



Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

www.wccm.org

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JOHN MAIN SEMINAR 2009

“WHEN GOD DISAPPEARS”



27 – 30 AUGUST

SARASOTA, FLORIDA

led by

ROBERT KENNEDY SJ

Come to next year's John Main Seminar on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico in Sarasota, Florida. The seminar will be led by Robert Kennedy, Jesuit priest, Zen master, author and professor of theology. He is also a practicing psychotherapist in New York City and a representative at the United Nations of the Institute for Spiritual Consciousness in Politics. In Christian mystical teaching every image of God can become an idol. Robert Kennedy has better understood this – and the meaning of God beyond words and images – through Zen. Fr. Kennedy's long experience of teaching meditation to modern Christians gives him powerful and much needed insights into the contemporary hunger for the experience of God. In the context of prayer, silent meditation, lecture, and open dialogue, these are issues Fr. Robert Kennedy will explore with us. There will be an optional **pre-seminar silent retreat** led by **Laurence Freeman OSB** in Sarasota from **24 – 27 August**. Complete information at <http://www.jms09.com/> or contact your National Coordinator.

A Contemplative Pentecost



After the John Main Seminar over 30 national coordinators met with Fr Laurence, members of the Guiding Board and others with international roles within the community. Anaesthetists and artists, engineers, pastors, public servants, homemakers and many more, we came from all over the world – from Fiji to France, from Canada to China... Fr Laurence welcomed us and spoke of the vocation of ministry in this new form of ecumenical community, which has grown mysteriously and unexpectedly. A vocation shared by so many in all of our countries – not just national coordinators – called to offer leadership in a work without targets, one in which we don't have to succeed, but in which we are called to persist.

The gathering had a retreat portion and a business portion. The latter aimed to help us take Christian meditation further forward in our own countries, and to develop the international community. Fergal McLoughlin led us through a discussion of our answers to a short questionnaire which had been completed in advance, focusing on the role of the national coordinator and the key issues which each of us faced. This led us to talk of Lutheran theology and the community's carbon footprint, to view the wealth of resources on The School part of the

main website, to talk of meditation among the young and the very young, and much more. We broke into small groups for some of the discussion and for me this provided some of the best bits. What I took away from the time in my group was the importance of embracing reality rather than chasing too many expectations...but at the same time being open to unplanned outreach developments as they spring up, and ready to adopt them and help them grow. One to one chats at breaks were also helpful.

It was great to experience the geographical diversity of the community and to meet many of its leaders. It was inspiring to see the energy and ideas flowing from the small “start up countries” – Norway, Denmark, Poland, Latvia and the Czech Republic – five countries with seventeen groups between them.

Fr Laurence closed by showing photos of the monastic establishment high up on Skellig, off the coast of Ireland, built by monks fifteen centuries ago. An analogy for our community – each piece of the structure seeming small and fragile (like so many of our groups) – but the walls are still there now, and what a view they offer!

Roger Layet, UK National Coordinator

For other descriptions of the Meeting visit the website www.wccm.org



A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Dearest friends,

‘Magistra experientia’ as John Cassian says – experience is the teacher. Not, however, just the experiences that pile up on top of each other, good, bad or indifferent. Experience, in the way that John Main said that meditation is about experience not theory, has more shape and purpose than that. ‘Experientia’ is the gradual, significant coming together of all that goes on, in and around us. It forms our story, our way of knowing God. When we are in touch with this evolving pattern and meaning of our lives, we are in touch with holy wisdom.

So, we are taught not just by the accumulation of random events but also by the mysterious golden thread that holds them together and allows us to make sense of what, at the level of mere randomness, is often felt to be terrifyingly meaningless. In the end, that is why we don’t look for ‘experiences’ in meditation. If we do, we stay at a very superficial level and before long we will start trying to induce experiences or imagine things happening. Then we remain fixated at the level of the mere ego-observer, desiring and judging everything compulsively from our own point of view.

Nevertheless, in one sense we are always waiting for something to happen. Life is always new. And even the long awaited can take us by surprise when it finally comes. To wake to a new day without feeling at least for a moment or two the irresistible force of renewal and hope would signal that some heavy hand of depression has descended on us. Something is always going to happen, of course, but the question is how do we wait? With fear and desire? Or with hope and patience? Experiences of life follow each other irresistibly. How we wait for them, deal with them and learn from them is the meaning of faith.

FACES OF FAITH

The experiences of our community in recent weeks have been very rich and significant for us all, whether we were there when they happened or, as for most of us, if we learn from them at a distance after the event. As I take a week of solitude after the busyness and also try to learn from them, they have revealed for me some of the faces of faith. Faith’s faces are all friendly though some are sterner or harder to decipher than others.

The first of these events was the John Main Seminar, held for the first time in a language other than English yet bringing participants together in Germany from more than thirty countries. The theme of ‘Unity: Local and Global’ had an ecumenical expression with Protestant and Catholic speakers, led by Cardinal Walter Kasper whose job in the Catholic Church is to promote Christian Unity and to lead the dialogue with Judaism. He spoke powerfully about ‘spiritual ecumenism’ as the ‘new impetus’ of contemplation that Christianity needs today. An ‘invisible monastery’, he said, though separated in time and space, can be united in prayer and be a strong force for unity. Local meditation groups, he said, have a far-reaching influence by forming a ‘global choir’. This then becomes, not prayer for the victory of ‘our’ church, but a collective ‘putting of trust in God’s will and work’. Prayer, in this sense, he said, is a real cosmic energy that brings cosmos, humanity and God together in a unity of love.

Cardinal Kasper’s words genuinely moved us. They connected with our own experience of faith, in our personal daily meditation and in our groups and community life, because he seemed so truly to speak to us from a deep level of his own faith. Like peace negotiators who suffer constant setbacks but somehow do not lose hope, his own vision of unity, sustained by a grounded humanity and a serious sense of humour, seemed to grow and become clearer as he examined the failures of Christians to realize their ‘eschatological unity’. For me and for others present, that endurance and frankness was a real face of faith rooted in hard experience.

The second face appeared to me in the meeting of our national coordinators that followed the Seminar. There are presently meditation groups in about sixty countries with individual meditators in more than a hundred. Of course not each of these countries has a national community structure but many do and more than thirty representatives came to speak about their national community experience and to learn from others. What struck me straightaway was the chemistry, the immediate ignition of friendship, the openness to others and the pleasure we took in each other’s company. There was business to get through which we hope will make the community better able to develop. But the strongest benefit was the deepening of friendship built in the short silent retreat we shared, in the meditations, over meals and end of the day glasses of good German beer. In all this, faith-active-in-love which the community generated in silence, was another face that showed itself.

The third face of faith for me in this period became visible during the consecration, by the Dalai Lama, of Europe’s

largest and newest Buddhist temple, Lareb Ling, headquarters of Rigpa, in southern France. The striking new building is itself a product of many years of faith on the part of Sogyal Rinpoche and his students. The elaborate Tibetan liturgical ceremony, with state and religious representatives present, was another expression of religious faith. But the face that glowed to me through it especially was the new universality of faith that the Dalai Lama spoke of as one of the three major commitments of his life and personal motivation. Thousands of people, most of them westerners, listened to him advise people, that the 'safer and easier' course is to stay in and rediscover one's own tradition. Yet because true faith is always personal and so must be lived in the freedom to go where one feels one can best grow, it is also possible to move into another tradition. Yet the spirit of the event was both local and global – as our Seminar had concluded unity must always be. It was a Tibetan Buddhist faith-event but it also manifested the essential and universal nature of faith that our modern world has learned to recognize and defend. There can be no true face of faith that does not look kindly on faith's other faces.

To say merely that in our secular age we are no longer a people of faith would be to miss the bigger picture, the many faces of this human universal. It would be, firstly, to generalize only from the experience of the West. Religious faith is growing apace in many parts of the world, including hyper-materialist, barely ex-Communist China. It would also be to limit our understanding of faith to externals. That is a frequent clerical self-entrapment in all traditions. The emptying of the churches or synagogues is not at all the same as the abandonment of faith. As the encounter of religions today shows us all, faith is a universal dimension of human consciousness and no life that represses it can hope to achieve its ultimate goal.

METAPHORS ABOUT METAPHORS

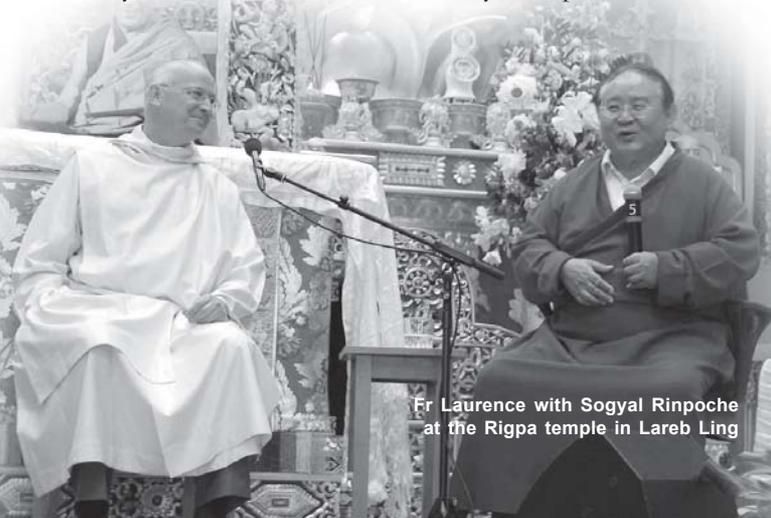
At the beautiful mass celebrated by Cardinal Kasper in the cathedral of Mainz during the Seminar, as also during the Buddhist consecration ceremony in France, faith expressed itself in sacramental signs and symbols. The objects, the stimulation of the senses of sight and smell and touch, colours, incense, rituals, hand gestures, chant and music were all tangible metaphors of what this faith-factor in the human person is seeking. To an academic student of religion (the detached observer we like to pretend to be today) there are plenty of parallels and similarities between the symbols and rituals of all religions. In every culture and tradition, religion like art dips into the common stock of what the earth and our own modes of perception provide us with to make meaning of experience. What then is surprising is not so much how similar they are but how different. Despite the obvious similarities, it is not easy to translate the symbolic systems or beliefs of one tradition into another. In faith we meet in our otherness.

The religious metaphors of prayer and worship often mean one thing to 'simple' devotees and another to the intellectual interpreter or observer. Buddhism does not 'believe in God' but ordinary Buddhists often act and feel as if they do. Long

life, health and prosperity, are such powerful universal concerns that achieving them, wishing for them, often overrides orthodox belief. The same is true for Christians whose belief in God often obscures their understanding and sense of personal relationship with Jesus.

The religious face of faith is therefore very complex and interlaced with psychological as well as theological motivations. When this complexity is not understood, a literalism can result which traps us in a mental room of mirrors – metaphors about metaphors, symbols about symbols. Images and rituals expressing ideas and beliefs can then become not only the means of worship but the object of worship. The bitter divisions within and among churches (Protestant and Catholic) and within other religions (Shi'ite and Sunni, for example) suggest the dangerous fallout from this fixatedness of faith. Intra-religious dialogue today (between dissenting members of the same religion) is at least as important as inter-religious dialogue. This is why it often happens that one feels closer to members of other faith-traditions than to certain members of one's own. The literalist believers who can only see one face of faith (and therefore cannot even see that clearly) are rarely able to be close to similar literalists even in a sister religion (although they can sometimes collaborate politically on single-issue ethical issues). But faith-fixation cannot build lasting friendship. On the other hand, those who can see the many faces of faith can usually, at a subtle level, recognize universal and trust-building similarities in other traditions.

When the force of faith is set free in the human person it impels us to experience reality beyond words, images and ideas. We then discover that the filters of metaphor, however useful and necessary they may be at one level, can also (and need to) be de-activated if faith is to grow. Like all human universals we grow in faith or faith wilts and dies. Faith contains the eternal yearning we all have to see reality just as it is. 'Brothers and sisters,' said St John, 'what we shall be like we do not know but we do know that when Christ appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is. As he is pure, all who have grasped this hope make themselves pure.' (1Jn 3:2-3). To see God is to become like God. Purity is the condition of this vision. In much of religion, though, where faith is restricted to belief or ritual, purity means piling on the filters, adding to the intervening layers. At the core of each religion, however, is the ineradicable mystical knowledge that ultimate purity is 20-20 vision of reality, unfiltered and unmediated by metaphor. Most of



Fr Laurence with Sogyal Rinpoche
at the Rigpa temple in Lareb Ling

us never fully attain it but the intuition that this is so is part of the deep nature of faith itself.

THE FACE OF TRUST

To see reality as it is, or at least to free oneself progressively of some of the filters, is a major act of faith. It expresses the trusting face of faith because our attachment to the beliefs and rituals of our tradition (rather than the beliefs and rituals in themselves) become a false and falsifying security. And so, many deeply religious people feel an aversion or antipathy to meditation because it seems to (and indeed does) undermine the secure boundaries that protect our world view and our sense of being superiorly different from others.

A way of faith, however, is not a dogged adherence to one point of view and to the belief systems and ritual traditions that express it. That would make it just ideology or sectarianism, not faith. Faith is a transformational journey that demands that we move in, through and beyond our frameworks of belief and external observances – not betraying or rejecting them but not entrapped by their forms of expression either. St Paul spoke of the Way of salvation as beginning and ending in faith. Faith is thus an open-endedness, from the very beginning of the human journey. Naturally, we need a framework, a system and tradition. If we are stably centred in these the process of change unfolds and our perspective of truth is continuously enlarged.

Here, though, is the dilemma for many who are seeking to find and express their faith-dimension today. So many are religious and cultural orphans, pickers at the multi-cultural buffet of religions, self-taught and unguided on a journey that needs guides as much as it needs solitariness and self-reliance. As bishops and lamas and meditation group leaders all in their different ways know, the first and most difficult step of faith for many in today's shattered culture is commitment. Discipline, which is another face of faith, is usually unattractive after the first fervor of conversion has passed. Put off by it, many reject the particular, which we encounter so nakedly in discipline, for the universal, attractively abstract. Discipline works to unite them. Before commitment can be authentically global it must first be local. Those who can be trusted with small things, Jesus said, will be trusted with greater.

Every movement of faith in life deepens the level at which we integrate experiences into the greater 'experientia' that teaches us what we long and need to learn. Faith is therefore integral to discipleship which, for the culturally homeless who have a slender or disembodied sense of self, is almost inconceivable and undoable. The disciple, 'one who learns', grows in the capacity to give self and discovers as a result the personal, relational face of faith. But, chicken and egg, how can one learn to commit without commitment, to be faithful without being faithful? Often only through the imperceptible gaps of this dilemma are we able to discover grace – the inexplicably intimate energy that scales the impossible, moves mountains, makes us present to what once

seemed infinitely remote. Faith is at many levels of experience simply a way of coming home.

THE FACE OF ENDURANCE

A promise to be faithful for a week or two or until the mood wears off is not worth much. Nor can it effect a deep integration of the person. Perseverance is not the most sellable idea in the consumer culture that feeds on constant change and novelty, yet it is a real face of faith and an inescapable truth of the human journey to wholeness. No one who has ever tried to be faithful to a profession of love or friendship has failed to discover this.

Suffering is therefore part of the journey because faith demands such an ongoing detachment from self-centredness. We may scale a certain height and then rest and feel a satisfying sense of progress but it is still not the peak. Before long we are reminded of the ways to which we are still clinging, still seeing ourselves egotistically, still observing others rather than loving and entering into them. This may be more or less painful but faithfulness (living true to our faith-instinct) inevitably proves what the body-builders profess, 'no pain, no gain'. While faith leads us into this it also helps us to endure the occupational pain of the journey

"MEDITATION UNDERMINES THE SECURE BOUNDARIES THAT PROTECT US."

because it gives meaning to the suffering we encounter. With sufficient meaning, born of the wisdom picture of 'experientia', most things can be endured. Even what can't be handled plunges us

into a failure that, if simply endured, (some things we just get through any old how), leads to an encounter with grace that reverses the downward plunge at some point. Miraculously, or so it often seems, the failure was a necessary part of the journey. This teaches us another face of faith that we call transcendence.

The great Christian mystics are much less depressed and preoccupied by sin than the moralizers and condemners with their single-face view of faith. 'Sin is behovely', necessary and timely, Mother Julian tells us. Not so far from St Paul who had been plunged into helplessness in order to discover that where sin (failure and confusion) was, there in that very experience grace abounds all the more. Or, from the experience of the lost sheep and the prodigal son in the teaching of Jesus. Actually seeing this is an essential aspect of the Christian way of faith. It is why the Letter to the Hebrews (11:1) says that faith itself is a form of vision that fleshes out our deepest hopes and intuition and realizes in 'experientia' what we cannot see at the more dualistic levels of perception or in random experiences.

OPPOSITION AND REALIZATION

At times, faith seems in direct opposition to our experience. We feel we have made no progress spiritually, 'whatever that means', or even at other levels. After all our meditation we are still helplessly distracted. We still feel jealous, lustful, impatient and caught off guard or overwhelmed by a rejection or betrayal that shows us how remarkably mean we can be for people who spend so much time being spiritual. And

then, for all our reading of scripture and spiritual books Jesus still seems a remote figure, a 'great teacher' no doubt but 'how is he different, for me, from other masters equally exemplary and distant?' Our inferior reason, by contrast with the greater logic of the heart, too quickly persuades us that this sense of the opposition of faith and experience exposes something wrong with faith itself.

Not all the 'testing of faith' – that the desert monks said is both essential to the process of human development and goes on till the bitter-sweet end – is dramatic. The spiritual life is not the sitcom kind of show that modern culture projects on the screen of consciousness: a rapid succession of entertaining, transcendent or tragic experiences that fill the gaps between the commercials. The proof of the pudding of faith emerges by living with little doubts and self-questioning, through daily fidelity in small things and in the patient, self-forgiving reinforcement of those few good habits which have been overwhelmed by the many bad ones. John Main's insistence on meditation itself as a 'way of faith' helps to guide us through these confusing dips and around these curves on our journey by giving us at the same time a straight if narrow path.

There is, firstly, the fidelity of the daily practice. To be unfaithful to it does not, however, mean that failure diminishes our basic worth. It can in fact help us to see better what faith means and why meditating morning and evening is actually a good idea and the best investment we can make of our time. Not meditating can be the best way of discovering just why meditation is important. When we return to it we experience an immediate homecoming without rebuke or blame, a welcome home, a sheerly joyful getting back on the path.

It is not through the ego's success-failure mentality but with a mind attuned to the faith dimension that we can see how the opposition of faith and experience is transcended. Faith is realized in a deeper experience than any level where success and failure survive as meaningful terms of judgment. Faith is realized when it is enacted even in the face of failure and when one sees why faith is an expression of love. Faith active in love. Behind all the faces of faith is the healing of the human wound by the mystery of primal love. What every human child cries for is what every human being ultimately discovers.

And, on the other side of desire hope is fulfilled. 'Go in peace, your faith has healed you.' John Main knew this and it was why he said that in meditation we verify in our own experience the mysteries of our faith.

THE WORK AND THE TEACHER

The other face of meditation as a way of faith is the inner, silent work of fidelity to the mantra. It is not enough just to sit still and silent. That is the lifting of the curtain. The performance that follows is the work of pure attention.

The mantra as an act of loving attention, so much deeper than a conscious intention or the good will with which of course it must begin, itself 'begins and ends in faith'. Both sides of the way of faith are mysterious but with a difference. Where and why do we begin this work of faith, saying the

one little word with single-mindedness and learning humility through our failures? And at the other end of the journey, when the mantra in God's own time leads us into absolute silence, when the ego through grace has been at least temporarily transcended? That is even more mysterious, more open-ended and full of potential than at the beginning. The questions we have about why we begin and where we end resolve only in faith realized in union. One fleeting glimpse of this would be enough to keep us faithful for a lifetime. But even the deep intuition of this reality which is (so we might think) not yet realized in experience, simply being open to the truth of the as yet unverified, is also genuinely effective. Our failures and inadequacies, accepted in faith, may be just as helpful to others on their path as the great successes of the saints and bodhisattvas.

From Jesus himself we learn that faith is realized in experience whenever we let go of our projections about what experience should be. To the one called to discipleship and who has taken refuge in him, Jesus shows himself – in his own time and in ways suited to the one who receives that grace. This too happens in faith which is why Jesus can never be touted – in a literalist desperation for a kind of certainty that is in no sense the same as faith – as the single, oneway ticket to heaven. Jesus is greater than that and much more inclusive.

During my retreat after these recent events I have been listening to a wonderful Bach cantata (number 21). Musically and verbally it is an enactment of the journey of faith. It opens with the cry of the poor, from the depths of human loneliness and ends with the great hymn to the Lamb in the glory of heaven. It takes us through the feeling that faith and experience are opposed to that of realizing that faith and experience are one. This is, for each of us, a uniquely incarnational moment of our human journey where our own egotistical self-abstraction is radically grounded in the reality of God and self. It is a dangerous union but one in which identity is fulfilled not destroyed. The tipping point of this process in Bach is the point where the lamenting soul suddenly glides into a duet (how else can we express the silence of the union?) with Jesus. The soul's anguish is echoed and reversed in the responses of Jesus, as a friend and companion on our path, until our resistance to union is demolished and love is satisfied and we see how he is also the way and the truth.

If this is the destination of Christian faith it is also the beginning of another journey with and in him to the place where he is everywhere present, the Father. Our meditation, and indeed any path of faith we follow, is simply, day by day, the beginning of this endless arriving.

With much love,



Laurence Freeman OSB

NEWS FROM THE WORLD COMMUNITY

The following is a small representation of the life of the Community. For weekly news and more information visit the Community web page: www.wccm.org

UNITY: LOCAL AND GLOBAL.

JOHN MAIN SEMINAR 2008

Our theme 'Unity: Local and Global' examined the place of contemplative prayer in ecumenical dialogue. The presenters were from the Lutheran and Catholic traditions. The keynote speaker was Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. This year's seminar, held in Germany, the crucible of the Reformation, thus explored the role of prayer and meditation in healing the divisions between the Christian churches. Read a full report on the JMS by **Stefan Reynolds** in the web page: www.wccm.org

INDIA: NEWS FROM MUMBAI

While the John Main Seminar was beginning in Mainz on the 15th August, a significant event was taking place in Mumbai for the Christian Meditation Community. Fr. Joe Pereira released the Indian edition of *Light Within - The Inner Path of Meditation*, by Laurence Freeman at the Annual Kripa Musical Nite. The practice of meditation has been integrated into the recovery programme for drug addicts and alcoholics by Fr. Joe whose name is almost synonymous with the NGO that 'Kripa' is. The publication of this book is a 'grace' that the word Kripa represents. *Light Within*, together with the other two books published earlier, is part of a trilogy that forms the basic reading material for those interested in the practice of Christian meditation in India. For meditators in India this is a great blessing since we now have access to Christian meditation literature at an affordable price.

Meditators here are looking forward to our next regular 'Day of Silence' in October, on the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Apostle of Non-Violence.

Christopher Mendonca; Coordinator, Mumbai

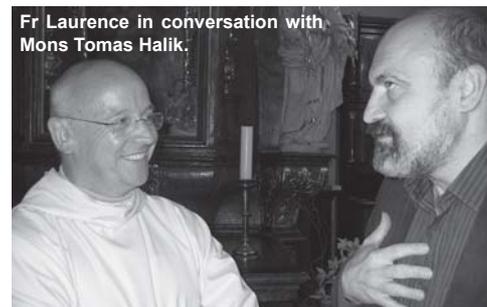
CANADA: MEDITATION AMBASSADOR IN THE CARIBBEAN

Michel Legault, former National Coordinator in Canada (legault.smeltzer@videotron.ca), recently returned from a 15-day visit to the Caribbean where he gave introductory talks on meditation, met with established meditation groups and assisted in setting up new weekly groups in Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago, and Curaçao. This reflects a growing tendency of more established parts of the Community to send teachers to help emerging countries. Please visit our 'News' Web page to learn more about Michel's visit.

PORTUGAL: WCCM WEB SITE

We have our own site since the beginning of June, an important step to make more people aware of Christian meditation and to support Portuguese-speaking meditators in general. Please visit: www.meditacaocrista.weebly.com

MEDITATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC



Recently, the main Czech Catholic Weekly paper ("Katolický Týdeník") published an interview with Fr Laurence. The interview was given during Fr Laurence's visit to the Czech Republic earlier this year. It is a full page article accompanied by a photo of Fr Laurence in conversation with Mons Tomas Halik. The Czech meditation community has redeveloped its website and may be found at www.krestanskameditace.cz. It is currently only in Czech and it will be continuously improved and added to as more texts are translated and become available.

AUSTRALIA: WORLD YOUTH DAY, SYDNEY



In Sydney this July the WCCM was present for the first time at a World Youth Day. As a local community too we did many new things: cooking for pilgrims; developing the stations of contemplation, which lined the "cloister" of our centre, creatively designed by the younger meditators to bring people to silence and stillness; holding sessions on the Saturday amidst the buzz of the markets outside. All done in a spirit of love and trust as we negotiated the uncertainty of it all and made the most of what was.

The week opened with a visit to a group who had held an overnight vigil for the WYD Cross and Icon. Sitting in the early morning light in the shadow of the huge wooden cross with the pilgrims as Fr Laurence spoke so movingly about the meaning of the Cross in their young lives. Later, the East Timorese pilgrims, excited to find the centre after becoming lost on a bitterly cold night, were welcomed with hot homemade soup and rolls by the local meditators. They became focused as Fr Laurence spoke with the help of a translator, and their questions afterwards illustrated their understanding of the practice. They brought the session to a close by singing a hauntingly beautiful East Timorese hymn. It was a memorable evening for us as East Timor has been part of our outreach and friendships made during our visits there, were renewed.

A special time of grace was our visit to the group in the Sydney women's prison, singing the WYD song so joyously with them in their sacred space and being one with them in the silence of meditation. Young pilgrims came looking for the centre to hear about meditation, and others dropped in for quiet prayer in their hectic schedule – among them our Patron Bishop Michael Putney. We met pilgrims from Australia, Indonesia, Germany, France, China, Fiji, Italy, and New Zealand as well as the Dominican sisters from the Solomon Islands.

All were welcomed and, before Fr Laurence's talk, were shown the DVD "Silence in the City" made by Claire Morgan, available for purchase and also now on YouTube (Silence in the City: Young Christian Meditators Stories (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLQswTNdFHs>)).

Giovanni Felicioni offered preparation of the body and he and Fr Laurence creatively adapted to each group and integrated with each other. Some days there were up to four sessions, each of them was unique. Many stayed after the formal sessions to experience the quiet of the space and the mindfulness of the contemplative stations.

After two years of effort and creativity by many, our WYD centre and the retreat gave us a taste of what a Christian Meditation Centre in Sydney could be like, how nourishing it is being in a contemplative "medium", the oasis it could be for people, how much hunger for such a place there is. It was a beautiful, encouraging reflection of the Community to ourselves and, we sense, a gift to those who came.

Judi Taylor: palmy@ozemail.com.au

IN FOCUS

Wife, Mother, Meditator - and Oblate

When I began to meditate 25 years ago I realized it would be a lifetime journey.

There were many twists and turns in my meditation pilgrimage, as in life, and although I dropped off the path at times, something kept drawing me back. In my heart I knew I just needed to be faithful and God would do the rest. A major turning point was when, as a busy wife, mother and teacher, I first heard of meditation at a parish mission. The priest spoke about giving time to God – just being with God. For years I didn't know any other meditator except John Main, through Word into Silence and Moment of Christ which I read and re-read. Then to my surprise I discovered a weekly meditation group following this teaching and with it the joy of meditating with a group. It was my "coming home".

My husband Graeme was a great support to me in my role as Parish Pastoral Associate and also instrumental in my connection to the wider meditation community. We'd planned to go on a vintage car rally in Melbourne when Graeme read Fr Laurence was giving a meditation retreat there and he encouraged me to go to it. So began another phase as it opened me more deeply to the teaching and deepened my commitment. My connection to the Australian community began when I met other Australian meditators. Our national community flourished with good teaching and leadership with the commitment of the State and National Coordinators

I was invited onto the National Council, to the first School for Teachers in Florence and then on to the Guiding Board which I chaired for the past 5 years. The connection between the Australian and the World communities has been very important to me as, although Australia is down under and far from the Centre in London, we all felt more connected through my presence on the Guiding Board.

My time as Chair has been personally very fulfilling. With Fr Laurence and 16 other meditators from around the world

we've met twice yearly to plan for the global community. Last year we celebrated the 25th Anniversary with a joyous Memorial Mass for Fr John Main. Looking back over the years you can see the Spirit leading us in many new directions – meditation and children, universities, the young oblate programme, interfaith dialogue and Christian Unity (the subject of this year's Seminar), contemplative retreats for Priests, the School retreats, the World Youth Day Centre, YouTube and using the web to reach young people. It's been inspiring to see and serve the interest in meditation on new frontiers like Latvia, South America, China and the Solomon Islands.

My journey this year took another turn as I made my Oblation as a Benedictine Oblate of the World Community. After a retreat at Monte Oliveto I was hoping to make it at St Benedict's sacred cave with other oblates. But it wasn't to be and I felt very disappointed. However, the God of surprises intervened (once again) and I made my final oblation surrounded by the other oblates in the church of St Francesca da Roma. This was very special to me as I have made my meditation journey as a wife and mother and she too was a married woman and oblate.

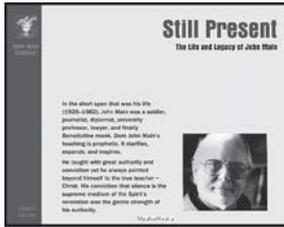
My role in the community has now changed to that of liaison with the National Coordinators who met recently in Mainz. Their commitment to the teaching and their leadership in their own countries inspires me to try to serve them. How grateful I am for this gift of meditation through the teaching of Fr John Main, which with the Word and Sacrament, has nourished and sustained me for many years. With the loving support of Graeme and my family, and the friendship of other meditators I am still on my journey.

Pauline Peters was chair of the Guiding Board 2003-2008 and lives in Ipswich, Australia





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STILL PRESENT The Life and Legacy of John Main

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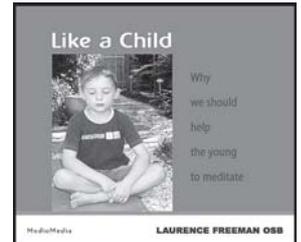
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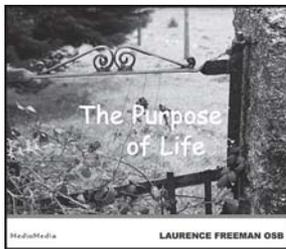
LIKE A CHILD Why we should help the young to meditate Laurence Freeman OSB

A child has a natural capacity to experience God as boundless and unconditional love but the experiences of life may teach it to fear and doubt. Meditation as a way of prayer will enable children to stay in touch with their early experience of God, which is a direct experience unmediated by language or thought.

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can lead to a greater sense of meaning.

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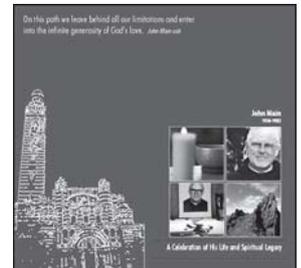
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A live recording of the glorious 25th Anniversary Memorial Eucharist at Westminster Cathedral, in London, where John Main as a young boy once praised God in song.

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recording is to feel time converge and sense that one is really present there, caught up in the beauty of the liturgy and the mystery of the Risen Christ.

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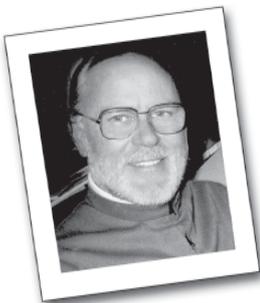
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Words by John Main...

The whole of your being is involved in this process. You sound the mantra, and by your fidelity in returning to it day by day, you root it in your heart. Once rooted it flourishes. And the flower of meditation is peace.

(Moment of Christ)

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