



The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Fr. Laurence Receives Appointment to the Order of Canada--His Commitment to Peace, Interfaith Dialogue and Understanding Cited

Ottawa. On May 25, along with 44 other recipients, Laurence Freeman received one of the highest honours in Canada from the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, at Government House. The Order of Canada recognizes recipients for a lifetime of outstanding achievement dedicated to the community and service to the nation. Membership is accorded to those who exemplify the Order's Latin motto: *desiderantes meliorem patriam*, meaning, "they desire a better country", a phrase taken from Paul's letter to the Hebrews 11:16.

The Order of Canada's award of merit states: "Laurence Freeman is an internationally recognized spiritual leader and proponent of peace and interfaith dialogue and understanding. Founder and director of the World Community for Christian Meditation, he regularly circles the globe to introduce meditation as a means of inner transformation and connection between peoples and religions. He works at all levels of society, engaging world leaders as well as the poor, and the organization has expanded to more than 100 countries. A committed advocate of non-violence, he co-founded the Way of Peace gatherings, which bring together Buddhists and Christians, as well as those who have been on the violent ends of religious divides. In addition he is a respected speaker, author and theologian".

The Christian Meditation community of 44 weekly groups in the greater Ottawa area, and other Canadian meditators, celebrated the Order of Canada event with a party for Fr. Laurence, the evening of May 24th at St Bart's Anglican Church. St Bart's, with its own Christian Meditation group, was founded as a parish in 1868 across the street from the residence of the Governor General.

The party, organized by the Ottawa Christian Meditation coordinating committee, embraced an enthusiastic reception for the Order of Canada recipient from over 100 participants, followed by a talk by Dr. Balfour Mount, known as the "father of the palliative care movement" in Canada, and a response of thanks from Laurence Freeman. In his talk Dr. Mount stressed the remarkable energy and love demonstrated by Laurence Freeman in sharing the teaching of John Main in his travels around the world and his gifts in the area of inter-religious dialogue

and meditation outreach to the secular world.

Born in England in 1951, Laurence Freeman was educated by the Benedictines and took a masters degree in English at New College, Oxford. After work experience at the United Nations, and in banking and journalism, he joined Ealing Benedictine Abbey in London in 1975.

In 1977 at the invitation of the Archbishop of Montreal, he joined fellow Benedictine, John Main in establishing a Benedictine community of monks and lay people in Montreal dedicated to the practice of Christian Meditation/ Contemplative Prayer. While in Montreal he studied theology at the University of Montreal and McGill University, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1980.

After John Main's death in 1982, he succeeded him as Prior of the Montreal community and continued the work of teaching meditation that has rapidly grown into a community of meditators world wide .In 1992 Laurence Freeman returned to England to establish the International Centre of the newly formed World Community for Christian Meditation, which now is active with over 2000 groups in 114 countries. He is also a founder and director of the John Main Center for Meditation and Inter-Religious Dialogue at Georgetown University in Washington, editor of John Main's teaching, and a member of Medio-Media, the publishing arm of the World Community for Christian Meditation. His published books include. *Light Within, Selfless Self, Web of Silence, Common Ground, Short Span of Days, Your Daily Practice, The Pearl of Great Price, Jesus The Teacher Within*, and most recently *First Sight: The Experience of Faith?*.

As a world traveler Laurence Freeman has conducted dialogue and peace initiatives such as the three year historic Way of Peace program with the Dalai Lama, and is involved in inter-religious dialogue with other faiths. In addition he is active in encouraging the teaching of Christian Meditation to children, students and young people in the renewal of the contemplative tradition in the Church and society at large. Each Easter on Bere Island, in West Cork, off the west coast of Ireland, he conducts a meditation retreat for young people.

He has been a patron since 1990 of the Prison Phoenix Trust, which seeks to support people in prison, through the daily practice of meditation. In addition he actively promotes the practice of meditation as a way of addressing the 11th step of the 12 step AA program.

His current emphasis is on a secular outreach through the World Community Meditatio Program which was established to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the WCCM. This initiative comprises a series of Meditation Seminars covering meditation and Children, Meditation and Mental Health, Meditation and Recovery, Meditation and Inter-Religious Dialogue, and the spiritual aspect of Business and Finance. Additional emphasis is given to the networking of young meditators in the global community and the development of web-based technology to spread a contemplative message.

In accepting the Order of Canada, Laurence Freeman agrees with the founder of L'Arche for the mentally challenged, Jean Vanier, who has stated his reason for accepting the honour of the Order of Canada. Vanier has pointed out: "it was not just awarded to me, but is a sign of the value of people with disabilities, who for too long have been pushed aside or hidden away in institutions or their families?".

Laurence Freeman also accepts that it is not so much a personal honour but recognition of the worldwide hunger for a spiritual renewal in contemplative prayer, the need for meditation practice in the current world of chaos, noise and violence, and the recognition that each person is created for a unique destiny and a unique fulfillment in God. All of these are core goals of the World Community for Christian Meditation. He has said since receiving the honour that it reflects powerfully on Canada's breadth of vision and wisdom to recognize the spiritual dimension of the global issues of our time.

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