



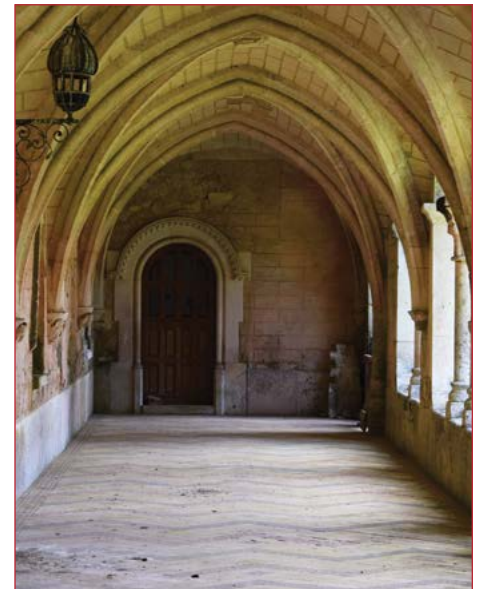
## Nurturing peace in the Post-Truth World

Laurence Freeman reflects on how a contemplative life can be an antidote for the contemporary global crisis



Message in a wall in a street in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Photo by Laurence Freeman)

## The new Bonnevaux website



The website describes the vision with a gallery of images to convey something of its beauty, development plans, news, comments on the project from meditators around the world - and the easy to use donation page. On the homepage you can also follow the progress of the Bonnevaux fund. (p.7)

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## Deeper Friends

A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

A top diplomat recently wrote a kind note of support for Bonnevaux and began by saying in a rather undiplomatic way, 'the world is in a mess'. He added that the need has never been greater for centres of clarity, inclusivity and peace such as we pray Bonnevaux will be with God's help (and yours). The contemplative life has often been misrepresented down the centuries. It has been presented as an option, often a very selfish choice, for a private peace and seclusion, an escape from the world and its problems. Many people, avoiding the work of silence for themselves but caught up in the affrays of the world saw centres of contemplation as dream get-aways.

But, if we see contemplation as a way of living in the present, with minds and hearts wide-open in rationality and compassion, the truth is very different. The contemplative life is ordinary, as ordinary as our own frequent faults and failings, and as our innate commitment to hope and to a more peaceful and fairer world. As ordinary, in other words, when all the layers of sentimentality and commercialism have been extracted from our understanding of its radical, universal meaning, as the birth of Jesus.

The incarnation is the greatest of revelations wrapped up in the simplest of packaging. It illuminates not the institutional, but the heart's meaning of contemplation, the vision of God rather than the observation of God, seeing not looking at. It shows anyone who beholds it that the human journey is the evolution of each person, whatever their gifts or background, towards a state that is, simply, divine. 'God became human so that human beings might become God' sang all the major Christian teachers before the caste-system returned and power-structures obscured the truth that blazed out in Bethlehem.

Not only diplomats today feel the

world is in trouble. 'Democracy ha-ha-ha' as the hurting graffiti in a Brazilian subway, pictured on the cover, declared, is hard to define and today harder for many to believe in. It depends on a deli-



cate balance of force. It requires levels of self-restraint and civility that make it is easy to hijack by populists, cynics and fools. A referendum today, therefore, seems a particularly volatile cocktail for democratic process. To redress a balance that is so imperilled we need more than platitudes and surface change. A more radical and costly change of attitude, such as Pope Francis has initiated in the Catholic Church is demanded by our times.

A friend in the financial world wrote to me after the election, reflecting on all the instability and sadness in the world, that 'there are simply too many people that have not participated in the brave new world we have created'. By 'we' I think he meant all of us who have a degree of comfort and privilege compared with those struggling to survive war and emigration or to feed their families in the dismal parts of our cities. In particular, I think he meant those charged with responsibility for the big decisions

about money and power. Their decisions have doubtlessly made the world a wealthier place. But they are also driving an ever widening wedge between those who have absurdly too much and

those who have barely enough. Jesus said the 'poor you will always have with you'. It is the gap between the poor and the rich, above all, that makes for the tragic mess.

How does contemplation, awakened through meditation, the work of silence, help us redress the balance that is the foundation of the virtues, of justice, peace, health and happiness? How can we teach and share this gift that is free and must remain as free as a bridge of impeccable trust?

Meditation is the simplest and most universal means of awakening the contemplative mind and thus raising the level of wisdom in the world. Acting with an unbalanced view of things, however, we can turn an ancient source of wisdom into just another component, a fad or a product, of our technoculture. However many the miracles and conveniences that science has showered on us and even though it can crudely devalue the human and blur the

identity of the human and the machine, it cannot replace the human. The human is the process of change through which the divine most fully incarnates. God becomes human, not a system or a computer. Meditation, then, is always better understood as relationship not as technique. It is more like marriage or monastic vows or any sincere way of life than a course or an app.

After the novelty of the practice has worn off, and if the discipline begins to take root, the times of meditation become naturally woven into daily life. It all becomes natural and ordinary. But it also becomes transfiguring, a constant agent of change that reveals the depth dimension in everything as soon as it opens and integrates the subtler levels of our selves. As one begins this journey a hard but necessary thing to be reminded of is that it is not like any other experience we are familiar with. It is in about letting go rather than grasping – something particularly hard and counter-cultural today for the busy malls of our minds to see. At the end of his life, the Buddha was asked what he had got out of meditation. He replied ‘Nothing... But I have lost a lot.’ Jesus too emphasized that we cannot find without losing and that discipleship, the most fully incarnate form of the human relationship with the divine, requires that we abandon ‘all your possessions’.

If only it were an experience like others. It would be easier to sell and to master. But then it would not propel us forwards in the direction that our lives naturally seek and need to follow. The experience of meditation is that of an ever deepening, self-renewing relationship. When one thinks it is exhausted it turns and takes on a new lease of life.

John Main famously said, ‘nothing happens in meditation and if it does, ignore it.’ Perhaps not the best way to sell something, but the truest way to lead people to start and continue on

this way of grace. What he means, of course, is what the contemplative wisdom has always taught. Experience, as we usually understand it, is already something past, a snapshot or concept of something we underwent without knowing what it was just because we were so fully involved in it. There was no bit of us standing on the sideline recording and evaluating. We were, it is true, in the experience, but the experience was not compartmentalized in us. The description, even the meaning, comes later because experience is only a vestige in memory. Our hunger for ex-

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perience and of course for novelty and the prestige related to it, runs counter to the whole meaning of contemplation. Understanding this, John Main said that the ‘most important meaning for modern people to rediscover is that of silence’.

Sadly, this is not what the church has taught in recent times. It has marketed the supernatural, the extraordinary and ‘experiences of grace’ because there will always be a market for this kind of thing and for other less service-oriented reasons. But this exhausts the genuine religious spirit and leaves it dependent on images not reality, on the surface not the real depths of God. It is also abstract, intangible except in the imagination, and falsely incarnational.

If, in the early days of meditating, we can find the help we need to strengthen our practice to withstand these initial

challenges and to control our craving for experience, we will soon discover the real work and the wonder of silence.

Silence is creative, refreshing, healing and de-toxifying. It can seem at first, however, as if it were negative and so frightening. To be truly silent, it seems, must mean to disappear altogether. But when we see that silence is reached through the work of pure attention, not on an object of attention, we have breakthrough. We fall into seeing how contemplation is indeed the expanding experience of love. Everything we have called love before is re-mapped. In this we are swept above our small self-consciousness and increasingly, in the bigger picture, the truth appears.

Silence is truthful. Nothing is more important for us in our post-truth world of ‘fake news’ and manipulative mass deception than to remember what truth really is. Merton once said that ‘I make monastic silence a protest against the lies of politicians, propagandists and agitators’. This is true and Bonnevaux will be part of this ancient monastic protest of truth. But today we have to see that the monastic is related not only to monasteries but to the monk within all of us, that part of us which ‘truly seeks God’ and knows that solitude is the condition of real relationship. A community, familial, monastic or global, is as strong as all the solitudes which compose it.

To the mind addicted to noise and novelty, silence will seem like a negative emptiness. In truth it is an emptiness filled with the degree of potential that matches the level of silence attained. Ultimately, until we fall beyond boundaries, into an ‘order without order’, into the freedom that is the life of Spirit, the silence that is God. Meister Eckhart describes this, in the mystical language of paradox, when he said.

In contemplation we become pregnant with nothing and in the nothing

God is born. God begets His Son in our soul. God begets me as His Son.

To be human is to change. As contemplative consciousness grows it is our very way of perception that changes. It is not that we become 'better at meditation' but that we see that real 'experience' unfolds not merely as something we observe or feel during the meditation but through all the dimensions and in every nook and cranny of life. In everything, we become more committed, less doubtful. Faith, not will-power, takes over and surprises us by the way it moves mountains, often at first by reducing them to little hills. Mystery then emerges from the ordinary rather than dramatically descending from the rafters above. Our idea of God (whether we are believers or agnostics) will also change and with it our whole set of our beliefs and values. God becomes more manifested by our discovering meaning through an expanding sense of connection to those around us, including those opposing us and those who live in other worlds, off the radar of our comfortable zones. In all these ways contemplation grows into action and political courage.

Today we feel understandably frightened by the speed of change. We can hardly adapt to the new before it is superseded by the arrival of next disruptive thing. We feel we are losing control and swayed by fear we rashly run after those we wrongly think can control things better. The catalyst of good change – change that moves us towards the human goal – is in fact at first interior not external. External changes are passing states. Interior change happens definitively as self-knowledge develops. As with the meaning of 'experience', the contemplative understanding of self-knowledge sees important distinctions regarding self-knowledge. It is not essentially just what we know about ourselves or how we think of ourselves – self-confidence or self-doubt, for example – but that we are ourselves in the deepest and non-self-reflective silence. It is not what we learn about ourselves

through magazines. It is what we lose and find in our solitude.

This kind of self-knowledge cannot be put into ordinary words or concepts. It is seen at work in its effects, the changes it works on our lives. When we are truly still and the grip of the ego is loosened, things change as they are meant to change. A kind of knowledge that we have never perhaps known before rises up gently, and yet, as in the story of Elijah's encounter with divinity on the mountain, with a quietness and modesty stronger than the earthquake or the storm.

Discovering this kind of knowledge as true power, this kind of change as the healthiest, we reclaim one of the casualties of modernity, the wisdom of stillness. Hesychia. St John Climacus almost sounds like a modern business consultant selling mindfulness when he speaks about 'hesychia (as) accurate knowledge and management of one's

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thoughts. Stillness of soul is science of thought and a pure mind. Brave and determined thinking is a friend of stillness. It keeps constant vigil at the door of the heart.' Clearly, then, meditation has benefits for the mind. There is nothing anti-intellectual about laying aside one's thoughts or leading the mind into or enter the heart through the path of stillness. The fear that stillness spells death soon evaporates and we discover instead a whole new range and brilliance of life. All organisations, democracy included, work better when people have clearer and calmer minds and are able to tell the difference between fake news and the simple truth.

Walking Jesus' 'narrow little path that leads to life', the Buddha's 'middle way'

or St Benedict's 'nothing in excess', requires balance. The balance of moderation demands vigilance to avoid falling into extremism. Moderation may make for less exciting news items, but it is in fact more thrilling because it awakens the senses and the intelligence on higher levels. It avoids dullness and enhances enjoyment of the truth. In the business world, 'stability' is seen as necessary for investment and productivity. Usually this means no more than 'peace as the world gives it', provisional and easily upset short-term solutions. The peace of Christ, however, arises from the heart of reality not from its surface weather patterns. A conscious contact (not just a self-conscious experience) is necessary to transmit this peace into the human, from the heart itself. Politics, business or religion, without heart are unable to make the world a better place.

We all desire change, but on our own terms. Our image of what we want to change is limited by what we desire. We become no more than creatures of desire. And so, it binds us to suffering, sadness and suffering, products of the cycle of desire, satisfaction and disappointment. It traps us in a realm of images and abstractions. The problem, in restricting change to what we desire, is desire itself. We never desire enough. The feast of the Epiphany reminds us how the whole potential, the glory of human destiny, is manifested in the person of Jesus and now through the cosmos in the body of Christ. Glory is always eager to burst through the ordinary things of life and allow us, even within our present limitations, to see the world as a paradise.

Meditation works by transfiguring desire: at first through those twice-daily periods where we commit ourselves wholeheartedly to poverty of spirit in the renunciation of desire. Increasingly, as change takes deeper root in us, we see how desire is changed in all areas. What and how we desire are no longer blindly controlled by illusion. Eventu-

ally we come to understand what the mystics really meant when they said we should desire only God. At first this might seem an embittered rejection of the world and all its beautiful ways of manifesting the divine. Religious people who lack heart jump onto this language and twist it in order to repress and control the natural desires and joy of life. But once the process of transfiguration is underway we see what it truly means. To desire only God means to resonate in harmony with everything that is real.

Change is the only thing that doesn't change. In the heart of God we find our deepest sense of belonging and transcend our self-consciousness. This is eternal change (the meaning of 'eternal life') and becomes the eternal now, the stillness in which the divine self-knowledge of love emerges and changes us. In the I Ching, the Chinese 'Book of Changes', wisdom is the ability to recognise where at any one moment we are in the perpetual cycle of change. In hexagram 20 on contemplation this is shown leading cyclically into the mystery of reality, just as every birth leads to an endless series of changes and experiences. In this Chinese wisdom text, contemplation is described as the space 'between the ablution and the offering'. Similarly in the Latin word *contemplatio*, *templum* refers not to the building structure but to the space in which it is erected. I think this is why when people come to Bonnevaux it is not just the building but the space in which it floats that reveals itself to them as an entry into contemplation and peace.

If the way home in this space is so simple and evident, why do so few seem to choose it? Life is continuous choice, often between the lesser of two evils as in democratic elections. But we are always facing a choice between right and wrong, the best life-partner, a new password or career. Too many choices create anxiety. Choices that only we can make often make us feel lonely. No doubt this is why, as our world fills up with choice

and complexity, a complementary hunger for simplicity arises. We look instead for an economy of effort, the place of the choiceless choice where we give our assent rather than pick one option. But why do some people want to meditate and others don't? Why do those



who want to meditate have to compete with part of themselves that resists it?

Maybe it is because we assume that it is only, or even primarily, about ourselves choosing. Yet: 'you did not choose me. I chose you', Jesus tells us. He adds that his choice is so that we can go out and bear lasting fruit – not just experiences that come and go but a continuous transfiguration that truly begins when we ourselves have begun to incarnate. The knowledge of being chosen unsettles us. It threatens our ego-control and often forces us into a combative relationship with whoever we feel is doing the choosing. But by learning (through discipline) and allowing (through letting go) the contemplative way of seeing we realise that to be chosen and to consent to it is the greatest freedom.

Aquinas said that what is new about the New Testament is the grace of the Holy Spirit operating in the heart. We don't choose this but we say yes to it.

To say yes is partly a choice but mainly an act of faith in which we surrender ourselves into an absolute equality. Isn't this what we celebrate God doing with us in Bethlehem? If we see it in a contemplative light we have found the key to our present dilemma. We have found

the wisdom way of radical simplicity. We learn over time how to celebrate diversity rather than fear strangers and how to mingle rather than separate. Contemplation is necessary for our next step of evolution.

All of us who serve the community on our international team join me in wishing you, and all those you serve, a happy and holy season of the Lord's birth and epiphany. Please keep Bonnevaux in your heart in a special way as a future place of contemplation and unity to serve what I have been trying to describe in this letter; we pray we will be able to welcome you there one day.

With much love

Laurence Freeman OSB

## Special

# 25 years of the WCCM The vital role of weekly groups

By Paul Harris



*Paul Harris at the London Centre in 1989 with Sr Madeleine Simon RCSJ, founder of the centre, oblates Thom Powys and Polly Schofield and Fr Laurence.*

The John Main seminar which was held in the idyllic village of New Harmony, Indiana, USA, from August 28th to September 1st, 1991, in retrospect confirms the great turning point in the world wide expansion and practice of Christian Meditation. It was a personal joy to meet the 125 meditators at the conference from various countries including the USA, Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, Belgium, Italy, India, Australia, Singapore and Thailand.

The seminar was led by the venerated Benedictine monk, Bede Griffiths, on the theme: "The New Creation in Christ". Laurence Freeman commenting on these seminar talks has said: "Bede manifested a radiant strength of vision and authority. He also showed a startling balance as he walked a razor's edge between radical prophecy and a deep respect for Christian tradition. He used John Main's teaching to crystallize his own vision of meditation and contempla-

tive spirituality and particularly the need for community".

In fact many of us who attended the seminar were impressed by Bede's remarks on spirituality with its roots in a human community. His insights about community beautifully paved the way for the subsequent dialogue to discuss Laurence Freeman's vision of a global inclusive family to shape the future direction and organization of the Christian Meditation community.

The discussion at the seminar on the possible birth of an International organization was lively, vibrant and sometimes chaotic. But with the assistance of Bede Griffiths, as well as the consensus built by Laurence Freeman, and the deft handling of divergent views by the Canadian chairman, Balfour Mount, the baby (WCCM) was delivered joyfully and peacefully.

From a personal viewpoint one of the most important aspects of the seminar discussions was the unanim-

ity regarding the vital role that weekly Christian Meditation groups would continue to play in the new WCCM entity. The participants in the discussion were well aware that Jesus formed the core of his ministry with a small group of twelve, and that the early Christians met in homes in small groups for mutual support and to affirm their common faith. It was understood at the John Main seminar that the weekly meditation group would be an essential pre-condition of the new World Community for Christian Meditation.

With my own 33 years involvement in the practice of Christian Meditation and the starting of new weekly groups, I am delighted at the importance the WCCM gave, and continues to give to John Main's insight about the vital role of groups. We now know that groups are the primary means of sharing the teaching. Around the world small groups are redefining religion, and spirituality is once again becoming alive in the humble meeting places of the weekly group meetings.

The prayer that leads from the head to the heart, from fragmentation to unity, from isolation to caring, grows in the fertile ground of the weekly meditation group meeting. This is the spiritual revolution taking place around the world today.

*Paul Harris is a WCCM Patron, former director of the first Christian Meditation Centre in London, a National Co-ordinator of WCCM Canada Christian Meditation Coordinator, and author of eight books on Christian Meditation and John Main.*

## News

### Bonnevaux

## Website shows the vision of our new home: [www.bonnevauxwccm.org](http://www.bonnevauxwccm.org)



The Community is working globally to make Bonnevaux possible - the new International and Meditation Retreat Centre in Poitiers, France. In November a new website was launched to inform and engage people around the world towards the same goal.

The website describes the vision, with a gallery of images to convey

something of its beauty, development plans, news, comments on the project from meditators around the world - and the easy to use donation page. On the homepage you can also follow the progress of the Bonnevaux fund.

There is a short video about the vision of Bonnevaux: watch here:

<http://tiny.cc/bonnevauxvid>

## What people think about Bonnevaux

**MARY MCALEESE (President of Ireland from 1997 to 2011)**

It is past time for the World Community to have a permanent home, a centre of deep peace and an invitation to reconciliation in our troubled and troubling age but also our age of educated young problem solvers and consciences formed by equality, democracy, compassion and courage. (...) It is a venture worth encouraging and supporting, another light in

the darkness, another heart that welcomes all, another home for the soul.

**DIEGO M ROSA (Abbot General of the Olivetan Benedictine Congregation)**

I am now delighted to learn of the Bonnevaux project. Its ancient monastic roots and spirit of tranquillity make it an ideal place for stabilising the centre of the World Community. It has a very great potential. It is inspiring and I pray new forms of our life

may flourish there.

**RICHARD ROHR OFM (Founder of Center for Action and Contemplation)**

I fully congratulate the World Community for embarking on the project of this new center for its whole community and for all who are seeking depth and peace. It is a truly beautiful place and I am sure it will communicate the beauty of the peace of contemplation. Having an ancient monastic origin adds a whole other dimension to the spirit of this unique place.

**REV'D SARAH BACHELARD (Anglican Priest and theologian from WCCM Australia)**

I believe that Bonnevaux will be a place of refreshment and hospitality, one that will enable all who come to deepen their own pilgrimage to the heart of God, and so to bear the fruits of this journey in their lives and communities at home.

**ŁUKASZ TOMBOREK (Poland)**

For us, young students and people in Poland the vision of the living Christ must be renewed. So many of us feel the lack of his presence and are seeking substitute pleasures. They feel 'Who wants to be in a church that is just a piece of stone without any life-giving presence?' I hope the Bonnevaux centre will become a home for our lost selves and the wounded hearts of our friends. I really desire to participate and help in this work.

*(...) through our union with Christ we are connected, not just with the source of our own being, but we are connected to the source of all being, and all beings. (John Main)*

## News

### Laurence Freeman in the Caribbean (11- 26 October)

By Sr. Ruth Montrichard



Group photo at the retreat in Tobago

Fr. Laurence arrived in Trinidad from Miami and started his visit meeting with our leadership team. This was followed by 120 instructors working with at-risk young people. Later that evening we headed for San Fernando where many had been enquiring about Christian Meditation. About 80 attended the session. On the next day Laurence was hosted by the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business where 75 persons attended a Meditation and Leadership session.

In Tobago, Laurence spoke and led a weekend retreat. The 43 participants included Meditators and Group Leaders from Trinidad, Tobago, Barbados, St.

Lucia, St. Vincent, Jamaica and Grenada. We used some time to show the WCCM 25th Anniversary Video and share information on the New International Home in Bonnevaux. We were privileged to have with us Bishop Jason Gordon, Patron of WCCM-Caribbean.

These islands are small but have nourished the seeds of Christian Meditation in many ways. Fr. Laurence's visit nurtured what was already there on each island, encouraged the leadership and re-emphasized the importance of Christian Meditation in the lives of people.

On the island of St. Vincent, the visit

began with dinner with Bishop Gerard County, who is very keen on promoting Christian Meditation. We had an early interview with Radio NICE and our first session was with a group of teachers who have adopted Christian Meditation and with Sister Martha who is coordinating Meditation in the Schools.

On St. Lucia we were interviewed by the local TV before meeting over 100 teachers from five secondary schools.

On Barbados we were greeted by our Patron Bishop Jason Gordon who organized dinner for priests and religious; Fr. Laurence gave a talk and meditated with the group.

Our final session was held on Sunday morning for all interested in starting Meditation groups. The head of Codrington, the Anglican Theological University was interested in introducing Meditation to the students and Bishop Jason promised to work with him to this end. Back on Trinidad we spent the last three days sharing meditation and Mass and meeting to plan the way forward for WCCM- Caribbean.

### Visit to Venezuela 28 October - 2 November

By Susana Ortega

On 28 October Fr. Pepe Martínez greeted Laurence with a late lunch in his Parish of Manzanares. Later in the afternoon there was a meeting with the National Council Team. On the next day we had a meeting with about 70 people from meditation groups. Fr. Laurence delivered a conference on peace and justice: "The meaning of peace and justice cannot be found in words but in the silence of our temple within." In the

afternoon, he met oblates.

On 30 November we had a one-day retreat with the participation of 126 laypeople and consecrated. The theme was "Be Calm: Finding peace in the storm, Jesus calmed the storm around him and in the hearts of those with him in the boat." At the end of the retreat, there was the profession of one oblate, one novice and three new postulants. As a fruit of the retreat a new meditation group was formed.

The following days we had two visits to "Fe y Alegría schools", "Jesús Maestro" in Petare, and "Las Mayas" in Co-

che, both located in very poor barrios. These started with meditation with a group of children followed by a talk to an audience of pastoralists, teachers and parents from various schools.

We had two events focused on the topic of Christian Meditation and violence. One was a forum with two panelists who addressed the increasing violence in Venezuela at macro and micro levels and then Fr. Laurence talked about "Breaking the cycle of violence. The courage to love your enemy and change the world is found in the depth of our own heart." Next day Fr. Lau- ▶▶



## News

rence gave a conference at the Universidad Central de Venezuela: "Breaking the cycle of violence. The courage to love your enemy and change the world is found in the depth of our own heart and in the community that contemplation creates."

On the last day Fr. Laurence delivered a conference to consecrated people: "The love of God flooding our inmost heart: For St. Paul this is the essential Christian experience. For us it is the fruit of contemplation as the source of our vocation." During his visit, Fr. Laurence did interviews for local TV and radio stations and SIC Magazine.

It was a very fruitful visit. On one hand there was a strengthening of our Community in Venezuela and on



the other hand, given the increasing political tension and social violence, Christian Meditation is becoming a means to inner peace, dialogue and reconciliation. The visits to Fe y Alegría schools was a boost to our alliance with them and a wonderful platform

to teach children to meditate, and have an incidence in reducing violence in the poorest neighbourhoods.

ONLINE: Watch a video of a visit to a school in Venezuela here: <http://tiny.cc/vnz2016>

## Meditation and Ageing Seminar in Sydney



*Photo of the second day of the Seminar*

Fr. Laurence Freeman led a two day seminar on Meditation and Ageing (19 - 20 November). He kicked off the seminar by reminding us that the word "Contemplation" is derived from the latin for "temple" and refers to the sacred space within the temple rather than the physical structure itself.

Neil Miller and Sarah Bachelard, Anglican priests, delivered a presentation on ageing and spirituality, highlighting

the benefits of "apprenticing oneself to one's own disappearance."

Neil and Sarah then emphasised two particular aspects of the letting go process – Lament, the process of suffering and complaining, and undergoing, a particular way of being in the world that becomes more relevant in old age, a practice of yielding oneself with passion, of letting go, but not of giving up.

Laurence invited three school chil-

dren aged 10 & 11 who had practiced meditation since kindergarten to share something about the role of meditation in their lives.

The afternoon also held a panel discussion based on pre-written questions from the participants. Finally Laurence spoke about Bonnevaux, a new contemplative and meditation retreat centre. A scholarship fund is being established to enable meditators from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend Bonnevaux.

On Sunday the seminar continued at the chapel of the Benedictine monastery in Arcadia, north-west Sydney. Laurence spoke of the value of monastic wisdom - Celtic and Roman - in developing meaning in modern lives emphasising the importance of 'coming home' to ourselves and the need for self-knowledge.

ONLINE - listen to all talks here: <http://tiny.cc/agesem2016>

## News

### Brazil

Fr. Laurence visited Brazil in December (1-11). He led retreats and gave talks in Vinhedo (São Paulo), Campina Grande (Paraíba), Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais) and Rio de Janeiro. He shared the vision of Bonnevaux. All the donations at the retreats went to the fund. The Brazilian community showed great generosity and enthusiasm about the idea.

### The Philippines



The Community in the Philippines organized a Retreat Workshop from 11 to 13 November, with 27 participants at the Order of the Carmelites' Titus Brandsma Center in Quezon City.

Two children also took part in this event. It was an opportunity for them to go deeper into the essential teachings of Christian Meditation.

## Leonard Cohen: You Want it Darker

Review by Jim Green



*I've seen you change  
the water into wine  
I've seen you change it  
back to water, too*

So opens Treaty, the second track on what has turned out to be Leonard Cohen's final album, *You Want it Darker*. In all of the songs – and throughout his life – he picks a joyfully defeated route through painful oppositions: *so water and wine are joined by glory and shame, devil and angel, lost and found, don't and do*. The polarities get more detailed in another song (*Steer Your Way*) when the uniquely gravelled voice of sadness and joy steers between the ruins of the *Altar and*

*the Mall, the fables of Creation and the Fall, as well as the Wisdom of the Way... and the women whom you bought*.

In this album – his last imperfect offering – the prophet-poet is channelling St Augustine (*I was*

*fighting with temptation, But I didn't want to win*), St John of the Cross (*You want it darker, We kill the flame*), as well as speaking for *every hung-up person* in the whole wide universe, as his fellow poet-prophet and Nobel laureate would say.

Along the way there are the shifting moods and bleak epiphanies that Cohen-followers love him for. And now, because he knew it was almost closing-time, the tone is valedictory, regretful, affirming – all at once. There seems to be much here about the loss of faith, *the Truth that you believed in yesterday*, the constant shifting between water and wine... Yet my overwhelming sense in listening to these miraculous

creations is that loss, this passionately rendered, becomes indistinguishable from finding and being found.

*Treaty* is the stand-out song for me. In it he dares, yet again, to meditate on what can seem the most fundamental and intractable of polarities: *you and me*. As ever, it's not clear whether God or a lover is being addressed. By now, perhaps, it's simply the Other. The song is reprised in the final track as a string quartet, but Leonard suddenly speaks one last time at the end, in one of the most heart-felt and heart-breaking pleas I have ever heard:

*I wish there was a treaty  
we could sign  
It's over now, the water  
and the wine  
We were broken then  
but now we're borderline  
And I wish there was a treaty,  
I wish there was a treaty between  
your love and mine*

He makes me wonder, yet again, whether a wish so fully expressed is itself the very salvation he is seeking. May we share the peace in which he rests.

## In Focus

# Sicco Claus, from The Netherlands



My first encounter with meditation was when I started studying theology. I was taught Zen by a friendly, elderly priest from the student parish. It is hard to say why I was attracted to it. Was it the desire for experience alongside all the cognitive stimuli fired at me during classes? For a few years I kept on meditating with frequent infrequency. However, slowly my practice disappeared into the background of my life only to reappear for short periods once in a while.

About ten years later my father became seriously ill. He was diagnosed with cancer and passed away within a period of barely half a year. In this sad period my life shook to its foundations. In those days I went to the

gym regularly. Suddenly I asked myself the question whether the proportion of time between devoting myself to transitory matters, and my spiritual life, thus that which is enduring, was in balance. The answer was: 'no'. God received about one hour and a half a week; masses in my parish are quite extensive. My body received three times as much.

Precisely in these turbulent days Laurence Freeman appeared on the Dutch television in a series on Christian spiritual leaders. His teaching, but in fact even more his way of manifesting this teaching, struck me. I realized that Zen always had remained somewhat strange to my Christian identity and perhaps for that reason became central in my life. But here a way of meditating was presented that was fully integrated within a Christian spiritual discourse. Immediately after having seen the documentary about Freeman and Christian Meditation I started looking for a group in my residence The Hague.

During the almost six years that have passed since then, I became more and more fascinated by Christian meditation. First primarily in a practical sense. I managed to give meditation a central place in my life,

enriching it in a wonderful way. However, I also became increasingly interested in the intellectual background of the spiritual way John Main had introduced me to.

Notwithstanding Main's frequent warnings against reading too many books on meditation, I embarked on an intellectual journey into Christian meditation. Gradually I discovered that until now fairly little scholarly attention has been given to Main's small but rich spiritual oeuvre and that some aspects of his teaching perhaps remained somewhat underexposed.

These observations resulted in the development of a PhD proposal which in June of this year was rewarded with a scholarship for teachers (see picture). So for the next few years I have the privilege of being able to occupy myself with the reconstruction of Main's spiritual teaching, both in its theological and practical dimensions. However, I will not leave it at that and will explore what the relevance of his teaching might be for some hard problems that plague present day, North Atlantic 'secular' culture. Luckily I don't need to start from scratch and can take Charles Taylor's analyses as a starting point for this assessment.



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

## Events & Resources

### Calendar 2017

**19 April, Washington DC, USA**  
The Way of Peace

**HH The Dalai Lama and  
Laurence Freeman OSB**



This year the Way of Peace will focus on the questions of spirituality, religion and education. Students from CUA and Georgetown University who belong to the Way of Peace Fellowship will also participate and Sean Hagan will be the moderator of the dialogue. More information: [meditatio@wccm.org](mailto:meditatio@wccm.org)

**24 June - 1 July, Siena, Italy**  
Monte Oliveto Retreat: Silence

**Led by Laurence Freeman  
and Giovanni Felicioni**



A thirst for silence characterises our un-silent culture of over- stimulation and continuous mental talk- show chatter. In a post-truth world where we believe less and less, silence performs a healing and restorative role - it restores meaning to words and ritual and reassures us that truth is really real.

More information:  
[monteoliveto@wccm.org](mailto:monteoliveto@wccm.org)

### More important dates & events:

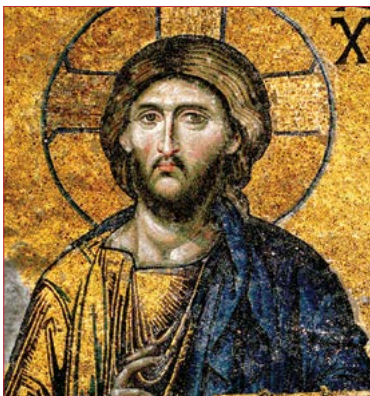
9-16 April  
**Bere Island Holy Week Retreat**  
Contact: [theresawccm@gmail.com](mailto:theresawccm@gmail.com)

8-25 July  
**Pilgrimage to  
Kashmir & Ladakh, India**  
More info:  
[http://tiny.cc/wccm\\_india2017](http://tiny.cc/wccm_india2017)

15-22 September  
**Health & Meditation Retreat**  
Contact: [theresawccm@gmail.com](mailto:theresawccm@gmail.com)

22-24 September:  
**Bere Island Music Festival**  
Contact: [theresawccm@gmail.com](mailto:theresawccm@gmail.com)

1-8 October:  
**Fara Sabina School Retreat, led by  
Laurence Freeman**  
Contact: [som@wccm.org](mailto:som@wccm.org)



### John Main Seminar 2017

10-13 August, Houston, USA

Praying with the Masters Today, presented by Bernard McGinn

7-10 August, Pre-Seminar led by Laurence Freeman OSB

The John Main Seminar 2017 will explore the development of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition from the early to the contemporary mystics and show that these great mystics are not just historical monuments, but active resources for those drawn to the contemplative life. For more information and registration visit:

[http://tiny.cc/JMS2017\\_RG](http://tiny.cc/JMS2017_RG)

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

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