

# Meditatio

Newsletter of The  
World Community  
for Christian Meditation



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## The Deep Well of Peace and Joy

Laurence Freeman shares the conferences from the latest School Retreat, on the different aspects of contemplation



Fara Sabina, Italy

## Contemplative Exchange



In August 2017 a group of 20 young Christians contemplatives from different forms of life spent four days in prayer, discussion and celebration at Snowmass Monastery, Colorado. They came from four leading contemplative networks: Contemplative Outreach, The World Community for Christian Meditation, the Centre for Action and Contemplation and the Shalem Institute. The 'founders' of these networks were also present. **Read more at p.7**

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## Dear Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

I am writing this on the 'desert day' of our international School of Meditation Retreat taking place this week in a monastery near Rome. If you haven't yet had the opportunity to do this retreat I urge to think about it. Many countries now host them. At the right time in your journey, the more frequent daily meditation sessions and the intensive silence growing through a full week can lead you to a new clarity and a deep, peaceful opening to the Spirit. As on all retreats it's better to think more about what you are losing than about what you are going to get. But most people feel the School retreat is a rich blessing for their lives that continues to release its benefits long after they have returned to ordinary life.

Accompanying the eight meditation periods, interspersed with contemplative walking, a daily personal meeting with one of the leaders of the retreat, a short conference and a contemplative eucharist in the evening there is an ever-deepening and liberating silence. Through this, people are surprised to discover their capacity for depth and peace. As one of those I am meeting daily said to me: 'I struggle sometimes with two half-hour periods of meditation. Now, doing more, I see this is possible and necessary. Fr John said two periods a day is a minimum; now I see why.' After two days there is a palpable calming of the mind and a new clarity. It becomes easier to surf the waves of thought and feeling and the inner light and shade. Deeper integration doesn't depend on our analysing ourselves. By the third day, we feel that this equanimity – that seems so foreign in ordinary life – is our natural state. It is the foundation of all prayer and all spiritually focused living.

On the fourth day we have a desert day – not a day off (there are no days off in the best journeys of life) but a holy day in which the dimension of solitude comes to the fore. As meditation itself teaches us, solitude and community are

the two sides of our selves that need to be continuously calibrated. So today, while we all remain in the great silence, some stay in the daily routine and meditate together at the regular times; others

catch up with each other. Our home for this week, Fara Sabina, is an ancient monastery of Poor Clare nuns. For centuries prayer as a supreme priority of life has been lived and nurtured here. I think



Group photo at the School of Meditation Retreat in Italy

take a sandwich and go to walk in the hills around us or take time to write more of the haiku poems which enrich our evening liturgies. Today I am keeping to the same meditation times but using the free time to share with you what I have been saying in the short morning conferences on the theme of Contemplation. Maybe you can use them to take a little extra time in your busy days to tune in to the deep well of peace and joy. We so easily forget how real and present it is; and our wounded world needs so urgently to recall that the kingdom is truly 'near at hand'.

### First Day: The Meaning of Contemplation

We are forty or so people and we come from sixteen countries. Today has been a day of travel and there is always agitation with changes in our time and space. So, we begin tonight with meditation to help our bodies and minds to

you have already felt how this has saturated the walls and floors around us.

We are here for contemplation, which the ancient teachers called the goal of human existence. If it is the goal then it also contains the meaning we are all seeking. We are here however to practice, not to think about it. By practice we come to understand it better and through better understanding we can teach and share it more usefully with others. Contemplation is essentially other-centred. Even though we know we will be reaping benefits from it ourselves, that is not our immediate purpose. Contemporary secular spiritualities often fall into this trap. They become self-limiting in their contemplative aspect because they do not see beyond the benefits "I get out of it." Contemplation, according to Aquinas, is the 'simple enjoyment of the truth'. This is not self-centred. Not surprisingly, then, it is more often from children that we

can understand this than from ourselves. This week we should become more simple and childlike, more joyful and more truthful people.

*Contemplatio* is the Latin translation of the Greek *theoria*, which sounds like 'theory' but isn't. *Theoria* means vision. It gives us our word 'theatre', a place where we have a view. It comes from the Indo-European root that means to 'perceive' or to 'know'. Theoretical meaning something abstract and not quite real is a late development – from the 17th century when the rapid rise of scientific methodology and impersonal social systems helped the brain's left hemisphere to grow at the expense of the contemplative hemisphere. We moved increasingly from the immediate flow of experience to models of reality, from vision to theory. When we write haikus – or meditate – we aren't interpreting experience by pre-existing models. We are present to what is. It is intrinsically joyful, surprising and wonderful, even if it is sometimes painful. Jesus calls it the 'kingdom', meaning the zone where God reigns.

The word 'contemplation' hides the word *templum* or 'temple. Today we imagine this as a religious building. But the original meaning was not the physical structure but pure space itself – before the building was erected or the sacred events enacted there. This gives new meaning to St Paul:

Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 Cor 3:16)

So we are space. Not just containers of amazing thoughts and imagination, neural pathways and complex biology. We are the spaciousness of God. This insight then opens us to a contemplative experience of self-awareness. We will look at other aspects of contemplation in the light of this experience in the coming days.

The way words like 'contemplation'

shift their meaning over time shows how whole cultures – religious institutions included – can simply forget their original and essential meaning deriving from first-hand experience. This shift reflects the drift we can all suffer as we lose balance and clarity and end up in disharmony and confusion. Contemplation is seeing clearly, not looking objectively. It requires a focal point, where lines of sight or rays of light converge after passing through a lens or mirror. The mantra is our single focal point for these days. We are not here to read or talk, to think or to chat. But to become silent. To see clearly.

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### **Second Day: Contemplative Happiness**

The Cloud of Unknowing (Chapter 8) describes how interdependent contemplation and action are. In our present realm of existence life cannot be either completely active or completely

*Contemplation is essentially other-centred. Even though we know we will be reaping benefits from it ourselves, that is not our immediate purpose*

contemplative (even on a retreat like this). The *Cloud* also says that the most important element in discerning false (self-centred and experience-hungry) contemplation from the real thing is self-knowledge. False contemplation is easily spotted because it pursues happiness as the top priority.

The American Declaration of Independence – perhaps because it so focused on independence rather than interdependence – proclaims that we all have inalienable rights. Apart from the right to bear arms, it describes the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. As we see with tragic regularity in

American mass-killings with regard to the right to carry weapons, all rights can be abused. We have to balance rights (independence) with responsibilities (interdependence).

The universal right to happiness is a valid claim. It is not only the privileged and powerful that have it. But it can sound like the World Health Organisation definition of health as a 'condition of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. Sounds nice, but by that reasoning no one has ever or could ever be healthy. It excludes the universal experience of suffering and death. It explains why modern health-care is in crisis everywhere, spending the greatest part of its budget on end of life, chronic care and creating an industry that increasingly divides rich and poor. Such a view of health makes us sick. Such a view of happiness as a right has made us miserable.

Today, happiness is often equated with 'well-being' – a phrase that means less and less the more it is used. It usually means getting what you want and feeling good about it. It suggests that happiness is largely dependent on luck. Socrates was the first recorded thinker in our tradition to challenge this and to argue, like the Buddha, that happiness can be achieved through right effort. Only the good, the moral can be truly happy. This means that key virtues (or values as we call them today) must be respected, including justice and self-control. A successful corporation with booming dividends and bonuses does not produce true happiness if it does so by exploiting the poor through cruelty and dishonesty. An addict may satisfy a craving but is not happy.

The Greek word for happiness is *eudaimonia*. Aristotle saw it as the goal of human life, although he probably didn't think slaves or women were included in this. It means something more like a hu-

man 'flourishing' where virtue and reason are combined thus making all other aims of life appear intermediate. When Jesus enumerated the Beatitudes ('Happy are the poor in spirit...') he did not distinguish between gender or social class. The gospel word *makarios* means both blessed and happy. But happiness is the fruit not only of discipline and self-control but also of penetrating paradox and participating in something greater than ourselves. True happiness must be blessed too.

The Beatitudes draw the curtain open to see the paradox of reality. We cannot be happy unless we integrate our experiences of pain and suffering. Equanimity, detachment, compassion, interior freedom and seeing love to be the supreme truth are all elements of happiness. Blessed happiness is more than a right, far more than the satisfaction of desire. It is human destiny, a vocation, a pure gift of being that flourishes when we least expect.

If there is a false and a true contemplation, the same is true of happiness. We need to be clear which form we are pursuing, which is more real and sustainable. If it is based on desire, imagination and fantasy it will fail, as falsehood always does. If it derives from freedom from images and the arising of joy in being we are well on the way to true happiness. Just as meditation teaches us from day one of the practice, happiness shows us that it does not flow from addiction to satisfaction but from the deepening harmony of all aspects of our being.

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### Third Day: Contemplative Discipline

John Main always speaks of discipline in association with the ideas of freedom and generosity.

This is the free gift to be found in our hearts – Christ's infinite love. Nothing is more important than that we should learn by discipline, by daily discipline, to be open to that love and to receive

it with generosity. (*Being on the Way*)

A contemplative understanding of discipline demands that we see it as distinct from technique. Technique (and technology) is more compatible with modern culture because it is individualistic – like our mobile phones. It promises mastery and success. It can be reduced to programmes, courses and rules. It can be bought and sold. All unlike a true discipline, which transcends individuality, integrating it with the greater whole we belong to. In the end, through discipline, we learn most fully by love, not by technical training. If you don't come to love what you are learning - and how you learn - you be stuck at the technical level, preoccupied with self-evaluation and control.

How does this related to learning to meditate? At first we all struggle with the technical aspects – sitting still, breathing, coordinating the mantra, letting go of distractions, returning to the mantra. Soon, if we don't fall into the temptation to master and complicate it by increasing the technical aspects, we will experience *acedia*. This is the inevitable feeling of discouragement and failure. It leads many to give up the practice for a week or a decade but, in fact, it is a grace to experience this failure. It purifies our motivation and creates the opportunity to renew the discipline in a more mature way. At whatever age we start to meditate it is a learning and maturing process.

We learn that meditation is not about reward and punishment. We are not dogs learning to be housetrained by being given treats. Our deepest experience in prayer may come when we feel we least 'deserve' it and are expecting to be corrected not embraced. By developing discipline we appreciate grace. The theology of prayer is a theology of gift, hard though it is for a wounded adult to understand it. Children have the capacity to receive *generously*, as John Main says of meditation. Christian prayer is not about passive receiving, however, but

discovering reciprocal generosity: giver, gift and the one receiving are caught up in a single wave of generosity.

The daily discipline of meditation embeds this 'theology' in all aspects of life. It introduces the spirit of discipline – self-control, restraint, fidelity, conscious living and fearlessness – into everything and is evident in all our relationships.

We master a technique. We may want to be a great master of it and get rewarded. But we come to love a discipline. And even if we become adept and generous at it, we always remain a disciple. As we see in the person of Jesus, turned humbly towards his source, his Father, at the core of every true master there is always a disciple.

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### Fourth Day: Contemplative Relationships

Sr Eileen O'Hea who helped me lead the first School of Meditation Retreat here some years ago had a moving phrase I always remember: relationships are the sacred ground of our humanity. This is an insight into all relationships. Existentially speaking, we cannot imagine ourselves *not* embedded in relationship in every dimension: historically, socially, emotionally, ecologically and cosmically. We live in an inter-related network of being. Spiritually, we are related to everything in the all-inclusive dimension – in Christ – where all things meet in unity.

The question is what kind of relationships do we enjoy? It is not enough just to be in relationship. The quality and spirit of our relationships determines the quality of our life. Are they loving, truthful, faithful? We must do the work that conscious relationships require. Meditation is at the heart of this work and why we first feel the effect of meditation in our relationships. A contemplative approach to relationship is so necessary today when relationships have become less conscious.

Many today feel lonely and isolated. They long for intimate relationships. Online dating is a technological response to

this. In itself it has the element of chance that village hall dances used to have. But the danger of objectification, misrepresentation, expecting fantasy to be real and becoming more lonely if things don't work out as expected – all these are exacerbated by the technological invasion of the sacred ground.

The word 'relationship' as we use it began in the 17th century. Not too long after, it came to imply sexual relations. Its meaning became more intimate but also more limited. 'Relationships' were often felt to be in danger of ending when the erotic element (the attracting force and ability to be playful together) begins to weaken. Essentially the word 'relation' itself means a *bringing back* together or *restoration*. It is not good for human beings to feel alone – as God remarked after the creation of Adam. Yet the pangs of separation and loss are necessary for human development and mature relationships. These are most intense in adolescence and much of modern culture remains at this interim stage of development which is why - social media notwithstanding - the young and those who want to remain young past their time, feel so chronically un-related.

Contemplative relationship means passing beyond the narrow sense of 'my' relationships altogether – the kind that we control, possess, feel jealous about or violently defend with the dark side of Eros. Alternatively we see relationships as fields of growth where we learn to be faithful, non-possessive, loving with detachment and without projection - and growing in self-knowledge. Relationships are temple-spaces not ego-constructions. We should not worship those we are in relationship with. We achieve union with them by worshipping with them, in spirit and truth, in the divine ground of all relationship.

Meditation itself is not about mastering a technique. It is practicing true relationship.

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### Fifth Day: Contemplative Reading

Reading is a basic life-skill. If you don't have it, it seems magical. If you do, it expands consciousness towards universal compassion, broadening tolerance



and empathy. For St Benedict, it is one of the pillars of the good life together with prayer and work. In our digital age – when we are more likely to watch an episode of Game of Thrones than read before bed - the art of reading often becomes functional or superficial.

For teachers like Hugh of St Victor in the 12th century, reading was a remedy, a medicine (the ultimate healing is the wisdom of God). Reading needs humility, quiet, the gift of time and a measure of good health. Like meditation, it has an inner and outer discipline. Just as we drift from the mantra, we find we have read a whole page of a book without paying attention. We have to 'go back' over it, as we 'go back' to the mantra.

Cassian asked Abba Isaac about prayer and said he needed something as elementary and practical as children get when they are learning the alphabet and pronounce simple words. He was given the mantra. Meditation is the ABC

of prayer. Except that we remain children in this ever-simpler practice as it establishes us in the beginner's mind which is our way into the kingdom.

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We leave the School of Meditation

retreat tomorrow. Those who were nervous coming, tell me they don't want to leave. These brief notes from the short morning talks (which will be online soon) don't say anything about the experience of the retreat itself. Maybe, when the time is right you, you might also discover deeper stillness on a retreat like this – and see how simple it is, in a fairly short time, to slow down and clarify the mind in its natural state.

After the silence ends tonight, I will tell the retreatants that Bonnevaux will soon be hosting such retreats and will be a place where the truth of this retreat - that the 'kingdom of heaven is close at hand' can be verified in our own experience.

*Laurence*

Laurence Freeman OSB

## News

### John Main Seminar 2017 A Living Transmission



Prof McGinn and Laurence Freeman during a dialogue session in Houston

*"I have been reading John Main for many years, always with great appreciation. When you read John Main it often seems it is always simple and straightforward. But I discovered there are very unusual depths to John Main's thought and to his teaching. So I am happy to pay back, to a group like this, some of the things I have learned from John Main over the course of these years"*

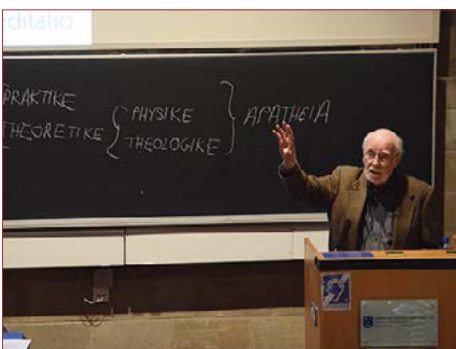
These were the opening words of Professor Bernard McGinn at the 2017 John Main Seminar, August 10-13, at the University of St. Thomas, Houston, USA. One of the great scholars of the Western Christian mystical tradition in our time, he spoke on the theme Praying with the Masters Today. The teachings included lessons on Origen, Evagrius, John Cassian, Gregory The Great, Meister Eckhart,

Julian of Norwich, as well as on Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio and Contemplation, and The Our Father, among other subjects. During the Seminar Bernard McGinn also took part in a dialogue session with Fr. Laurence. Before the JMS, Fr. Laurence led a pre-seminar retreat on the theme "The Inner Room" during which a session took place at the Rothko Chapel.

"I think this Seminar will bear much fruit in the Community worldwide. It had struck me several times during the week with Bernard that these talks will be tremendous resources for us to share with our meditation groups across all national communities" said Fr. Laurence at the end of the Seminar. The John Main Seminar in Houston had about 200 participants from seventeen countries. In 2018 the Seminar will be hosted in Bruges (Belgium) from 17 to 23rd of September.

ONLINE - You can listen and/or watch all talks from the pre-seminar retreat and JMS here:  
[http://tiny.cc/JMS2017\\_allt](http://tiny.cc/JMS2017_allt)

### John Main Conference: A Hunger for Depth and Meaning



After leading the JMS, Prof Bernard McGinn was the keynote speaker at the Meditatio Seminar on *John Main: A Hunger for Depth and Meaning* in 15-16 September, in Dublin, Ireland. This conference was held at Trinity College (where Fr John taught) and was very well attended, with about 300 participants. The programme brought together a number of stimulating

speakers, including Fr. Laurence (John Main and Modern Christian Identity), Dr Mark Dooley (John Main: Bringing It All Back Home), Dr Noel Keating (Meditation with Children), Dr Barry White (Meditation and Health) and others.

All the talks will be available soon at the Meditatio website and WCCM website in audio and video format.

## News

# Contemplative Exchange Looking to the future of Contemplative Christianity



Twenty younger members of four Christian contemplatives groups gathered in August at St Benedict's Monastery, in Snowmass, Colorado, USA, for a meeting called by the 'founding fathers' of Contemplative Outreach (Thomas Keating), the Center for Action and Contemplation (Richard Rohr), the Shalem Institute (Tilden Edwards) and The World Community for Christian Meditation (Laurence Free-

man).

Participants in the four-day meeting experienced very deep and productive periods of both practice and discussion. A video about this gathering will be available soon on our website. Five meditators represented WCCM in Snowmass: Sicco Claus (Netherlands), Sarah Bachelard (Australia), Vladimir Volrab (Czech Republic), Karen Pedigo (USA) and Leonardo Corrêa (Brazil).

## Comments on the gathering in Snowmass...

*An organic development happened among us, rooted in our own contexts, that opened us to see connections, to see opportunities for collaboration, and to feel a sense of imagination. We became aware of how the Spirit is at work, shading the way we look at specific tasks or goals. We did not want to make this rigid or defined. We wanted to listen deeply to what the Spirit is up to. (Stuart Higginbotham, Shalem Institute)*

*It was personally very nourishing for me to*

*be with my peers, and to meet new companions on this path. When I think about the future, I am hopeful that members of these four groups, and other groups, will be able to prioritize connection. Really grounded in friendship, we will then be able to discern together how we can be of service in this world that we care so much about, and long to see its healing. (Phileena Heuertz, CAC)*

*The most important thing will be continuing bonds of friendship and trust. Many*

*people who commit their lives to the contemplative path or other ministries often suffer from a sense of isolation. We feel all our energy goes to our work. Something that I hope can come from this gathering is to have peers who can support us, peers with whom we can be human and vulnerable, and who will share our ideas, our sorrows and joys.. (Mark Kutolowski, Contemplative Outreach)*

*This gathering was a very good sign for the world and also for Christianity, particularly for institutional Christianity. There developed a possibility for common understanding and relationships that are creative and very promising. I believe that we made many connections here, in both a personal level and between groups. (Vladimir Volrab, WCCM)*

*What was significant about this gathering is that we are getting to know one another in a much deeper way. Not just knowing about each other, but knowing each other. From that relationship becomes more possibility for collaboration in different areas of the world, or in different themes, learning from each other, becoming a real source of renewal and energy in the Church and in the world. (Sarah Bachelard, WCCM)*

ONLINE - You can watch a video with interviews from the Contemplative Exchange here:  
<http://tiny.cc/contXch2017>

*(It is possible to enjoy a deeper, more positive unity which is rooted in a common awareness of the potential of the human spirit rather than the limitations of human life. (John Main))*

## News

# Meditation and Depression

By Jim Green



*And now my life ebbs away; days of suffering grip me. Night pierces my bones; my gnawing pains never rest.*

These are the words of Job who some have identified as one of the first sufferers of depression in all of world literature. He often strikes a note familiar to those who have lived through such trials: For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. I was not in safety, neither had I rest, nei-

ther was I quiet; yet trouble came.

However depression is defined or explained, it is nearly always accompanied by this miasma of dread. There is no hiding place, no resting place and terror threatens to overwhelm at every moment. We consequently assume that reports from the Land of Depression will be bleak, hopeless and – well – depressing. So it comes as an arresting surprise to hear a different tone sometimes being struck:

The last thing you should do is waste your depression. Please don't let all that suffering go to waste. It will give you better clues about the way you are living your life, and how right that is for you, than anything else. Survived, and used properly, depression could be the best thing that ever happened to you.

Here's something different. These are the words of Gwyneth Lewis, a distinguished Welsh author and poet. In *Sunbathing in the Rain: A Cheerful Book on Depression* she shares her experiences and invites us to consider them from many perspectives. It leaves the reader with an almost scan-

dalous question: could it be, after all, that what we call depression might actually be... useful?

I am currently writing a book under the working title of *Meditation and Depression*. I'm particularly interested in how – and indeed whether – the practice of meditation can help people recover from times when the hopeless self seems lost in the desert and the dark night. Is such a practice something that can help prevent damaging relapses? And, on the other hand, are there times when it is just not appropriate, perhaps even harmful?

If you would like to share any experiences from your journey through this territory, then please feel free to get in touch with me (in confidence, of course). I am certain that there is a treasure-house of experience and hard-won wisdom in our meditation community, which I would like to honour and reflect. I'll respond to everyone who contacts me.

Love and blessings,

Jim Green ( [jg@greenjim.co.uk](mailto:jg@greenjim.co.uk) )

## Monte Oliveto Retreat on the theme "Silence"

The Monte Oliveto retreat, on the theme 'Silence', led by Laurence Freeman and Giovanni Felicioni, was held from 24 June to 1st July at the Abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, Italy. The one-week silent retreat welcomed over 45 participants from 14 countries. This is a comment from, Connie Wong, from Singapore:

*It was a little disappointing during the*

*first few days, because I could not quite get into it. And the only thing I really enjoyed were the conferences by Fr. Laurence. Maybe because it motivated and inspired the cognitive part of me. But the silent part was a little difficult for me to get into. What I have understood from my experience is that it takes three to four days to really get into it. It is a work that we do, in a leisure setting, but it is a*

*lot of work. I think I am going back with this notion that this is a work, for which I need to put aside time, every day and I hope I can commit to that work.*

The Monte Oliveto retreat 2018 will be on the theme "Being Alone Together", from 2 to 9 June. For more information contact [monteoliveto@wccm.org](mailto:monteoliveto@wccm.org) ONLINE - Watch all the talks here: <http://tiny.cc/MO2017talks>



## News

### Helping to make Bonnevaux a reality



The Community is now very close to completing the purchase of Bonnevaux, after which the renovation work can start. None of this would have been possible without the enthusiastic and generous support of many people around the world. WCCM is grateful for all the support received so far (financial

support and so many other ways) and we ask you to keep promoting this vision of a new international home - a place that will offer the contemplative path for a troubled world.

One simple and powerful way to promote participation in the project is by speaking about Bonnevaux and sharing information during WCCM events. Anne Singley (photo), a meditator from Houston, USA, recently recorded a video-message to that effect. This video (see below) is a clear and beautiful expression of the ways in which we can all support the Bonnevaux vision. This video could be shown at WCCM events around the world. It could be also subtitled, or similar videos could be produced in different languages.

ONLINE - To watch the video by Anne visit <http://tiny.cc/hlpbonn>

### Bonnevaux evenings

In April, Meditatio House in London began a monthly social evening of meditation, friendship and introducing new friends to Bonnevaux. Members of the community invite their personal friends who are interested in meditation and may also like to help realize the Bonnevaux vision. These Bonnevaux evenings have proved very attractive and also enjoyable. These evenings are, first of all, opportunities to share the gift of meditation with new people – who are also happy to hear about the inspiring vision of Bonnevaux. “Some good news, at last!” one guest remarked.

The evening starts with a short introduction to meditation, followed by meditation and some sharing by meditators on what the practice means to

them. Afterwards, sharing in the fellowship of a light supper, people discuss meditation in general terms, respond to questions, and, of course, introduce Bonnevaux, with its vision and needs, in greater detail.

Fr. Laurence and the Bonnevaux team encourage national and local WCCM communities as well as oblate cells to replicate this idea, sharing the gift of meditation in connection with the vision of Bonnevaux. For further information on how the evening can be set up and organized, please contact Adrienne Letay

([adrienne.letay@adhocouncil.com](mailto:adrienne.letay@adhocouncil.com)).

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



### Australia Meditation and Dadirri

The Meditatio event “The Art of Meditation and Dadirri,” was held on July 7th at the Australian Catholic University, Sydney as part of the Awakening the Sacred in Literature and the Arts program. It was a conversation between Laurence Freeman OSB and Miriam Rose Ungunmerr. Miriam is an artist and educator, an Aboriginal elder from Nauiyu (Daly River) whose work on dadirri has considerable resonance with the practice of meditation. ONLINE - watch the conversation: <http://tiny.cc/meddad>

### USA Oblate Retreat in Chicago

The US Oblate retreat, led by Fr. Laurence, was held in Chicago from June 9th to 11th. He received seven oblate novices and four final oblations. “Our retreat was a blessing to our oblate community in countless ways, as we continued to realize what it means to be a community of love. The bright spirit of the new novices and oblates reaffirmed how our community is growing,” said Mary Robison, US oblate coordinator.

## News

# In Remembrance: Serena Woon (1944–2017)

*By Patricia Por, Malaysia National Coordinator*



Serena, the first National Coordinator of WCCM Malaysia, returned to the Lord on 7 August 2017. She was a pioneer and pillar of the Malaysian Community, a mentor, teacher and friend to all.

Her journey of meditation began on the island of Penang when she was tasked with organizing Fr. Laurence's first visit to Malaysia in November 1993. She often related the story of that gathering of about 150 people who attended that first talk. With reluctance she even had to turn away participants as the hall could not accommodate any more.

The next week, when she held a meditation group meeting at the same venue, the crowd had dwindled to half. In the ensuing weeks, there were more drop outs. Ultimately she found herself totally on her own. Despite this, she continued to turn up to meditate each week.

She meditated alone, faithfully, week after week. After about three months, parishioners began to return, one by one, and the number of regular members grew. They formed the first meditation group in Malaysia, a group that still meets every Tuesday at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Penang.

In 1997, Serena spent around five months in the UK at the London Meditation Centre on Camden Hill Road. She also attended the first WCCM School of Meditation Essential Teaching Weekend (ETW) in Florence the same year.

On her return to Malaysia, she continued to nurture new groups and set up a Chinese-speaking meditation group which met in her house in early 2000. She relinquished her post as National Coordinator of WCCM Malaysia in 2004 to focus on her Secular Franciscan duties when she was elected their Regional Minister for two consecutive terms. Here too Serena's wise and spirited leadership made a profound impact.

We hosted the John Main Seminar in Malaysia in 2006, the first ever in Asia. Serena's support was invaluable. Tirelessly she gave of herself in multiple ways to ensure the event went smoothly. In 2009, she retired to Ipoh, south of Penang. She brought new life to the fragile meditation community there and initiated the formation of more groups. A founding member of the National Council which was formed in June 2011, Serena remained central and active in all the WCCM programmes we conduct-

ed. She continued to share the gift of meditation whenever she had the opportunity throughout the country.

Serena was in good health until sixteen months ago when she needed to seek medical attention for an intractable cough. On investigation, she was given the devastating news that she had Stage 4 lung cancer. She opted for palliative care but agreed to targeted chemotherapy for symptom relief. This gave her reasonable quality of life for nine months during which she was able to participate in our annual retreat in November last year and even host our last National Council meeting at her home in March this year.

Just as we thought she was improving, the cancer came back, spreading rapidly in the last three weeks. All this time, she fought the disease because she wanted so much to be around to celebrate WCCM Malaysia's 25th anniversary next year. Alas, this was not to be. Fr. Laurence called from London with words of comfort and blessing. He assured her that "Fr. John would be there to hold her hand" as she crossed the threshold. She seemed to let go after this, lapsed into unconsciousness that evening and passed away twenty four hours later. With her at the time of her passing were her 80 year old sister, her nieces, a close friend, a few Lay Franciscans and church members.

We mourn the loss of Serena and will miss her dearly, but are comforted that there is now a new angel in heaven. Rest in Peace, Serena.

## In Focus

### Sarah Bachelard, from Australia

*Theologian, retreat leader and Anglican priest, founder of Benedictus Contemplative Church*



Like many in our community, I was first introduced to a meditation practice by the Buddhists. I had grown up in the Anglican tradition and studied theology in my early twenties, but by the time I was introduced to meditation I had left the church and Christian faith (as I thought) well behind me. I hadn't been able to make faith 'real' for me and the question of prayer felt particularly fraught. If God answers some prayer and not others, where is justice? If God knows everything, why do we have to pray? Intercessory and petitionary prayer seemed bound up with such insoluble ethical and metaphysical problems that I was left unable to pray at all.

What I loved about meditation was that I didn't have to resolve any of this in advance. I didn't even have to know

what I believed. I just had to follow the practice and trust that if something were there, it would declare itself. Truth would become apparent. Gradually through the practice, I did begin to hear the Scripture and symbols of my own tradition in a different and vital way. Beyond my doubts and intellectualising, I glimpsed something of the deeper mystery. I returned to church and continued to meditate. A couple of years later, I discovered The WCCM and the possibility of making the theological connections between my meditation and my newly emerging faith. I had come home. My sense of vocation to the priesthood followed soon after.

In the twelve or so years since that time, meditation has been at the heart of my journey of faith and my spiritual practice, though my experience continues to change. This is not just about the level of distraction which does gradually lessen, although on any given day I can still be much more distracted than I like! More significantly, I keep discovering the wisdom inscribed in the deceptive simplicity of John Main's teaching. The wisdom, for example, of listening to the mantra rather than visualising it

– and how the attention needed to listen draws us beyond our thoughts.

This year, I joined with Fr Laurence and four others from WCCM (Sicco Claus, Leonardo Correa, Karen Pedigo and Vladimir Volrab) at the Contemplative Exchange hosted at St Benedict's Monastery, in Colorado. This gathering came about as Fr Laurence and Fr Thomas, together with Fr Richard Rohr and Rev. Tilden Edwards, had conceived the vision to bring together a group of younger teachers and leaders from their communities. It was an opportunity for us to get to know one another, to share from the experience of our different charisms and emphases, and to be open to listen to what might be being called forth as we seek to communicate the Christian contemplative tradition and join in the work of healing of our world. It was a week for deepening our practice, and strengthening the bonds of affection between strands of the contemplative renewal. It felt like a beginning; as yet we do not know where these friendships will lead, but we left filled with a sense of possibility and encouraged in faithfulness to our own callings as individuals and communities of faith.



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**Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is 20 November.**

## Events & Resources

### Meditatio Talks Series

#### Finding Oneself 1

Laurence Freeman OSB



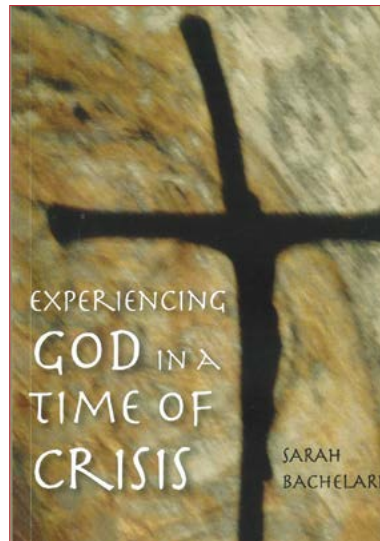
In these talks Fr Laurence explains how meditation can help us realise the essential message of Jesus: 'Whoever wants to save their life must lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.' (Mt 16:25) To discover our true self is the goal of life; but finding our true self requires first laying aside all those familiar superficial layers of personal identity which are illusory and therefore false. Meditation is a way of transcending or demolishing the false self. As we take our attention off ourselves in meditation and focus our attention on Jesus, we lose ourselves and are found in him.

ONLINE - you can listen or download the audio files here:  
<http://tiny.cc/MDTS2017C>

### Books

#### Experiencing God in a time of Crisis

Sarah Bachelard



Sarah Bachelard explains that there are critical times in our lives, moments of profound loss, grief and fear in which our frameworks of sense seem to collapse and no longer enable us to convey meaning to overwhelming events or even to life itself. In this work Sarah Bachelard suggests that the practice of meditation and contemplative living may help us endure and integrate such turning-point experiences, and bring our life and identity into a deeper wholeness.

MORE INFO - you can order the book at the Meditatio Store here:  
<http://tiny.cc/EGodTC>

### Audio & Video

Some new multimedia resources you can find in our websites:

**Contemplation for an Age of Artificial Intelligence**, visit:  
[http://tiny.cc/AI\\_talks](http://tiny.cc/AI_talks)

**Be a Local: New Forms of Community in a Digital Age**, visit:  
<http://tiny.cc/bealocal>

**The Second Way of Peace Fellowship Dialogue**, visit:  
<http://tiny.cc/WoPeace2017>

### Upcoming events

#### 16 December

Christmas Preparation Day  
The Meditatio Centre, London  
More info:  
<http://tiny.cc/Xmas2017>

#### 17 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)

ONLINE - check our 2017/2018 events calendar here:  
[http://tiny.cc/wccm\\_cal1718](http://tiny.cc/wccm_cal1718)

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

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