

# Meditatio

Newsletter of The  
World Community  
for Christian Meditation



[www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)

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## The birth of a new sanity

Laurence Freeman reflects on how attention and stillness can help in the recovering of the art of a balanced life



*Fr Laurence meditating with a student in La Florida School, Mexico City*

## The Blessing of Bonnevaux



The new international home of our Community hosted a ceremony on the 21st of November with the installation of an icon of John Cassian and the blessing led by the Archbishop of Poitiers, Msg Pascal Wintzer. It was the beginning of a new journey for WCCM. Read more at p.6

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A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

### Dearest Friends

I have just returned home from a trip to Mexico. My first morning there gave me the challenge and delight of meditating with a thousand children in a large school auditorium. I spoke to them in two groups, younger and older, but the quality of the silence we shared was the same for both sessions. They have been blessed with a school and teachers who understand the value of meditation for the young and who have not only added it to their daily schedule but allowed it to pervade the life of the school. The fruits are very evident. On my last morning in Mexico City I met and meditated with a group of business leaders at a breakfast session in an elegant club. I think they were more surprised than the children at the idea of meditating together but they responded well: there is nothing like the experience itself to make one see how normal and sane meditation is.

I told the children that they are the leaders of the future and will soon be inheriting the grievous mistakes of their parents' generation. The consciousness and balance they are already finding in the contemplative experience will be essential to their way of dealing with the global and personal problems of their lives. I told the business leaders what I have come strongly to believe, that no greater responsibility sits on their stressful shoulders than that of leaders recovering their childlikeness in the experience of contemplation.

The prototype Christian monk Anthony of the Desert speaks to both young and old today across seventeen centuries of human evolution. 'The time is coming,' he said, 'when people will go mad and when they see someone who is not mad they will attack him saying 'you are mad, you are not like us''. Anthony spoke these words not far from the mosque in Sinai

where 305 worshippers were massacred recently by Islamist militants. The victims were Sufis, the contemplatives of Islam, the most peaceful and gentle in their teaching and lives. Anthony's words and the madness of our times remind us how urgent is the need to recover the contemplative perspective that we have somewhere lost on our global march of progress.

'Sanity' comes from the Latin 'sanus' meaning healthy. In good health we feel whole, balanced, sound in body and mind – even if we are suffering or dying. Sanity means accepting and making sense of the whole spectrum of life, the painful as well as the pleasurable. This total acceptance and clarity allows us to live and to die healed.

John Main said that sanity and balance



Children meditating at La Florida School, Mexico City

But such has it always been. The Nativity story evokes not only the joy of the birth of the Jesus who is still changing human existence but also the madness into which he was born and in which we still live. The massacre of the innocents by the tyrant Herod and the witness of the first martyr, Stephen, are both remembered close to Christmas. They stop us from seeing Christmas in the sentimental light which modern consumerism confects around us at this time of the year. A newborn child fills the world with happiness even if the world has gone mad. It also evokes the protective concern of parents and family for the health of the child. When we are most vulnerable we are most in need of understanding what health really means.

mean 'knowing the context in which we live'. That is why we are obliged to know what is going on around us. Like many perhaps, I have been tempted recently to opt out, to stop listening to the news, the failures of self-seeking politicians, the shadow side of humanity spilling its raging darkness over the innocent, the greed and corruption of corporations, the Mexican cartels who give schools and social services to poor villages and towns and ruthlessly kill those and their families who resist them. But, to be sane we have to recognise and confront both our own insanity and that of the world.

Understanding contemplation helps us to see this in more immediate, experiential terms. If we are to be attentive to reality, we need to see, to be aware

of our inattention and all the disorder it creates around us and between us. This helps to bring the idea of God down to earth. To 'seek God', as St Benedict says, means more than thinking or imaging God. It means, more purely and simply, to pay attention. The life of attention is a godly life. It reverses disorder and restores order and harmony to ourselves and to the relationships that compose ourselves. To be devoid of attention, unaware of our selfish mindlessness, is a state of sin from which we are redeemed by the experience of love, which hits us when we are awakened by a source of attention directed towards us in all our unworthiness and insanity.

Awakening to a more attentive and conscious life is an initiation into self-knowledge and so into the knowledge of God. Self-knowledge, the contemplative tradition teaches us, is more than self-esteem or just feeling good about ourselves. It is feeling good *because* we can see ourselves as we truly are. Humility like this is a great resource for getting through madness. Mere self-esteem often hides dependency on others. When they reject or despise me, I withdraw, react, twitter my feelings to the world and violently reject the rejection I feel. Contemplative wisdom exposes the insanity of this response. Even more (this makes it seem insane to many), it recognises the advantages of suffering rejection. The ego is purified and reduced and the space it excavates in us allows the spirit to expand. No one likes the Cross yet we have to learn to embrace it.

It feels like an entry into a nothingness which is easily mistaken for death simply because we misunderstand the nature of death, failing to see it as the combining of loss and transformation. Enlightened ones, even as different as Francis of Assisi and Simone Weil, understand the advantages of the Cross. An MBA stu-

dent learning meditation, who told me he did not 'have a religious bone in my body', asked if he could write his first essay on the Dark Night. I wondered why and where an irreligious person would even find out about this term, let alone be interested in understanding it. Meditation had taught him quickly by direct experience. His conclusion, comparing mindfulness and meditation, was that mindfulness would be unlikely to lead you into the dark night but that meditation surely would.

In the science fiction film of the future, *Interstellar*, there is a dramatic scene where the astronauts plunge their craft into a black hole. The very name we give this phenomenon indicates our ignorance about it and the fear that ignorance produces. In the film, however, the black hole, while admittedly a bit terrifying, leads into new dimensions of reality. The human concerns and emotions, love and gravity, survive the transition but the ways in which we see reality and undergo all experience are utterly transformed.

This same transformation happens through the far less terrifying practice of meditation. There we discover that the radical poverty of spirit we enter through the loss of 'all the riches of thought and imagination', as the desert monks called it, enables us to awaken to the new dimension that Jesus called simply the 'kingdom'. The kingdom, like the human self, is unobservable. It is found in a dimension of reality beyond the confines of ordinary self-consciousness and our persistent illusion of 'objectivity'. Although this may sound abstract and over-subtle it is without doubt children who experience and can even understand it more easily than we with our business-oriented minds.

The self is always invisible – that which 'no one has seen or can see'. Our

personality by contrast is most of the time only too visible. We look at it in the mirror of the mind all the time. But we cannot see consciousness. Consciousness is seeing. In the dimension of reality we call contemplation we know what is beyond knowledge through a work of unknowing, the laying aside of the conceptual and image-making mind. We learn that we can know without always being stuck as an observer. More than self-awareness, which is necessary for accomplishing mechanical tasks efficiently, self-knowledge is born amid the labours of consciousness and awakens us to the fact of our being on a journey. This journey spans dimensions of reality and the stages of human development. Yet, however different these dimensions and stages, the journey is one and its irreducible oneness is the meaning of the self.

Attention requires what our world has sacrificed to the acquisition of speed: stillness. It is possible to be moving fast and remain still, in a state of attention; St Benedict tells us to 'run along the way of the Lord's commands' and that 'idleness is the enemy of the soul'. The contemplative life is not about inertia. Of course the speed at which one runs and remains busy will vary with individual temperaments and even the most resilient and energetic need times of slowing down to a still point - just as we all need some space for emotional solitude. But modern life, hijacked by our technology at the ransom of our spirituality, has lost the art of the balanced life and the wisdom to know what this means.

Surprisingly for the fast-moving types, stillness is energising for body *and* mind. Early in this journey, almost from the beginning (though there can be a honeymoon phase), it becomes clear that we are not just into relaxation or stress-control. We need to deal with the inner

conflicts and contradictions that the distracted life keeps undercover. Soon we see that there is no one to blame except ourselves. Even those who have suffered injustice are denied the luxury of remaining a victim. This may sound harsh but it is what all therapy is designed to show, including the powerful therapeutic influence of a daily contemplative practice.

Similarly, we must forego a prolonged state of discouragement (*acedia*) as this would lead eventually far away from the revitalising experience of stillness and straight into the sidings of stagnation. Loneliness, too, one of our age's most corrosive illnesses of the soul, needs to be faced and re-evaluated. Meditation turns it back into the solitude out of which every conscious and living relationship is generated. Loneliness is the failure of solitude.

These and many other elements of the work of contemplation show us that the work is a constant intertwining of repentance and growth. *Metanoia* is the narrow path into the kingdom, a turning around of our attention and so of all mental states. This pivoting is continuous. It demands tough self-awareness of our faults and failures but frees us from lingering guilt or self-rejection. Out of self-criticism comes a truer sense of our potential and essential value. We come to see our real potential in the light of our accepted failures rather than in the light of fantasy.

Without a strong capacity for attention the centre is lost and things begin to fall apart. More and more energy is then needed to hold the disintegrating elements together. Life begins to feel, as it does to many today, like an endless struggle with no worthwhile meaning. Attention, however, quickly changes all this. It awakens the undiluted and undistracted experience of being. To the distracted person this experience feels at first like nothing leading nowhere. In a

sense it is. But it will take time to appreciate the meaning of the experience: and then one sees that no where is now here.

So, we *can* become sane again and helps others to do so. Even with the world continuing in madness sane people can make a difference, especially if they remember what it was like to be insane. In Christian wisdom, contemplation is felt to be gift or grace, not the result of will power, scholarship, imagination or spiritual technology. Yet, because contemplation involves an ever fuller participation in reality, not an observer's distance, it does ask for 'right effort'. We need to do something in order to learn what it is to be. Then being shows itself as pure action and we return to the mundane world of work with new motivation and insight.

We meditate in order to be contemplative, which is an end in itself. Nearly everything in our world has become an instrument, a tool for achieving something else whether it is fame, money or self-gratification. All streams of human wisdom agree that contemplation is an end in itself and justifies itself. What

### *Even with the world continuing in madness sane people can make a difference*

flows from it – compassion and wisdom – need to emerge from this non-instrumentalist attitude. Contemplation then turns the toxins of madness into medicine. It is always open-minded and open-hearted and turns away from ideological or sectarian options. In this, religion and science agree in the value of the contemplative mind.

'Contemplation' contains the word 'templum'. But *templum* originally referred to the space in which a ritual was performed or a structure (like a temple) might be built, not the physical building

itself. The meditating mind is boundlessly spacious and yet always capable of acuity and focus. Structures rise and fall, just as thoughts and certainties come and go. Spaciousness is the Spirit and, when we are in it, we are detached from whatever physical or conceptual structures may occupy the space for the time being. There is always an inbuilt tension between a structure and the space which it occupies. So, there is a timeless tension between contemplation and religion. When it is in balance, this tension protects sanity. Its collapse presages madness.

The capacity for contemplation is innately human. Even those who convince themselves 'I can't meditate' have the gift of this capacity both to enjoy the present and to transcend. Children and atheists testify to the universality and unconditionality of the gift of contemplation. It is, Jesus knew, a truth often hidden from the learned and the clever and revealed to mere children. It is never the possession of the religious. In a world gone mad such a resource has immeasurable significance. The contemplative person channels anger into healing and re-constructive action. It purifies and reforms religion and so helps us see what new role religion is meant to play in the future. It corrects and heals; it does not, like many remedies on offer today, make us madder.

To appreciate the gift of contemplative practice (like meditation) in one's own life will eventually make one aware of its social value as well. Its capacity to change the world is proven by its ability to transform us personally. A nine-year old meditator, a little girl told me recently, when I asked her when she meditated at home. 'whenever I have a big fight with my sister'. To recognise that anger is unpleasant for the angry person to feel but that it can also be internally cured is wisdom. Wisdom for a violent world. The symptoms of contemplative



consciousness affecting the body politic and the financial structures of society can be expressed in the classic formula of the secularised French Revolution: liberty, fraternity and equality. Without a transformed mind these ideals quickly deconstruct and there is no quicker passage to violence than to have one's ideals exposed as illusions.

A mind liberated from its own structures and its illusions gazes on other people with fraternal and sisterly love. To those we love we attribute value and importance equal to our own. Families and communities are the laboratory and the lampstand of this experience of the kingdom. And although they may generate many failures and have all the faults of the ordinary, these seminal social groups are needed by society to testify to a necessary redemptive hope even in the grim face of collective madness.

As an idealistic young man I was drawn to the vision of community created by meditation as a 'community of love'. I have failed it many times and in many ways but I have never lost the vision or the conviction that it is achievable. From being a vision held by me and a very few, it has grown, through the community, as one that is now embedded in many singular lives, meditation groups, friendships and national communities. Such a vision lives or dies in the individual but it is realised in the body of the community.

At the blessing of Bonnevaux a few weeks ago I felt that we are already embarked on a new phase of this long journey. It is a young, fresh and fragile phase. Like anything young and growing it needs much nutrition and care in order for it to mature well. Whenever Bonnevaux becomes the centre of peace and for peace that we pray it will, a place of creative thinking as well as deep contemplative practice, I think all the sacrifices we have made for it will be justified. Bonnevaux cannot save the world. But it

is a partial manifestation of something, a movement of consciousness, a wave of contemplation, that is sweeping the world and that we can confidently affirm can pull us out of madness into a new sanity and a new kind of sanctity.

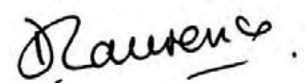
On any long journey like this, a companion is a blessing, at times a necessity. What is considered the first work of literature, the Gilgamesh epic, composed more than four thousand years ago in a Sumerian culture, the goal of the human quest is interwoven with the experience of friendship. Gilgamesh is a strong young warrior who becomes proud and tyrannical. His subjects pray for relief and it is sent in the form of Enkidu, a somewhat wild man who becomes the intimate friend of Gilgamesh after he has been civilised and fought Gilgamesh. They go off together on a great quest in the course of which Enkidu is killed. Gilgamesh is grief-stricken and inconsolable but also tortured by a sense of his own mortality. He continues the quest alone and returns to his city a better man and a far better leader.

This epic awakens and portrays the major themes of human consciousness. It shows us, for example, that we cannot mature alone and that we must suffer the loss of what we love in order to achieve transcendence and wholeness. One might see in both these ancient friends, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, archetypal elements of the Christ-mystery to which the end and beginning of each year, this sad-happy tipping-point of time, invites to pay deep attention. 'God became human in order that the human being might become God'. This shocking revelation, repeated by the earliest teachers of the Church, from the Alexandrians to the Cappadocians, plunges us into the twinned mystery of the incarnation and divinisation revealed by the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. In him we see both ourselves and the friend who is always another one's self.

The humble, imperfect work of contemplation – as ordinary as daily meditation – awakens and transforms our sense of self. It sheds an illuminating light on the scriptures of our own tradition as well as on the wisdom texts of others. It renews the language which we need to express and share our human journey of faith. Loving God then means more than agonising about God's will and 'doing what He wants'. It evokes the human attraction to love that is powered by the capacity to turn from self-consciousness and focus our attention on another. When this awakening is happening we know that we are not asleep and that we cannot deny, reject - or for long forget - the essential fact of being which is the true arbiter of the good. To love is simply to be awake in all we are and do.

Birth is the continuous present of reality. Christ, as the mystics down the ages have taught, is continuously re-born in us. He forms himself in the womb of consciousness through the work of recognition and acceptance. To know that we are recognised and known awakens our ability to recognise and know. The more we grow in attention, the more humble becomes our desire to be conscious. Christ's self-formation in us is our transformation and our progressive divinisation. As we become truly ourselves we can understand why the Christian says 'I live no longer but Christ lives in me'. The I that no longer lives is the old self, Gilgamesh before Enkidu. The I that can say this knows that it is never alone but now lives continuously in the deepening solitude of its uniqueness.

With much love



Laurence Freeman OSB

## News

### The Blessing of Bonnevaux The beginning of a new journey



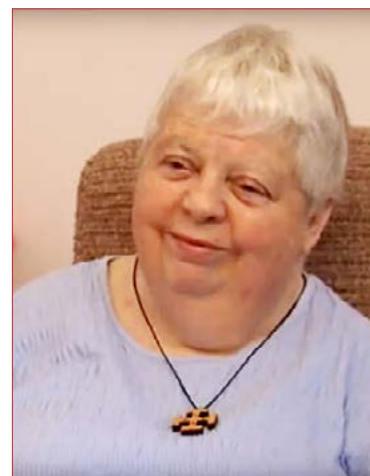
Our Community has entered into a new and special stage in the past months. The purchase contract for Bonnevaux was officially signed in October: WCCM became the new "owner-stewards" of the place, as Fr. Laurence said in his blog. Andrew and Delyth Cresswell, who had given up their jobs and sold their house in Wales in order to be part of the community and its work from the beginning, moved into Bonnevaux the day the contract was signed. They will care for the property, and prepare it for the transformation which is now under way.

On the 21st of November a blessing ceremony was held at Bonnevaux with Fr. Laurence and the Archbishop of Poitiers, Msg Pascal Wintzer. The abbot of Liguge Monastery Dom André-Junien Guérit, was also present and took part in the installation of an icon of John Cassian in the Bonnevaux chapel.



The icon was 'written' for Bonnevaux by Odile van der Hoff, a meditator from The Netherlands. Another important moment was the blessing of the professionals involved in the renovation work at Bonnevaux. The National Coordinator for Belgium, Jose Pyper, read messages from WCCM communities from different parts of the world.

ONLINE: See audio slideshow of the blessing day and listen to the speeches by Fr. Laurence and the Archbishop of Poitiers here: <http://tiny.cc/bbnvx>  
Visit the Bonnevaux website: [www.bonnevauxwccm.org](http://www.bonnevauxwccm.org)



### Our gratitude to Marie O'Leary from Australia

Marie O'Leary, of Perth, Australia, was (and remains since her death earlier this year) a beloved member of our community. She suffered chronic pain for decades with deep faith and unflinching love for others. Although she was mostly housebound, she fell in love with the Bonnevaux vision and wanted to be part of it. To help achieve this, she left a very generous legacy which will help move the project forward. As she was a special sign of grace to others, so is this generous gift. Thank you, Marie! We know you hope your example will inspire others to remember Bonnevaux in their wills.

### Walk For Bonnevaux

See a photo gallery of the "Walk For Bonnevaux" pilgrimage made by Henriette Hollaar in Italy in November here: <http://tiny.cc/wlk4bonnvx>

## News

The Fourth International Oblate Congress in Rome (4 – 10 November)

## Read comments from WCCM participants



The theme of the Congress was, 'A Way Forward: the Benedictine Community in Movement.' The presentations – not least that given by Joan Chittister OSB – were inspirational! It was good to hear about the different ways Oblates are actively involved in supporting their monastic communities and sharing the spirit of Benedict in places of work, parishes and local communities. The Congress certainly provided me with much food for thought as I listened to the struggles facing oblates and their monastic communities in other parts of our world. **(Eileen Dutt - International Oblate Coordinator)**

The keywords which I submitted to the Congress questionnaire were: rule, stability and mission. I hope to be stable in the Benedictine Order through WCCM. Sister Joan Chittister said that the future of the Benedictine Order lies in Oblates. I experienced a deep blessing of Oblate identity and I understood clearly that Augustine's

Benedictine orientation means moderation between meditation and evangelization – Ora et Labora. **(Augustine Xiao Xiao, China)**

The Congress emphatically illustrated a shift from the restrictive idea that only vowed religious were called to a committed life to one that expressed a more inclusive understanding of one's potential and relationship with the mystery that is God. One can also argue this shift from an elitist view of spirituality is reflected in the dynamic life of WCCM through its inreach and outreach programmes. **(Gloria Duffy Australian Oblate Coordinator)**

Each morning we meditate at 7 am and one of our nine Oblates would introduce the meditation. One morning in Spanish but the others in English. After meditation, I could not believe how the chapel had filled up! Three mornings there were about 80 people. **(Henriette Hollaar,**

**Resident Oblate, Meditatio House)**

A mind and heart opening vision for the future, 200 people from the world over – monastics and Oblates called to be true 'Friends,' to share St Benedict's aim of peace and harmony in community. Facing diminishing vocations, it was said that Oblates are the future: what happens to the oblates will happen to the Order. We must have a vision bigger than ourselves. We mustn't 'hide and horde' – we must give what we have, what we can, to bring new life, depth and strength and 'take a monastic heart into the troubled world.' **(Raymond Lamb, UK)**

Each day was interesting and motivating. It was stimulating to meet Oblates from all over the world. They all had their story to tell which was fascinating to hear. We took turns to give a brief meditation in the church at 7 am each morning and asked all those who were interested to join us. **(Vicky Lamb, UK)**

There were plenty of opportunities for silence, acts of service and kindness. Several members of The WCCM offered morning meditation sessions. Others were facilitators or translators. It was a joyful experience to have become translator for the Lusophone community at the eleventh hour so they could feel at home. During breaks and communal times there were opportunities to learn about the different oblations around the world. **(Elba Rodriguez, Colombia)**

*The spirit that is a healthy spirit is the spirit of an explorer: We are not terrified by the beyond, we are not too tired to seek what is ahead.* **(John Main)**



## News

# A Truly Meditatio Tour in Trinidad & Tobago



The Community in the Caribbean led by Sr. Ruth Montrichard organized a truly Meditatio tour with Fr. Laurence in his recent visit to the region (last October). The first event was in San Fernando: a session with 500 young people at Presentation College, a boys secondary school. That evening there was a Contemplative Mass with 170 meditators. After that, during dinner, Fr. Laurence met with members of the medical profession, spoke about Bonnevaux, and received a donation from the Caribbean for the new Centre.

The next day Fr. Laurence delivered a lecture on "Consciousness and Leadership" at the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business to post-MBA students and members of the business community. It is hoped that this institution will eventually adopt the Meditation and Leadership Course developed at Georgetown University in Washington DC.

The visit was also an opportunity to be close to nature. This is how Sis-

ter Ruth describes a tour to the Caroni Swamo, one of the major attractions in Trinidad:

"A flat-bottomed boat took us many miles down the river and into the swamp where the famous scarlet ibis came in to nest at sunset. It was an experience of the silence of nature, as we



waited for the birds to fly in - the scarlet ibis and the white egrets... all heading home."

The 18th of November was a bank holiday in Trinidad (Hindu Festival of Lights). This was a perfect opportunity for the blessing of the John Main Cen-

tre. The moment was also an opportunity for Fr. Laurence to receive Michele Ayoung-Chee as an oblate novice.

For the first time, a Meditation and Health Seminar was held on 19 November at a medical complex in Trinidad. Again Sister Ruth comments on the seminar:

"It turned out to be a very successful event in spite of the rain and flooding that descended on Trinidad that day, virtually cutting off the south of the Island, which was under water. Some 120 people braved the weather to attend and the feedback was positive from all quarters."

The seminar included a very enthusiastic group of doctors and panelists who were meditators from various traditions. Fr. Laurence was the featured speaker, followed by the panelists. A short video by Dr. Barry White (Dublin) on the meaning of Meditation and Health was shown. A video recording of the session will soon be available.

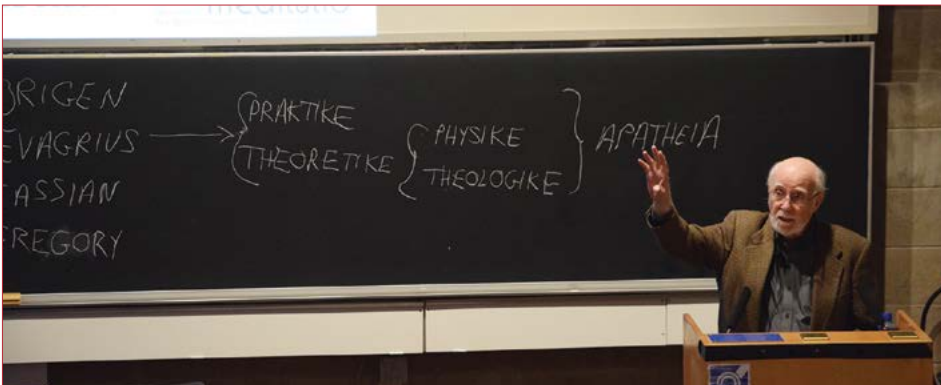
In the last day Fr. Laurence visited another school, this time meeting with 200 students (13 to 16-year-olds) from Providence Girls Catholic School. This school had already introduced meditation into the Religious Knowledge curriculum and many of the girls acknowledged having meditated at their primary school where meditation was introduced. A quick visit to the retiring Archbishop of Port of Spain, Rev. Joseph Harris C.S.Sp, brought the journey to an end. He will be replaced by Bishop Jason Gordon, a patron of WCCM Caribbean who will become the new Archbishop of Port of Spain in December of 2017.



## News

### Meditatio Seminar in Ireland

## John Main: A Hunger for Depth and Meaning



The Seminar John Main: A Hunger for Depth and meaning was held at Trinity College in Dublin, in 15-16 September. This was a conference on the life and legacy of John Main organized by the Community in Ireland in association with the Loyola Institute of Trinity College and Meditatio. The conference was a huge success and sold out weeks in advance of the event.

This was also a special recognition of John Main's connection with the

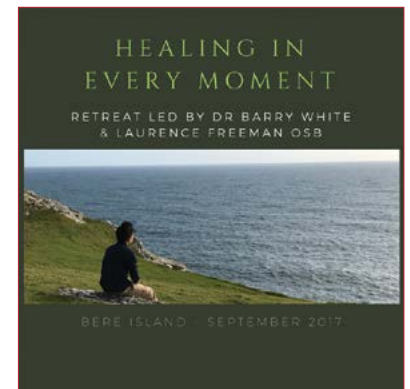
College where he had been a professor of Law. The present Director of Graduate Studies introducing the Seminar thanked the participants for contributing to the ethos of the university as a place for depth and meaning. The keynote speaker was Prof Bernard McGinn (who led the John Main Seminar the previous month in Houston). The programme's speakers included Laurence Freeman, Mark Dooley, Noel Keating (Meditation with Children) and Dr Barry White (Meditation and

Health), all reflecting on John Main's influence on modern consciousness. ONLINE - Watch the videos here: <http://tiny.cc/JMhng2017>

### Bere Island

#### Meditation & Healing Retreat

The Meditation & Healing Retreat was held in Bere Island from 17 to 23 September, led by Laurence Freeman and Dr Barry White. You can listen to the talks here: <http://tiny.cc/MedHI2017>



## Ask the Guiding Board: send your questions and suggestions

Part of the mandate of the Guiding Board is to provide an accountability and communication point to the general membership. We have therefore created a simple way for the Community worldwide to communicate directly with the Guiding Board. Now you can send your comments, suggestions or questions to [askthegb@wccm.org](mailto:askthegb@wccm.org). We have our next meeting in London from 21 March 2018. So if any of your com-

ments should go on our agenda, it would be helpful to have them by, say, 21 February. After our meeting, the Board will share responses for some of the questions through our website and newsletter.

The Guiding Board gives direction on matters of broad concern within the Community. These include major new initiatives but also the simple integrity of the teaching which is the heart of the Community's life and mission. The

Board oversees the service provided to the national communities by the International Team, Meditatio and the London International Office, new initiatives and outreach. The Director of the Community is a member of the Board, which also oversees succession and continuity in all the main leadership roles in the Community. The Guiding Board thus provides overall direction and vision to the life and mission of the Community.

## News

### Meditating with those on the margins: a Time of Encounter

Terry Doyle, a UK oblate recently took part in a retreat-day with 22 people helped by charities that work in the John Paul Centre in Middlesbrough. The retreat was held at a retreat centre in Ampleforth (40 miles away from Middlesbrough). Below are some observations from Terry:

*We should never underestimate the healing power of genuine and authentic listening to a person's story as it affords the person being listened to the power of dignity which can go a long way to healing wounds and raising self worth. So, our meal times were spent sharing stories and laughter, and as people began to relax more,*

*defences came down and hearts were opened. People from the streets of an urban town some born in the area, others dispersed there from various countries in Africa and Afghanistan, sharing stories with young people from more privileged backgrounds but all meeting as fellow human beings sharing and learning from each other. One particularly beautiful session was held in the Crypt underneath the Abbey with the darkness illumined by an array of candles in the shape of a cross as well as the smiles of everyone gathered there. A beautiful meditation followed there proving that when we become simple and enter*

*the silence and stillness of the present moment, none of the outer differences of age, colour, wealth, background matter anymore. In the sacred space of the Crypt it felt as if we all met each other's Soul there in the silence and what a sacred encounter that was.*

*So thank you Pope Francis for reminding us of how Jesus showed total commitment and solidarity with those on the margins. And thank you to all those wonderful staff and students from Ampleforth who made our group feel so very genuinely welcome.*

ONLINE - Read the full article by Terry on this retreat here:

[http://tiny.cc/art\\_encount2017](http://tiny.cc/art_encount2017)

### In memory of Lucy Palermino (1924-2017)

By Mary Robison, US Oblate Coordinator



It is with great sadness that I share with you news of the death of our beloved Oblate, Lucy Palermino, on October 14th, after enduring the effects of a stroke. Her extraordinary transparency of spirit, firmness of faith, and love of the Oblate community of WCCM are all reflected

in the words of some of her friends, below.

*Lucy was well named as a vehicle of light. Deeply rooted in her faith and the body of Christ she continued to grow and spread the light in new and courageous ways. She was an exemplary oblate, meditator and disciple of Jesus. We are blessed to have travelled with her. (Fr Laurence)*

*She has not left us. Lucy is very much a part of who we are and have become. Her loving care continues. (Mary Ann Gould)*

*Lucy was a woman who never had children but was mother to so many. A woman who belonged to no one and to everyone but above all to her God who she knew she "belonged to since the age of 7." She always loved God first and from that central place her love for all humanity. (Anne Dillon)*

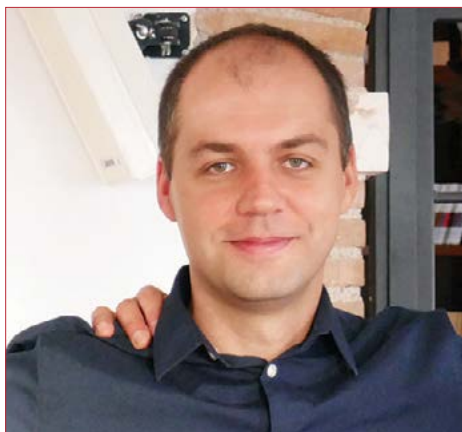
### In memory of Fr Arnaldo Dias (Brazil)

Fr. Arnaldo Lima Dias passed away on November 3rd at the age of 72. A spiritual director and a poetic composer from the state of Bahia, he had been a missionary in Africa and Brazil. He had a special gift of grasping the meaning of whatever was going on and to putting it into words on a string of rhymes in a humorous, concise and poetic way. While participating in silent retreats he frequently celebrated Mass with Fr. Laurence and read to the participants his always-joyful poetry which, in key phrases and aphorisms, synthesized the main teachings of the ongoing conferences by Fr. Laurence and the events of the day. Let us pray for his happy and loving passage after this fully-realized life.

## In Focus

# Vladimír Volráb from the Czech Republic

*Priest in Hussite church (reform), National Coordinator for the Czech Republic*



My spiritual journey began when I was about sixteen years old. I grew up in a non-religious family but during this time I started to be naturally attracted to spirituality. After a period of searching I became a Zen Buddhist student in the Korean tradition and I was trying to keep up a regular practice and also attend meditation retreats.

A few years later I became friendly with a reform priest. He gave me the Gospels to read because he wanted to discuss them with me and also he wanted to know my thoughts about them from a Zen Buddhist perspective. Actually, I had never read the Gospels before and was very sur-

prised when the reading of them gave a deep and direct meaning and sense to my life. I am convinced that this was because of the experience of silence that I had already had within the Zen tradition. The Gospel's narrative reflected my own story of life. I felt I was ready to hear them at that stage of my life. I received baptism, entered the church and started to study theology soon after that. I had found a place to belong within the religious life of my own culture.

Nevertheless, I had entered into an environment where spirituality was more of a conceptual understanding than experience. I still felt a great desire for the experience of silence so I started to look for references to meditation in the Christian tradition. One day I finally found a book by John Main: *Moment of Christ*. After reading a few pages I understood that I was really "at home". Especially John Main's idea of meditation as a process of "smashing the mirror" which deeply resonated in me. Every time as John Main says, we look into the mirror which is between us and God, we see ourselves, our past, and the things around us. If I can really

see the story of my life as connected with the Gospel narratives, I understand that I am not the central focus in this story. God is the focus, not as an intellectual idea or image.

I'm grateful that I was invited to the meeting of young contemplative teachers and scholars this year, which took place in Snowmass, Colorado. We discussed many problems of the today's world and churches. Although we were people from different Christian backgrounds, we have shared an understanding that the

*If I can really see the story of my life as connected with the Gospel narratives, I understand that I am not the central focus in this story.*

answers should come from our experience with God's presence in our hearts. The process of "smashing the mirror" is able to bring God into our lives as the source and purpose of all our efforts. I believe that this is what Christianity and the world desperately needs.



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



## Events & Resources

### Books

#### **Meditation with Children:** A Resource for Teachers and Parents Noel Keating



The book encourages adults to experience meditation for themselves and equips them with the tools needed to introduce the practice to children, including simple lesson plans that can be implemented at home, in the classroom or on a whole-school basis. Noel Keating explores what the wisdom traditions and religions of the world say about meditation and identifies the practical rewards and spiritual fruits that arise from regular meditation. Featuring excerpts from interviews with Irish primary school children who have practised meditation regularly in the classroom, the book also gives voice to their first-hand experiences of its benefits, both psychological and spiritual.

MORE INFO:

<http://tiny.cc/NewMedBook>

### Meditatio Talks Series

#### **Finding Oneself 2** Laurence Freeman OSB



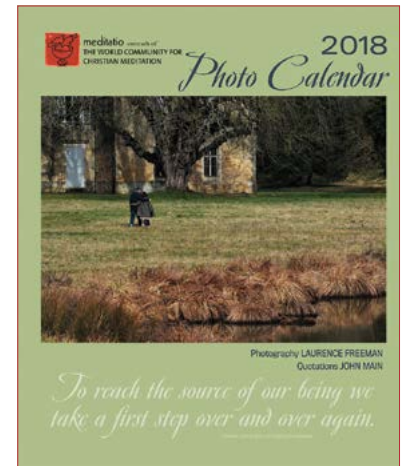
These talks present meditation as the way to self-knowledge, to finding oneself.

ONLINE - listen to the talks :

<http://tiny.cc/Med2017D>

### Photo Calendar 2018

Photos by Laurence Freeman and quotations by John Main



ORDER ONLINE:

<http://tiny.cc/MedCal2018>

### Upcoming events

#### **19 February**

Meditatio Seminar on Meditation & Business/Values - London, UK  
Contact: [meditatio@wccm.org](mailto:meditatio@wccm.org)

#### **21 - 24 March**

The Guiding Board Meeting

#### **25 March - 1st April:**

Bere Island Easter Holy Week Retreat  
Contact: [theresawccm@gmail.com](mailto:theresawccm@gmail.com)

#### **28 April - 5 May:**

International School Retreat  
Contact: [jacqrussell3@gmail.com](mailto:jacqrussell3@gmail.com)

#### **2-9 June**

The Monte Oliveto Retreat  
More info: <http://tiny.cc/MO2018>

#### **25-31 August**

Health & Meditation Retreat  
Contact: [theresawccm@gmail.com](mailto:theresawccm@gmail.com)

#### **17 - 23 September**

The John Main Seminar in Bruges  
Contact: [jms2018.be@gmail.com](mailto:jms2018.be@gmail.com)  
ONLINE - check our 2017/2018 events calendar here:  
[http://tiny.cc/wccm\\_cal1718](http://tiny.cc/wccm_cal1718)

### Meditatio Centre Programme 2018

Download here: <http://tiny.cc/MedPROG2018>

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

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