INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIES AT THE CENTRE FOR CLIMATE AND ENERGY SOLUTIONS. HE HAS BEEN MEDITATING FOR 20 YEARS AND WAS THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER AT THE 2024 CANADIAN ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN VANCOUVER IN JULY.

WCCM - How do you see the relationship between meditation and climate?

Kaveh - What we're facing now is a situation where we are making progress in the fight against climate change but it's just not happening quickly enough. We must move from incremental progress to transformational levels of climate action. That means a paradigm shift. I am really struck with this word “transformation”, which is increasingly being used in the climate space. Also, the

relation in terms of personal transformation through meditation. The wisdom and the reality of the words: that to change the world you must change yourself. I'm understanding more and more the truth of that. So, personal transformation through meditation, I think, is the first point of departure if we really want to make true change.

WCCM - How does that transformation take shape? Are there initiatives that stimulate that?

Kaveh - It's interesting that in the actual formal negotiations, it's a very confrontational, diplomatic, formulaic kind of approach. But increasingly I am surprised that below that facade, which is part of their job - they are diplomats - there is interest among many for these big questions and issues around spirituality or religion. They may not phrase it in those terms. But essentially, I am encouraged by the fact there is this acknowledgement. The real challenge is that people, including myself, but all people to greater or lesser extent, seem to compartmentalise these worlds. We just had a lovely retreat here (in Vancouver). It's been an amazing experience, and I've got a lot from it. My biggest fear is that I leave here, and I leave that experience here. And I have a very deep yearning to live a life of integrity where there is no separation.

WCCM - Do you think there's more hope in grassroots initiatives than in waiting for political leaders to make the changes for us?

Kaveh - It's really both because in the end we do need political leaders to

make those decisions. But we need to take personal responsibility for the way that we behave in the world. At the same time, we need to recognise that the challenges of climate change are systemic. While it is important that people take personal responsibility, it is more in terms of if people care about recycling their waste, or travelling less in the car, or trying to eat less meat, then they are more likely to start caring about the bigger things. But the biggest change is to push our political representatives to act on climate change. If you live in a democracy, vote for the right people. If you live in countries with other forms of government, push your representatives through the means that are possible to take these issues on board.

I don't think it's enough to blame our political leaders because regardless of whether they live in a democracy or not, they have stakeholders and political considerations that they have to balance. And they need to hear from the people whom they're representing that that balance is not right at the moment and that it needs to be much more in favour of looking after our home, the Earth.

WCCM - Do people still not believe in climate change? What would you say to them?

Kaveh - The number of people who don't believe in climate change is greatly exaggerated. When you look at the numbers, most people acknowledge that it's happening. The science is ab-

Environment

solutely unequivocal. Scientific method, which is dealing with uncertainty and probability, is often used by some to portray an unclarity about the underlying problem or the media misunderstands it. But as a former scientist, it's absolutely clear that there's a consensus on climate change that humans are the cause of it. We've never experienced since the existence of humanity what we're seeing now. So, I don't think it's about persuading people to believe in climate change. It's about showing people that something can be done about it. And also, that the future can be better than the present. So, it is not about sacrifice and giving up quality of life but actually living a better quality of life. Also recognising that if we don't take action, life will get worse for everybody.

The paradox is that we know that climate change is happening. We know very clearly that humans are the cause of it. We know the solutions that could take care of the vast majority of the problems in the short and medium term, in terms of reducing emissions, and becoming resilient to climate change, and adapting to its worst impacts. And there's more than enough money in the world economy to make the investment that will in the end pay huge dividends for everybody in terms of quality of life. But even for those for whom it's important, a profit in the real sense. So, all of that is there. The question is: why isn't it happening? There's a lot of inertia, people are afraid of change, they tend to stay with the status quo, they feel paralyzed - maybe about the size of the problem.

The challenge is that this is not about preaching to people on how to live their lives. But it is to find individuals who can connect with people in their own social groups, to tell sto-



ries, to have a narrative that speaks to people and a way of listening to them. And offers solutions for things they are worried about, rather than telling them, from the outside, from a remote place (...). That work is being done increasingly. Not enough. We need more people that can do that.

WCCM - What are the key takeaways from this conference and retreat in Vancouver?

Kaveh - The thing that gives me hope after this retreat is that it's really reinforced my conviction that ultimately most people around the world are good most of the time. And actually, there's much more that connects us than divides us. And words separate us. As soon as we speak, there are as many different meanings as there are people in the room to hear them. This is why silence is such an important and powerful tool because it's very hard to be divided in silence. At the beginning, it can be very uncomfortable for people who are not used to it, but once you can sit in silence, there's no division. It

speaks to that which is common to all of us. And listening to that silence and that voice inside is something that's important to do.

Something else that I've taken away as the strongest message: people don't do things to hurt whoever they love. Whether it's a spouse or a sibling or a child or a grandparent or a parent or a friend or even a stranger. If we love them, we don't hurt them. The underlying problem here is that we need to find a way to help humanity fall in love with creation once more. I'm stealing that phrase from Fr Laurence. But if we can find a way of helping humanity fall in love with creation again, the choices will become relatively straightforward. They may not be easy to implement. But they will be very obvious, the choices we will have to make. The Community and meditation have a very strong role to play in that.

ONLINE: watch the full interview with Kaveh: <https://wccm-int.org/kavehintv>

Indonesia

WCCM Indonesia helps to introduce meditation to 149 seminarians

BY JOHANNA WISOLI

The recollection, on the theme “Rooted in Christ” and attended by 149 seminarians, was held at the Minor Seminary St. Claver in Makassar on 3 and 4 August 2024. It was initiated by Fr Willem Daia (Senior Teacher and Former Rector of the Major Seminary Anging Mammiri) who had previously attended the Introductory course, held on 13 May 2024 in Makassar Cathedral, led by Fr Siriakus M. Ndolu, OCArm (WCCM Indonesia Spiritual Director).

During the introductory course in May, Fr Willem Daia explained that candidates for the priesthood, from the beginning of minor seminary, must live rooted in Christ in order to confirm their vocation. Living rooted in Christ does not occur suddenly, but is the fruit of a long process, acquired through habit, so that when seminarians become priests, they become reliable priests, living in the faith of Christ, then being able to bring people to Christ. The problem he sees today is that many lay people and priests are “working for God” but not doing what God wants. In this process of pursuing a life rooted in Christ, he involves the laity to motivate prospective priests not to be complacent or to feel they are more advanced and competent in spiritual matters. He wants to open the seminarians’ eyes to that fact that today’s laity is far more advanced in spiritual matters than some prospective priests and even some ordained priests themselves. Ideally, the seminary of the future will become an oasis of faith for the people, as well as a real contributor of prospective priests to the people. The only way to live rooted in Christ is to be diligent, faithful and dis-



Johanna during an introductory session with seminarians.

ciplined in practising Christian Meditation. Why? Because Christian Meditation is simple: it just takes will, discipline and faithfulness.

After a discussion with the rector of the Seminary, Fr Simon Refliandy, who agreed with this reasoning, Fr Willem Daia then asked Mrs Gina Lolo, the Coordinator of The Christian Meditation Community in the Archdiocese of Makassar, to collaborate with him on organising a recollection. Fr Willem Daia offered his encouragement and support to us to deliver the teaching and all the sessions during the recollection. The recollection began at 8.00 pm on 3 August. All the members of the community received a warm welcome from the 149 seminarians. The teachers included Fr Willem Daia, and Fr Simon Refliandy also attended. We began with a 30-minute teaching entitled “Introduction to Christian Meditation”, followed by a history of Fr John Main, and we ended the session with 20 minutes’ meditation.

The next morning, 4 August, we held a second teaching session on Wheels of

Prayer, and a third session on the fruits of meditation. Both sessions were followed by 20 minutes’ meditation. The fourth session was dedicated to questions and answers, during which the enthusiasm of the seminarians about Christian Meditation was evident from the number of questions raised. The recollection closed with a Bibliodrama Workshop on “O Signore Fa De Mi” (prayer of St Francis of Assisi).

For us, it was an immense privilege, as well as a rich new experience, to be given this opportunity to share and teach the gift of meditation to seminarians embarking on their journey into the priesthood. Fr Willem Daia was delighted with community’s willingness to lay down the formation of faith to the seminarians.

After the recollection, Fr Simon Refliandy instructed the teachers and staff to begin all the classes with 20 minutes’ meditation. All the seminarians seemed to enjoy their initiation into meditation. Fr Willem Daia asked for our prayers that they will be faithful in adopting this practice.

In Focus

Zenna Moeti, Botswana



My favourite Christian Mystic, Fr Bede Griffiths OSB, a Benedictine monk who lived in ashrams in South India, teaches that Life is the stage where Satori - a Buddhist term for sudden enlightenment - is realised. He writes, "...it is the actual situation in which we are placed...that we meet God and have the scorching experience of his presence." (Letters, 8 June 1972)

Life is full of moments to achieve Satori, and I hold as sacred the following Satori moment which set in motion my journey with Christian Meditation.

It was an unbearably hot day as I waited in my sister's car with my two children for her to arrive to drop us home. She had had an unexpected delay and my children, who had had a long day at school, fussed no end. Feeling my frustration mounting, I tried my best to subdue it with every prayer I could think of. But the sun continued to beat down on us unrelentingly, and the kids carried on being cranky. Frustrated and exhausted, the full reality of my decision to leave behind the comfort of my life in Botswana to "find myself", weighed heavily on me. Everything I didn't have was the solution to my problem right now, I figured. If I had more money, if I had more help, if I drove a nicer car... But even if I had all those things, the sun would still be hot and the children would still be fussing over having to wait, my rational self argued.

As my mind continued to exchange words, I noticed an unusual pause in my thinking where I could observe my conflicting thoughts. Wisdom flooded this space, and I emerged from my contemplative pause detached from Zenna's wilfulness, calmer and enlightened. I had all I needed to overcome the challenge I faced right in front of me - next to the car stood a large beautiful, shady

tree...Whoa!!! Awakening to the space between stimulus and reaction opened a new world to me as I discovered that "there is no gulf between myself and God." (Fr Griffiths)

Within a few weeks, I was introduced to the discipline of Christian Meditation through Sr. Ruth Montrichard SJC, at the John Main Centre in Port of Spain, Trinidad. Experiencing Christian meditation for the first time was unpleasant. I sat and painfully observed my "monkey mind." I felt extremely unsettled by the experience and left, not with a desire to return, but a desire to know more about The Christ to whom I was choosing to surrender my wilfulness. A year later, feeling that I had a better understanding and relationship with Jesus, The Christ, I decided to resume.

The practice of Christian Meditation within communities, together with the teachings and companionship I have enjoyed as a student of the WCCM Academy, encourage me to redefine what it means to be a Contemplative Christian in an ever-expanding non-contemplative world. To see the world, not as a troubled world, but a world full of moments to achieve Satori through living a contemplative lifestyle.



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Would you like to contribute to the WCCM Newsletter? Our next deadline is 10 December.

Young Meditators

Reconnecting with the energy and joy of being

The retreat for Young Meditators held at Bonnevaux this year from 31st July to 4th August had the theme "Where has the Joy Gone?". The group of participants from different parts of the world was led by Taynã Malaspina (WCCM Director of Meditation for Young Adults Programme), Fr Laurence (online), Fr Patricio Lynch and Giovanni Felicioni. Maria de León Castillejo from Spain shares on the experience:

"First of all, the retreat helped me in acquiring the habit of meditation. I used to meditate but not as much as we did. I am very happy because I discovered another way of praying, with the heart, as the Community explained. It is not thinking about God, but being with God. The retreat brought me peace. Meditating every day helps you to feel more connected with yourself, with the world, and to accept your reality. Being grateful for what you receive every day also brought me the joy of discovering



God everywhere, in every person and in every experience.

Another big gift is the friendship, because I shared the experience with people from 13 countries, different parts of the world, with different education, cultures. I felt the good energy and unity with all of them. I felt very connected, we were vibrating in the same dimen-

sion. This is a big gift in life: to have the opportunity to build a relationship. And for sure the most important thing was love, the love that I felt from all of them, from God and also from nature. Because I enjoyed all the experiences in nature, discovering and contemplating the beauty of each tree, flower and little animal. I loved it!"

WCCM presence on Insight Timer app

Insight Timer is one of the most popular apps for meditation globally and you can find teachings on Christian Meditation there as well. Laurence Freeman has a dedicated channel via app since some year ago, with content on the

basic teaching. More recently WCCM launched another channel more specifically for younger audience, where collaborators record the teachings by John Main and Laurence Freeman in English, Spanish and Portuguese.



Insight Timer

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