

Meditatio

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World Community
for Christian Meditation



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Returning to the Heart

In this issue: reflections by Laurence Freeman and Alex Zatyрка SJ, keynote speaker at the online version of the John Main Seminar (19-22 October)



Alex Zatyрка describes his journey as a missionary in Bolivia and Mexico: "I am certain that the experience of the heart described by the early Christians is the same as we find in the Indigenous societies today." (Photo: Alex Zatyрка archives)

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We need your help:
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WCCM is re-developing its entire digital presence. Please help us to understand the needs, desires, and longings of those who use our site. We want to identify our blind spots and do better. Our goal is to build one of the most useful, impactful, and user-friendly digital ecosystems in the Christian World. Please fill out our online survey by September 1st: www.wccm.org/survey.

Dearest Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

Several people have asked me, some with a smile, if I found it hard being confined at Bonnevaux during the past few months, given my frequent travel around the World Community in recent years. Hoping not to disappoint them with my answer, I said that I could honestly say 'no' to that question.

If one had to be confined anywhere, Bonnevaux is a beautiful prison and the community I was incarcerated with did not riot or make unreasonable demands. We grew together peacefully, sharing solitude and many wonderful moments of celebration and solidarity with the rest of the world with whom we wanted to share the peace we have found here. Before each of the four times that we meditate together daily, I walk up the hill and see other faithful pilgrims also quietly approaching the Barn from different directions and activities. Converging with others in a common place of prayer as the frame of one's life is a joy I wish more in our troubled society might taste even briefly. Many, of course, did discover it -- in the blooming of online meditation groups -- during these months of shutdown where they found loneliness cured by shared solitude.

I did not write the book or read as much as I hoped. Many days I wasn't travelling further than the Barn but I was meeting with meditators around the world, several continents a day sometimes. I am sure St Benedict would have written a chapter in his Rule on 'The Right Use of the Internet'. If the Bonnevaux commentary on the Rule that might come out of our daily sharing on it is written one day, I'm sure this chapter will be there, together with advice on welcoming guests like Christ while keeping social distancing.

The secret of peace, as children know, is regularity with variety. Since the Confinement, we have felt called to share the peace of our regular life with all who seek a "contemplative path through the crisis". This was how we called the new website we started when the crisis broke. With a small editorial group of our younger teachers – Sarah Bachelard, Sicco Claus, Vladi-



Bonnevaux

mir Volrab, Leonardo Correa – we tried to help make meaning of chaotic events and also to see the opportunity being offered us in often hard and frightening ways. Despair and anger are normal reactions whenever we feel mastered by outside forces that block our plans. But when this negative resistance is not converted, it only worsens the suffering.

The cure is in the illness. Misfortune is a call to conversion. Of course, we cannot see this in the first impact of a crisis. Something childish in us, the ego facing its own powerlessness, makes us feel irrationally that if we deny and resist what is happening to us strongly enough, it will go away. But it doesn't. And as reality takes on the force of fate, it is clear that only deep and full acceptance can make sense of it. Only acceptance keeps us sane and allows the feeling of dead-

endedness to evolve into something rich and strange. Eventually we say 'this must be what hope is'. In events we cannot negotiate with, predict or control, or that seem meaninglessly cruel, there emerges the humble surrender of acceptance. Without words we say, 'As it is, then let it be'. Acceptance is a long process, with many relapses into rage or self-pity, that

evolves into surrender. 'Resist not evil', Jesus said. Gandhi saw this truth, too, that what we resist persists. Merely to be against something gives it energy. In a silent moment of deep interiority, when the surrender is signed, what we refused to accept becomes a new permanent feature of the landscape of our life now deprived of its power to harm. Accepting the unwanted, welcoming the unattractive stranger into our household, liberates, bestows meaning and expands us beyond anything we could have imagined.

Surrender that is this deep and total becomes a triumph.

*

For many, Covid 19 has unexpectedly begun a spiritual awakening and a re-evaluation of life's values. The tsunami of a tiny virus shut down

factories, financial institutions, offices, places of worship, planes and trains, schools and universities, overwhelmed healthcare and exposed the flaws of the people and institutions that govern us. But didn't the internet flourish! We newly discovered its human, spiritual potential. It allowed us to volunteer, in great numbers, to help others, to express solidarity with the worst affected, to meet and pray, to accompany the lonely, to discuss what all this craziness might mean for the future. The crisis has exposed fundamental flaws in our view of the world, our environment and social structures. We are all in the same storm, rich and poor, north and south. But we are clearly not in the same boat. There is a zip code and racial factor in how the virus strikes. So what does 'getting back to normal' mean? Do we *want* to go back, or alternatively, to learn from new sources of wisdom how to change, to be converted in heart and remember what we forgot even that we had lost when we were burning the candle at both ends?

In the black comedy "In Bruges", two hit men, friends as much as killers can be, are forced to go under cover. One has been commissioned to kill the other who is secretly suicidal. One morning as he is sitting on a park bench the assassin creeps up on him to shoot him. But he sees with horror that his friend is preparing to shoot himself. Forgetting his commission, he prevents him. This act of natural goodness restores a real human value and the story ends with dark but true meanings. The world has been on a course of self-destruction. Has the virus, a deadly assassin, become a friend saving us? Enemies can be our best spiritual friends.

*

The John Main Seminar this year, hosted by WCCM Mexico, has a providential theme: how the wisdom of indigenous traditions still lives in the human family. How can the rest of the world learn from this? Instead of seeing indigenous societies as 'primitive' or just of touristic interest, can we accept their invitation to friendship? Can they help us back to the value we have foolishly abandoned, the sense of the sacred, the loss of which underpins our crisis of meaning and justice.

By sacred I do not mean a religious zone of elevated purity that names *this* as pure and holy by rejecting *that* as dirty and profane. This has been the flaw of religion from the beginning justifying the most appalling cults of sacrifice and cruelty. The collapse of the sacrificial, violent sacred has distorted organised religion everywhere. Yet this collapse has also released a global search for spiritual meaning which still mystifies most religious leaders. The truly sacred is everywhere and makes everything pure. 'God saw all the He had made and found it very good'. Nothing can survive outside the goodness of this divine source which is the meaning both of each human journey and of the unfolding cosmic miracle.

Alex Zatyryka, who is leading the Seminar in October, speaks in this Newsletter about his lifelong work with the Indians of Bolivia and of Chiapas, Mexico, from whom he has learned what he will share with us. In one particular community that he has come to know well, he sees a manifestation of Church such as we encounter in the Acts of the Apostles. A truly incarnated and indigenous church, a local community living a universal faith. As an example of how they see differently from us he describes how they greet each other with the ques-



Chiapas, Mexico
(Photo: Alex Zatyryka archives)

tion 'how is your heart?'. When they speak of someone who is false, they say 'he or she has two hearts'.

*

One of these Indians, from Bolivia, who was educated and exposed to modern society chose to return to his village. He was not seduced by consumer society or afraid of it. He returned because he intuited the fatal self-contradictions of industrial-technological society. One day, he thinks, it will crash and then we will need what is preserved in his and other indigenous wisdom banks. What we think of now as primitive or touristic will be seen as a healing link to the sacredness and wholeness of vision that we became separated from.

Covid has reminded us of what our fast-paced lifestyle made us forget, that life is short. However we may measure it, the human span of days is short. What matters is not the length and quantity, which is the dominant focus of medical science, but the management of suffering and the discovery of meaning. However suffering can be reduced or cured should be made available equally to

all. What cannot be cured – like death itself – needs to be accepted and so graciously surrendered to that we live and die with meaning. Meaning is the connection with all we have loved in life and with the whole that we belong to as a small part and yet also as a part that contains the whole.

Healers are not merely technicians who see death as failure and suffering as an embarrassment. Like artists and teachers and timeless wisdom, healers help us see the sacred in all things, whether they hurt or delight, from the direct source of meaning.

I was told recently of a renowned neurologist who was attending an elderly patient and gently broke the news to him and his wife that it was time to go to a nursing home, something the patient had long refused to accept. The doctor spoke from the heart. The patient felt it and surrendered peacefully. As they left the doctor's office, the doctor accompanied them to the elevator. They thought he was going to another appointment. But when they reached the ground floor, he took the patient by the arm, walked with them slowly to their car in the parking lot, embraced him, helped him into the car and returned to the hospital building

When we reach the limits of curing, we become healers.

*

I am not saying that the indigenous pockets of wisdom still remaining on the planet hold all the answers. But they are reminders, like friends who stop us from inflicting further harm on ourselves and our fragile planet. If they are to help us, however, we need enough collective sensitivity to what their wisdom means. Without sufficient receptivity in the patient, no healer can work. Locally or globally, contemplatives are the first-level re-

ceptors of wisdom.

The 'contemplative path through the crisis' will not end when a vaccine for Covid 19 is discovered. The crisis will continue until enough people are on a contemplative path and know, without being told, what wisdom, meaning, surrender, acceptance and the sacred mean. A contempla-



Chiapas, Mexico (Photo: Alex Zatyryka archives)

tive consciousness has already been growing silently for some time. Just as Covid has sped up many other existing trends in society – online shopping and working from home – so it has accelerated the evolution of a contemplative consciousness – still side lined or mocked by many, but now emerging as a player on all sides.

The pandemic has reminded us of our inherent solidarity as a human family. It has also exposed the forces at work – like bad government, greedy money-makers and the obscene gulf between rich and poor - that demand correction or punishment. As a sign of our unreality the stock markets are producing great wealth for some investors while the real economy is crashing. But everyone feels the effects of this global crisis; and everyone feels global warming. As hard wake-up calls they recall us to the unity of humanity and the oneness between humanity and the natural world. Any glimpse into this unity and oneness

is grace: a moment of true contemplation, a lightning flash of wisdom, a healing touch on the wound of our ignorance. Even if it is painful, we want more of what we experience in these brief insights. Because deep down, as we feel the futility of personal isolation or collective nationalism unleashing chaos and pain, we also want to know

what this oneness means.

We face an enigma hidden in a dilemma: the hope concealed in disaster. Our first response needs to be silence. Deep acceptance and surrender release silence. Authentic silence. Not the silence of denial, evasion, refusing to listen to the other point of view, the sound-proofing exclusion of another's right to exist. This is the silence of the death of the heart that dehumanises and erodes all values. Authentic silence is not escape from bad news or failure but embracing and being penetrated by reality, pleasant or unpleasant as it may feel in the moment. John Main taught meditation so intently because he believed that nothing is more important for modern people than to discover the meaning of silence.

Silence is necessary for the human spirit if it is to thrive. Not only thrive, but to be creative, to respond creatively to life, to our environment, to friends. Silence

gives our spirit room to breathe, room to be... The silence is there, within us. What we have to do is to enter into it, to become silent, to become the silence... Silence is the language of the spirit. (John Main)

What makes anything authentic is that we sacrifice ourselves for it, put our whole self into it. Meditation asks this wholeheartedness of us. It gives the opportunity to lay down our life so that we can be lifted up again into a greater fullness of life. Authentic silence is the fruit of pure prayer and saying the mantra is simply a way of pure prayer. After we have taught meditation to a diverse group of MBA students or professionals in the secular world, I sometimes tell them that what we have just introduced them to is prayer – in its pure, essence. They can look mystified, but I have never found they look offended.

*

The essence of prayer is purity of attention; from it springs a new perception of truth and freedom. These golden-oldie terms are rejuvenated as current and liveable values. Relationships of all kinds are felt differently in the light of silence. Work acquires a meaning beyond the satisfaction of financial or reputational reward. It becomes *good work* that brings out the best of us in a spirit of service (think of all the volunteers during the health crisis) and brings benefits to others.

The wisdom of traditional societies flows from a lifestyle that is better connected to the rhythms and healing gifts of nature than we are in the techno-industrial world. But to avoid romanticism and idealism, we need a partnership, an innovative kind of friendship between a new order of contemplatives spread through all

levels and generations of society and these older cultures. If there is enough time left, this could help to change the course of self-destruction we are still on. The indigenous and the contemplative share a common understanding of the heart as the unified source of wisdom and all forms of love. When we act in harmony with the knowledge of the heart our work is God-centred and upbuilds the unity of humanity. The challenge to our over-noisy world that finds it hard to listen to anything except noise, is that this knowledge, like the heart itself, is silent. It is always now. It is not a tool. It is what it is. It speaks by its fruits.

I was recently reminded by a nice

The indigenous and the contemplative share a common understanding of the heart as the unified source of wisdom and all forms of love

surprise party (in Bonnevaux and online) of the fortieth anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood (the forty-first of my monastic vows). I don't count the years, so I take this on trust. But I do remember the thought passing through my doubting mind a long time ago – 'where will this take me? Will I be doing this for the rest of my life?'. Simone Weil wrote in her notebook that we can't meaningfully say 'always'; but we can truly say 'never'. I could say I will never willingly betray this gift. But I couldn't say I will always be a good disciple of it. So, it was a reasonable question to ask myself even if it doesn't have an answer. I don't pretend to answer it now.

But I can say that the simple teach-

ing that John Main introduced me to a long time ago has never ceased to reveal new levels of meaning and dimensions of reality. A wish-fulfilling jewel, a diamond sutra, a pearl of great price, a buried treasure. In your presence I would like to thank him – and for his continued guidance of this work. It has led me into the mystery of Christ in ways I could not have imagined. I don't think I know any more than I did at the beginning but I believe, with a confidence that surprises me, that the simple teaching on meditation is a precious gift for the world, never more precious than in our present need.

In the heart of this gift I have not found knowledge or belief in the ordinary sense, but an ever deepening, receding and approaching stillness. Sitting in that stillness we reach new frontiers and our lives will inevitably reflect what we discover there. Our personal imperfections are embarrassing but not important - which is comforting if you have many of them. In the stillness we are not going anywhere but we are fully on the human journey. We are becoming human and realising what human means. The silence of that stillness teaches us of the friendship of God towards us, His longing for us. This is what we need. Not to surrender to the lure of turning ourselves into cyborgs or genetically recreating ourselves. But to surrender wholeheartedly to the divine potential of our humanity, with all our - ultimately loveable and redeemable - flaws.

Thank you for sharing this vision.

With much love.

Lauren

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John Main Seminar 2020 Online, visit www.johnmainseminar.org

The way back to the heart

Alex Zatyryka SJ, presenter at the online version of this year's John Main Seminar hosted by WCCM Mexico, describes the richness of the culture and spirituality of native people.

By Leonardo Corrêa



Bolivia (Photo: Alex Zatyryka archives)

Alex Zatyryka SJ is the keynote speaker at the John Main Seminar 2020, online 19-22 October: "One Heart, One Hope - Indigenous Wisdom and the Future of Humanity." The Seminar's lineup will also include: Tau Huirama and Vanessa Eldridge (New Zealand), Ana María Llamazares (Argentina), Puleng Matsaneng (South Africa), Ron Berezan and Ivan Rosypsky (Canada), Hilario Chi Canul (Mexico) and Laurence Freeman OSB (Bonnevaux).

Zatyryka's relationship with indigenous cultures and his passion and respect for them are evident. While this interview took place earlier this year, before the expansion of the pandemic crisis, Zatyryka's comments give ample insight into how much indigenous wisdom has to teach to "modern" societies on how to respond to and thrive in such challenging circumstances. In the beginning of his formation as a Jesuit, Zatyryka served as a missionary in Bolivia. Visiting the people of the high mountains of South America, he connected with something special: a genuine wisdom and way of life that goes beyond the apparent comforts

and promises of modern society.

He remembers one particular meeting with a young native man in Bolivia, who had had the experience of living in the city, but decided to go back to his agricultural village, where life was not easy, where hardships frequently threatened survival. He asked this young man why he decided to come back, if in the city his life could be so much easier and more comfortable. The answer shocked him: "Well I'm here for you". And Zatyryka asked, "Why for me?". He said: "I have been to your place, to your society, to your culture, to the city and I know that it cannot go on forever. That it is going to collapse sooner or later. And, when it collapses, people are going to start looking for someone to teach them how to live humanely, and it would be very sad if there would be nobody here waiting to teach you to live humanely..." This was Zatyryka's introduction to what he calls the "culture of resistance" of indigenous people: "This is not based merely on sentimental attachment to their old ways. It is instead a very thoughtful

and collective effort to preserve their wisdom and especially the way they have learned to relate harmoniously with nature and their surroundings. (...) They don't see the world as another thing that I have, that I can move and manipulate to my advantage. They relate to one another and, of course, to the world, as a living being. Their spirituality has a lot to do with that sensitivity to nature, to their surroundings, to one another and how this transform or turns into a way of living."

Indigenous Christian Community & similarities with the Primitive Church

Zatyryka's path as a Jesuit priest continued in Mexico, and, again, the link with Indigenous spirituality was (and is) present. He describes a Christian indigenous community in Bachajón, in the Chiapas region, as a unique example of how Christianity and indigenous culture can grow together, enriching each other.

"I would say this church is a rare example of a truly Indian Church in America, after 500 years of Christianity. Of course, there are churches where Indians form the majority of the faithful. But they have very little to say about the organization and operations of the church. The "truly Indian" Church presents, on the other hand, the face of a living community, one that reminds us of the kind of communities we read about in the Book of Acts. Here we see how the earliest Christians fostered a way for

JMS 2020

participants to learn how to care for one another, how to care for the environment, and how to care for communities that are outside of their mission territory. Of course, I think they have a message to give to the universal Church, which, as we know, in many places has lost much of its vitality and power to make Gospel values incarnate, not just for themselves but for others beyond their borders. But here you have a Church that is the very centre of the life of these people. They make the Church and the Church makes them. And it is a church with an indigenous face."

The heart - a universal experience

Zatykra explains that in the earliest Christian anthropology, St Paul, in dialogue with Platonic philosophy, describes the human being as formed by: body (soma), mind (psyche) and spirit (pneuma). The spirit (or pneuma) is the centre of human identity, where body and mind come together and are harmonized. It is the place where we become what we are supposed to be, in communion with God and with others.

According to Zatykra, the second and third generation of Christian writers replaced the word "pneuma" with "kardiá" (or heart). "If you read the Desert Fathers and Mothers, they talk about the heart. And how prayer should take you to the heart. The



Chiapas, Mexico (Photo: Alex Zatykra archives)

heart is the place where you meet God. Where you can live in communion."

The experience of the heart is also present in the cultures that Zatykra had contact with in South America and especially in Mexico. In Tzeltal (the Mayan language), the use of the word for heart pervades every aspect of community and relationship. "O'tan" mean the heart and there are a lot of words that have to do with heart. People greet one another, saying "how is your heart?". In other communities they say "Am I in your heart?". The way they express forgetting something is "It fell from my heart". When someone is not honest, they say "he or she has two hearts", which means, they are divided and fragmented, not unified or whole.

"I am absolutely certain that the experience of the heart is the same,"

considers Zatykra. "The experience that early Christians had of finding God in that place where you can only arrive when you are quiet, when you have the right attention, when you are not actively trying to achieve and acquire and consume is exemplified in indigenous spirituality. At first, we might not see the connection, but when we are open to see and receive the gifts and graces of the Spirit, we see that it is the same. It is the same experience that the early Christians described and that these indigenous cultures have cultivated. The opening to the loving presence of God I think is universal. The different cultures have found different ways on how to get there, but the destination is the same."

ONLINE - watch videos with Alex Zatykra and other JMS 2020 speakers here: <http://tiny.cc/alexz>

Enrique Lavin, WCCM Mexico Coordinator:

Indigenous wisdom has been since the beginning of our knowledge a deep fountain where we can find resources to heal the earth. Indigenous people from all over the world share this common insight: that we form a unity with all, with all of nature. We have forgotten that creation is the first Bible. (...) It is very important that we find a way to listen to the ancient wisdom of indigenous peoples. In listening, we might remember what we have forgotten.

JMS 2020, Online: One Heart, One Hope Indigenous wisdom and the future of humanity

19-22 October

Alex Zatykra SJ (keynote) & others

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www.johnmainseminar.org

Bonnevaux

Online events: bringing the global community together

In the past months, in response to the pandemic crisis and as a sign that it is the international home of WCCM, Bonnevaux has offered a series of opportunities for the global community to connect online, including meditation, Contemplative Eucharist, yoga sessions, seminars and retreats.

In June (10-13) Prof Mark Burrows led the online retreat "Reframing: Meister Eckhart's Wisdom and the Contemplative Integration of our Lives". Speaking from the USA, Prof Burrows led retreat sessions, Q&A, and invited the participants to join the meditation times.

The first online retreat in French from Bonnevaux took place at the beginning of July. Eric Clotuche led this "hybrid" retreat on the theme "Quelques Mots du Desert (A Few Words From The Desert)", with a small group attending in person and others joining online.

From 21 to 26 July Bonnevaux hosted another teacher "in house": James Alison, priest, theologian and author led the online retreat on the theme "Basic Christianity: what does the "real thing" look like when all the kitsch has collapsed?"

The online version of the Young Adult Retreat was held 29 July to 2 August, with the theme "Sources of Happiness – Where to Find Them", led by Laurence Freeman, Giovanni Felicioni and a team of mentors. The programme included meditation, yoga, talks, Q&A sessions, contemplative eucharist and personal mentoring.



Upcoming online events

We had hoped to re-start residential retreats in September but, unfortunately, due to the many uncertainties of the present crisis, we feel it is safer to hold all events and retreats online only for the rest of this year. Some upcoming online events:

29 August - The Message from Bhutan to the World: a seminar with Dr Julia Kim and Laurence Freeman

28 September - 1 October - Monte Oliveto @ Bonnevaux: online retreat with Laurence Freeman and Giovanni Felicioni

9 - 15 November - Beyond Words, Beyond Dualities: online retreat with Liz Watson

23 - 29 November - Lovers Are Always Meeting for the First Time – Advent Retreat with Laurence Freeman

Bonnevaux also offers weekly live events: meditation, Contemplative Eucharist and yoga classes.

Check all information at: www.bonnevauxwccm.org

Comments from participants

“ I have been on many WCCM retreats but never one of any sort online. It was an intensely contemplative experience - in the listening, the meditation alone and with the Bonnevaux meditators. The transmissions were without problems. I found the Q&A sessions and discussions further deepened my appreciation of Eckhart and sent me back to the books already on my shelves. (Comments from the UK on the retreat with Mark Burrows). ”

“ I want to express my gratitude for the retreat with James Alison. It has expanded me and opened me to many insights which I will be meditating with for some time, I expect. Your contemplative life at Bonnevaux is a gift for us all, and it warms my heart and gives me courage when needed, to think of you in your commitment to this work in the world. (Comment from Canada on the retreat with James Alison) ”

“ Thank you so very much for providing the online retreat- I realise the amount of resources and time required to put the technology on. Having the videos to watch afterwards is very helpful, as it was not always possible to make it to the live sessions. (Comment from the UK on the retreat for Young Adults) ”

Meditatio

A Gift for our Times – Meditation with Children and Young People

First Meditatio's Education outreach online seminar was held on the 30th of June

By Paul Tratnyek

The 30th of June marked what Fr. Laurence called "an important milestone" in Meditatio's Education outreach. Our first online seminar, "A Gift for Our Times", hosted by WCCM Mexico, was offered to community members teaching meditation to children and young people. The response, 181 registrants, speaks of the great need and desire to bring the gift of meditation to children and young people, especially during this time of crisis.

With the goal of collectively encouraging and re-energizing the sharing of the gift, Fr. Laurence spoke to the significance of meditation for the young generation in light of our current global crisis, and Anne Graham, a meditator and professor at Southern Cross University in Lismore, Australia, discussed current research pointing to the benefits of meditation with children and young people.

Fr. Laurence identified as the root of our modern crisis a spiritual crisis of disconnect from our own essential spiritual identity. Mental health and finding meaning are major concerns for children and young people. "This disconnect brought about by the forces in our culture is the reason why meditation is important to teach to children." He also spoke of the immeasurable gifts of meditation.

Anne's presentation emerged from the international gathering at Ashburnham outside of London in 2016. In her research with children and young people in schools, Anne

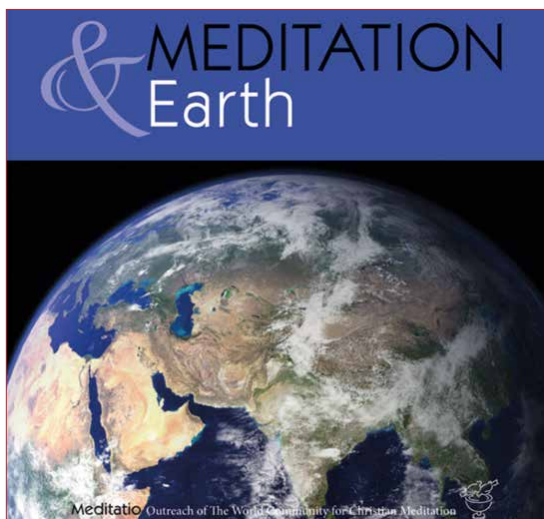


found that the benefits of meditation include improved attention, cognitive function and mindfulness along with reduction in depression, stress and anxiety.

An encouraging and beautiful video containing voices of children

from various countries reflecting on their experience of meditation was also shared at the seminar. The full report by Anne Graham with a summary leaflet, and the video are available online here: <https://rebrand.ly/medchilds2020>

Meditation & Earth - Knowing Where We Are



This booklet helps us to engage with the growing crisis of environmental destruction and climate emergency faced by the entire world. At its heart is the recognition that - collectively and individually - we need to change our habits. We are invited to look, with increased urgency, at how meditation can help us to save the planet. Order here: <http://tiny.cc/medearth>

Meditatio

Meditatio Ecology: an experience of solidarity in face of our climate emergency

By Pascale Callec

Although the Meditatio ecology event could not take place as planned in Bonnevaux from 21 to 24 May 2020, the experience lived online was rich and profound. The theme "Towards a new Earth" was so topical that the French organisation team were keen to propose a journey based on videos and an online book as well as workshops and sharing meetings on Zoom. The objective was that this journey could help each one individually or collectively in the deep changes to operate at the front of the stakes of our planet.

Despite our limited experience with online events, the journey was very successful with more than 180 participants in the workshops and many more people in the sharing groups. Each meeting of these sharing groups began with a time of meditation and then engaged in a benevolent dialogue around the issues raised by the state of our planet and the need to radically change our behaviours. A synthesis of these groups was shared during the final meeting on the afternoon of Saturday 20 June. Here are a few elements from this time of sharing, which brought together Laurence Freeman and Michel Maxime Egger with more than 15 groups, including Canadian and Australian groups that enriched the French reflections:

* The confinement allowed for a change of perspective and relationship to time with greater attention to nature. We understood that it was a matter of facing our fears head on,



Bonnevaux Community sharing group during the Meditatio Ecology

with courage, to overcome them and act at our level, starting from our inner transformation to better preserve our Earth. Our individual transformations are necessary for a mutation towards a solidarity economy to become truly inseparable from the ecological well-being of our Planet.

* If meditation is essential to our path of transformation, the situation also implies a new inner attitude, more connected by the sensitivity to living, in order to discover it and thereby discover ourselves. Meditation is therefore a path inseparable from that of attention to nature.

* Spirituality and militant commitment must go hand in hand. Our inner transformation only finds its meaning in a praxis in connection with our daily meditation. "Our daily experience prepares us for our meditation," John Main taught.

* Wanting to move towards a "new Earth" requires a precise attention to our consumer choices, a real attention to the preservation of nature but also to helping others. It also implies

trusting in listening, in collective intelligence in deep joy, love and enthusiasm. Meditation is of course the foundation of our life but it is not enough and we are invited to a real connection between the inside and the outside as a path of integration and so of unity.

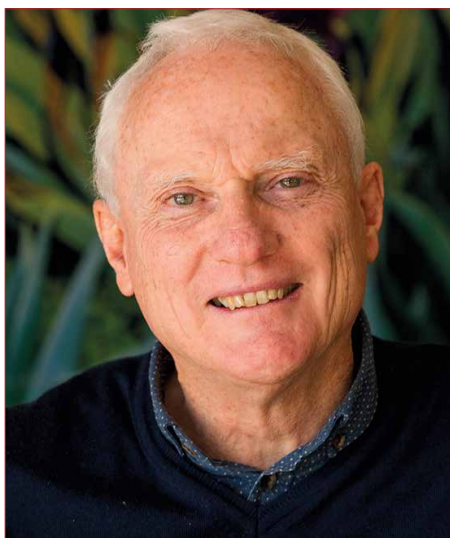
Bonnevaux has often been cited in the exchanges as a place that can be a place of coherence and experience for a new Earth. Moreover, the sharing group of the Bonnevaux community proposed to embark on the "Green Church" approach which in France commits communities to implement ecological life choices.

The participants also agreed on the need to make widely known the experience lived during Meditatio Ecology and above all to continue on the path undertaken! We are therefore already working with heart, perseverance and hope rooted in our meditation journey.

Meditatio ecology videos with English subtitles:
<http://tiny.cc/medecovd>

In Focus

Vincent Maire, New Zealand



My introduction to meditation in the Christian tradition in August 2004 was akin to discovering an oasis in a desert. I had been wandering this spiritual desert for more than 20-years but finally I had a place to call home. I connected with the meditation community in Auckland and met many people including Fr. Peter Murphy who then, as now, is a mentor to many in the New Zealand community. In 2008 I became a founding trustee of NZCCM and have served on the national committee in various roles ever since. Highlights include hosting the 2015 John Main Seminar, a Meditatio

Seminar in 2019 and in November 2017 meeting a young Frenchman, Thomas Litzler, at a teaching day I was leading in my parish. When Thomas told me he was a horticulturist, I encouraged him to visit Bonnevaux as I felt his skills would be appreciated. A year later, almost to the day, Thomas launched his first web talk from Bonnevaux. Because of this unique link with Bonnevaux, the New Zealand community donates funds each year for the development of the orchard and gardens. Currently I am the NZCCM Auckland regional coordinator and in March became a novice oblate of WCCM.

In May I received an invitation to Zoom with Fr Laurence. He asked if I would give an online talk about my work as a hospice chaplain. At the 2019 Meditatio Seminar I gave a talk on The Contemplative Care of the Dying. The basis of my talk is this: when I started working at Harbour Hospice in 2013, I discovered that my meditation practice had prepared me for the role in ways I could never have imagined. My work often involves periods of silence and stillness, of being at peace with not knowing what is going on, of navigating deepening levels of

presence, of using the mantra as a way to prepare myself for each new encounter with a dying person. I absolutely love working at my local hospice here on Auckland's Hibiscus Coast.

The other reason Fr. Laurence wanted to talk was to invite me to join the WCCM Guiding Board. This is a huge honour for the New Zealand community. It is also a great honour for me. I have worked and volunteered in the not-for-profit sector for many years and prior to becoming a hospice chaplain, I had a long career in marketing and communications. I hope that what I have learned through life's many twists and turns will be put to good use during my time on the Guiding Board.

I am married to Liz; we have two daughters, Victoria and Emily. Emily and her husband Paul have three daughters, Lucy, Georgia and Thea. Liz and I are conservation volunteers and love exploring New Zealand's many national parks. Each Wednesday at 1730 hours I lead a meditation group at my local Catholic church, St Francis by the Sea in Manly on the Hibiscus Coast. My life is blessed in so many, many ways.



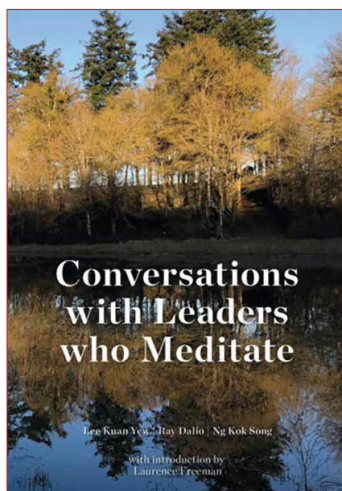
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Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is 20 October.

Resources

Books

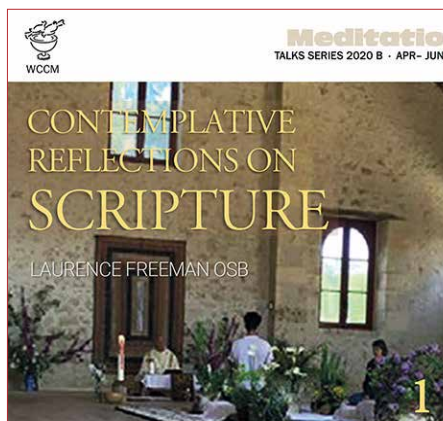


Conversations with Leaders who Meditate by Lee Kuan Yew, Ray Dalio and Ng Kok Song

Order here: <http://tiny.cc/convleadm>

In these conversations, leaders holding responsibility at a global level speak about the practice of meditation and its place in their lives, personally and professionally. They bear witness to the need for an enlightened approach to leadership where responsibility, vision and success find meaning in the deeper dimension of personal integrity and altruism, and where contemplation is inseparable from action. The introduction defines clearly the meaning and purpose of meditation and offers a simple teaching of the practice.

Audio



The latest Meditatio Talks Series: Contemplative Reflections on Scripture 1 by Laurence Freeman

Listen to or download the tracks: <http://tiny.cc/medt2020b>

This is how you can now get the quarterly Meditatio Talks

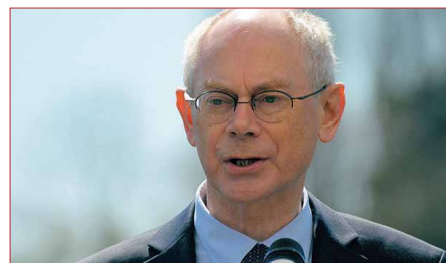
To keep up with the times, the distribution of the Meditatio Talks Series in physical CDs has been discontinued with effect from the 2020-B Apr-Jun issue.

A set of talks will continue to be released every quarter and will be made available for downloading from <https://meditatio.wccm.org>. There you will also find the complete Meditatio Talks series, from 2005, together with the corresponding transcripts.

A Contemplative Path

www.acontemplativepath-wccm.org

In recent months this new website addressed the urgent needs arising from the pandemic with a series of video-conversations and other teachings with meditators from diverse fields (spirituality, society, health, education, and others), developing a contemplative approach to the crisis and how to respond to it.



Herman Van Rompuy, president emeritus of the European Council, speaks on the Contemplative Path website

Online Courses

Meditation, Wellbeing and More with Jim Green - Enroll now: <https://rebrand.ly/mwbc>

Meditation, Wellbeing and More has been designed to help you explore a range of concepts associated with health, wellbeing, human development and personal growth, alongside the practice of meditation. Meditation has long been recognised as something that can support personal wellbeing.

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



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New depths of unity, faith and hope

by Kath Houston

For the Queensland community, and for meditators throughout the world, the term “going inside” has taken on a whole new meaning in 2020. For most of us it has been a time of change as we let go of plans and adapt to COVID-19 restrictions. We have been holding in prayer the many people throughout the world who are suffering, especially those who don't have access to good health regimes and medical facilities. This is a crisis that the world was not prepared for and it highlights the overreach and inequities in the use of the earth's resources.

It has been a time of separation from our extended families and friends. Many of us have been touched by the messages sent by grandparents and grandchildren on TV and social media. A lot of us have mastered new skills in technology and discovered that we really can connect, and even meditate together online. Meditators young – and older – have embraced the technology and are thankful for it. For many of us it has been an opportunity to let go of some of the busyness of life and reflect on what really gives meaning and purpose. As a community we are discovering new depths of unity, faith and hope.

A number of groups have been meditating each week online through



“The use of technology has provided opportunities to connect with meditators in other parts of the world.”

Zoom, Messenger, WhatsApp and other platforms. They report on the surprise of members who find they can be closely connected this way and can enter deeply into the silence together. Some groups report new members, and some groups have had meditators from other countries join them. Other groups have kept in contact by email and phone. They share news and readings, and meditate on their own at the same time each week. They also report on the special closeness that has kept them together.

Below are excerpts from some of the reports that bring to life the faith and connectedness of our groups.

The use of technology has provided opportunities to connect with meditators in other parts of the world. WCCM Oblates meet online each week and mass from Bonnevaux on Sunday evening has become an important focus for many of our meditators. The community at Bonnevaux has become a virtual hub offering wonderful reflection's and teachings through their new website. If you haven't seen it yet please do have a look:

<http://acontemplativepath-wccm.org/>

Our Queensland committee will be holding its next meeting online and a few members will be joining the online Essential Teaching Weekend being hosted by School teams in NSW and Victoria. With hope in our hearts we are making plans for a community gathering in December and a weekend retreat next year. In the mean time we continue in faith, and in gratitude for our community of love that sustains us all during these times.

We are now able to have 10 people in our Church to meditate each Friday. As there are approximately 23 of us, our leader, Barbara, organises a roster so half meditate at the church and half at home, all meditating at the same time: such a sense of community which we feel deeply. – Hilary

We've been meditating online via Messenger. Some use the WCCM website meditation. Those who can't access the technology are quite happy on their own using the WCCM app. We have a member Deb who's in Indonesia. We now think that when we return as a group we'll still connect with her via Messenger. – Denise

We have been using Zoom for our weekly meditation meetings. It is good being together in whatever way is possible. For some, technology isn't possible, so they meditate with us off line. – Joanne

continued over page

More excerpts from some of the reports that bring to life the faith and connectedness of our groups.

Our group has started meeting again. Everyone was very happy to be together. Since there are only ten of us keeping social distancing is not difficult and we have sanitizers and disinfect the seats we use. We don't stay for a "cuppa" afterwards at this stage. It's a blessing to be able to meditate together again. I know some found it difficult to keep it up on their own.

– **Myra**

We have not been able to meet in person at all, and still the ongoing inability to do so. So we have been trying to maintain our connection by emails and most of us attend the Zoom Contemplative Service on a Sunday night. Regarding the COVID time, this has been very positive... I've begun to spend time at my creek, drawing and sitting without the pressure to produce, just being present.

– **Kym**

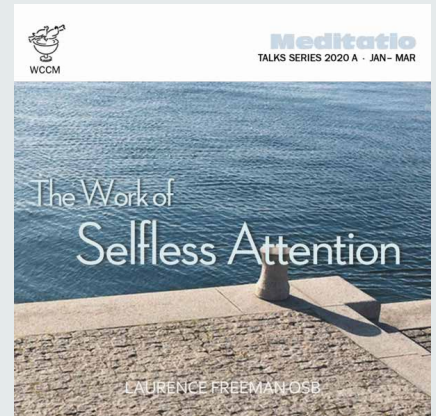
I have been meditating with the Oblate Community each Monday evening from London with Zoom followed by wonderful talks given by Fr Laurence. It has been excellent. Our meditation group had a trial run with meeting online via Zoom. Some had problems connecting. I am encouraging them to persevere.

– **Lorraine**

Our meditation group closed down during lockdown. We kept in touch via emails, phone calls and the occasional pastoral visit towards the end. We provided the opportunity to get together again fairly early once lockdown had been lifted – but there was still some hesitation. It was really providing a space where those who wanted, could gather together.

We are now in full meeting mode again and are able to do this with all social distancing and other requirements being met – the church is set up with this in mind. It is all a bit different with the whole church being

used and not just a small gathering space down the front – just need to turn the volume up a bit for the talks – the silence is still the same. We had 13 there this morning so that was close to 'normal'!



It is useful to be using the CD – The work of selfless attention – as it's a good reintroduction to what it's all about etc and as usual, contains a few gems.

– **Graham**

How to Meditate

Open to all ways of wisdom but drawing directly from the early Christian teaching John Main summarised the practice in this simple way:

Sit down. Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently begin to recite a single word – a prayer word or mantra. We recommend the ancient Christian prayer-word *Maranatha*. Say it as four equal syllables. Breathe normally and give your full attention to the word as you say it, silently, gently, faithfully and above all – simply. The essence of meditation is simplicity. Stay with the same word during the whole meditation and from day to day. Don't visualise but listen to the word as you say it. Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images and other words. Don't fight your distractions but let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively and returning to it immediately that you realise you have stopped saying it or when your attention is wandering.

Meditate each morning and evening for between 20 and 30 minutes.

Oblate Community WCCM Australia News

by Gloria Duffy
National Oblate Coordinator

In Australia we have had Oblates who knew Fr John Main and Fr Laurence Freeman in Montreal and who would have shared many of the experiences reflected in *Community of Love*.

The book references letters and tapes by Fr John which convey not only his deep spirituality but his farsightedness regarding the personal vocation of Oblates and their place in an evolving Church. It would be a fair assumption that Fr John may not have envisaged the face to face meetings of Oblates/meditators from different time zones around the world and that such meetings would be normalised.

June 6th was the 40th anniversary of Fr Laurence's ordination and of course there were many celebrations one being an online party of invited guests from different facets of WCCM. Pauline Peters spoke of her administrative experiences' minus all



Fr Main

Fr Freeman

Nokter Wolf

the electronic aids in dealing with Fr Laurence's timetable. The celebration, of course, was for Fr Laurence but it also demonstrated how Fr John's vision of a 'monastery without walls' was more than a sentiment of hope because it has become in fact, an interactive community. As names and faces appeared on the screen, they echoed the accumulative and shared experiences of individuals from different countries and events that make up the WCCM community, I know that this was true for me.

There have been several occasions recently that have demonstrated the interconnectivity of WCCM Oblates and their association to other Oblates and their monasteries

worldwide. Nokter Wolf OSB was Abbot Primate and a principal mover behind the initial International Oblate Conferences in Rome. Understandably, his name is not known by many. However, Australian Trish Paton would have recognised it immediately as she was very active in the organisational aspects of the conferences representing the oblate community of WCCM. Dom Wolf recognised the vocational call of Oblates and for this reason our International and National Coordinators, representing their respective communities, sent him our prayers, gratitude and best wishes for his 80th birthday on the 21st of June. He, like Fr John, recognised the emerging significance of Oblates as they stand at the crossroads in the monastic history of the Church. The current Abbot Primate Gregory Polan noted in 2017 there were an estimated 25,000 Oblates worldwide compared to 21,000 Benedictine monks and nuns.

<https://beingbenedictine.com/2017/12/02/4th-world-congress-of-benedictine-Oblates>

A Meditation Retreat Island (MRI) Experience

by Heather Olley

A Buddhist monk asked rhetorically ... what is the difference between a monastery and a prison?

Externally maybe not a great deal – simple lifestyle, not much choice in food, quiet, can't escape. One big difference is that in a monastery one chooses to be there, and regards the enforced isolation as an opportunity to practice silence. In a prison, there is no choice.

* * * * *

I had an hour in a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machine a while back, as the medicos scanned my spine and neck and brain for possible damage from a rare disease that had jumped out of nowhere and had already taken my kidney function down to 14%.

Big scary looking things, MRI machines, like something out of Star Trek. Maybe you've seen them

on TV science shows. Noisy and clunky, people often find them very claustrophobic and intimidating. Even the medical technician operating it sits safely in another room on the *other* side of a glass screen, watching you and operating the machine from a distance. You just have to lie there for an hour, while the machine noisily takes images through every possible angle of your body. You have to ... just lie there ... absolutely still ... for an hour.

Yet ... it was the most peaceful, healing hour I'd experienced since I landed in the hospital emergency department a few days before as a renal emergency patient.

It was no meditation retreat in some lovely island location with fellow meditators, that's for sure. But after hearing John Main's voice in my mind, softly, rhythmically, leading our Opening Prayer, I started to fall into the mantra.

Once I got used to the bangs and the clunks and the noise of the MRI chamber, the real distractions were still – as always – my own thoughts.

And then, at times, I found the silence and the stillness.

And the silence and the stillness was the *same one* I've come to know in my other meditations in all those other places and times – at home, with my weekly meditation groups, at quiet days, and on retreats.

And I also heard Laurence's voice quoting John Main, somewhere in the clunky, banging, noisy MRI chamber:

We don't have to create the silence, the silence is there within us. All we have to do is enter the silence, to become silent, to become the silence. The purpose of meditation and the challenge of meditation is to allow ourselves to become silent enough to allow this inner silence to emerge. Silence is the language of the spirit.

Meditation for Healing



<https://catholicleader.com.au>

by Paul Kraus

I am a retired senior high school teacher and a writer who, for most of my career, felt I had never had the need to meditate.

At the age of fifty-two I was, following surgery, diagnosed with advanced mesothelioma, a terminal form of cancer. I attended a ten-day cancer retreat where, among other therapies, I learnt a healing form of meditation, based upon the notion of relaxing at a deep level.

Not long after the retreat finished a

neighbour of ours, who was a leader for the WCCM form of meditation introduced me to the Benedictine practice of meditation of the late Fr John Main, and since followed by Fr Laurence Freeman. That took place over twenty years ago. I embraced meditation as an important, but not the only form of my therapy.

Meditation came to be an important means of healing, not merely trying to cure myself from this illness. Through strict lifestyle changes, and over a long period of time I survived this illness. However, in time I also suffered from heart problems, a brain tumour that was surgically removed and prostate cancer. Meditation and contemplative prayer, as well as being anointed with oil, prayed over by a priest and regularly receiving the sacraments, together kept me well, in spite of all my 'ups and downs.'

In a wonderful, almost miraculous way, like a parable, Our Lord carried me from darkness to light. I was also led to write books on healing, as well as poems on the nature of healing

and wellness. The poems included in my latest book, *Anointing The Soul*, (St Pauls Publications, Sydney) were written in gratitude to God for bringing me beyond these serious illnesses. They also are written in gratitude to Fr John Main's form of meditation.

A few lines from one of my poems allows you to find out my approach to stillness and silence in the face of our Almighty God:

*'Can we open the door to reality,
To love and find the journey
In silence and peace while truly
Knowing a state of being
In this here and now?
God's first language: silence ...
All else transcriptions of this
Compelling sound ...'*

– Paul Kraus

The new way to get the Meditatio Talks Series

Visit meditatio.wccm.org

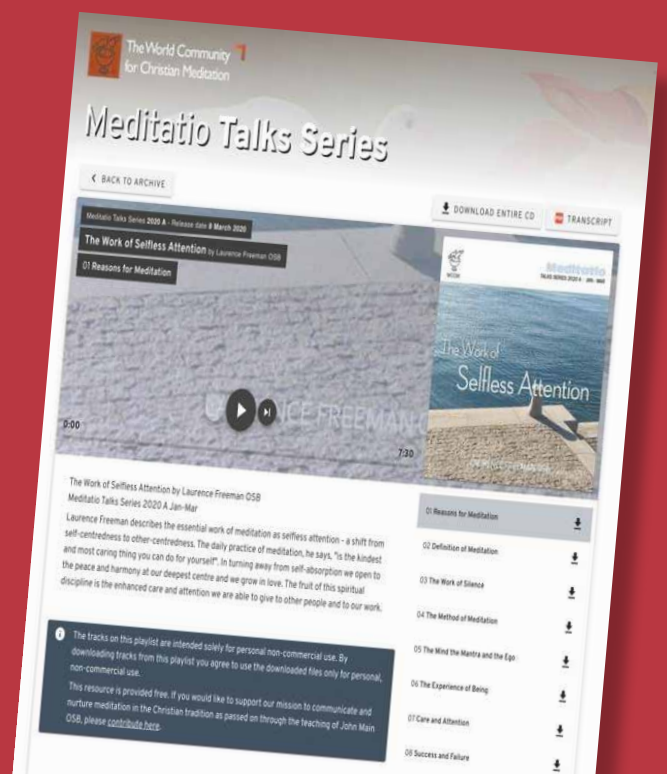
For many years and four times a year a **Meditatio CD** has been sent to each registered Christian Meditation group around the world.

In the new **Meditatio Talks Series** page (link above) you will find the audio files (with transcripts) of these talks which have come from many different teachers in the community, including John Main and Laurence Freeman.

To keep up with the times, these **Meditatio CDs** are being offered as audio files that can be simply downloaded and used at weekly groups.

Check out a simple tutorial ([here](#)) on how to download the audio files.

The World Community for Christian Meditation
wccm.org



Being Contemplative Community Day

by Anne Dudzinski

Almost 40 people attended our first Community Day for the year held at Immanuel Lutheran Church, North Adelaide on Saturday 15th February.

Our theme for the day was *Being Contemplative* and we were lucky enough to have four excellent speakers on this topic.

Rosie began by speaking about concentration on spiritual things as a form of private devotion, the act of considering with attention. She reminded us of Psalm 46: *Be still and know that I am God.*

The Desert Fathers and Mothers led to monasticism where contemplation was their whole way of life. This ended with the Reformation until a monk named John Main started it up again some centuries later.

Since then thinking has been viewed as the main way of processing things and ideas. We see the truth of things in their wholeness.

An excellent definition of contemplation is *observation with love.*

Contemplation is a way of giving attention to the mantra, which is what we do in meditation. In this process of letting go and being still in the present moment, we change our operating system and prepare to live a contemplative life.

Contemplation is a *way of being* whereas meditation is the practice of rewiring our brain for the contemplative life.

Contemplation is an opportunity to be present with others but not get drawn into their dramas. It's also a great prayer. Beyond our daily meditation, being contemplative means having a sense of inner peace, and being able to go into a situation with an open, non-judgemental mind.

It's having the ability to sit with differences and not feel the urge to come to a conclusion or make a decision.

Bob talked animatedly about our prayer life transforming us by deepening our relationship with God, who created us in his image and likeness. The Gifts of the Spirit are



Q&A with the Community Day speakers.

encompassed in pure love and can lead to a full, abundant life should we accept and develop these gifts.

Bob feels that the likeness of God – the life of Christ living in us – is seriously under-developed. He states that the path to emptiness is the basic path to arriving at fullness of life.

The journey to wholeness is a thing of joy that cannot be taken from us, according to John the Evangelist. Even though we all have attachments and addictions, fullness of life is available.

The prayer of contemplation, when we leave self behind, is important as it works on the inside like a drain cleaner. We become more open to God, through contemplative practice. This openness allows the Spirit room to work. Verbal prayer is also a slow path to transformation.

Sandy spoke about contemplation and children, reflecting back on her innate sense of wonder, especially when being in a garden as a child.

You are nearer to God's heart in a garden than any other place on earth is a well-known piece of text. The contemplative journey involves the untying and unwrapping of our souls.

Meditation is born of wonder and yet Sandy wonders if we, as adults, have lost that sense of wonder.

She suggests that if every child meditated for 5 minutes a day the world could be changed. I believe this is a great challenge for our country and the world. Children acknowledge that they get on better after meditating, have less arguments and seem to treat each other better.

Contemplative practices recapture the innate sense of childhood, which is there for all of us. This work of silence is hard work, spending our life being childlike again. Sandy shared part of her own life story and found that she reconnected with her innate wonder when she discovered meditation.

She used John Main's powerful quote. *"God is a sea of love; rest in that love. If you have any difficulties with others remember that river of love within you and begin to pour out love again."*

Dianne spoke about being a contemplative chaplain. When we pray we cultivate the presence of God and pay attention to the mantra, as in any contemplative caring we do for loved ones. The way we pray is the way we live.

Presence is a place to be where attention is given to others – a listening presence to pain, no answers to questions, it's a mystery to demand presence. One needs to pay attention to what is/not happening and to feelings and relationships without judgement. Paying attention is a work of love. To quote Krishnamurti, "to **pay attention** means we care, which means we really **love**." Attention is the most basic form of love. By paying attention, we let ourselves be touched by life, and our hearts naturally become more open and engaged.

While each speaker explored the topic of contemplation in their own individual way, there were similarities and some overlap, which kept the audience listening attentively throughout.



The Basilica of Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume



Mary Magdalene statue



The Abbey of Saint Victor



The King's pathway up Sainte-Baume



The plaque showing the Orders of monks who cared for the site

Following Mary Magdalene in Provence

by Rosie Hamilton

While I was planning our holiday in Southern France in 2019 I read about the "Tradition Provencale" that tells of the arrival of a boat on a beach in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in Provence.

On board were the close companions of Jesus, who had been exiled from Judea. Among them were Mary Magdalene, first witness of the resurrection of Christ, Lazarus her brother, Martha, her sister, Maximin, Marie Salomé and Marie Jacobé. When they landed on the Mediterranean coast, they gave thanks to the Lord.

Each of them went in different ways through Provence to convert the people and teach them the Gospel of the resurrected Jesus. Only Marie Salomé and Marie Jacobé, who was too old, remained at Saint-Mairies-de-la-Mer with Sara, their servant. Lazarus became the first bishop of Marseille. Maximin became the bishop of Aix-en-Provence. Martha went north and converted the inhabitants of the region of Tarascon. Mary Magdalene,

having preached in various places, withdrew to Saint Baume, in prayer.

I was fortunate to find a guide, Veronique, who specializes in Mary Magdalene pilgrimages. She took my husband, John, and I to a small town, Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, to the Basilica of St Mary Magdalene. Built into the furnishing are many reminders of Mary Magdalene and in the crypt are her relics. In the afternoon we hiked up the King's footpath on Mount Sainte-Baume to the cave where Mary spent the last years of her life. As we reached the gateway to the sanctuary I noticed a sign saying the Cassianite monks were the first to care for the site. Veronique suggested that we visit the Abbey of St Victor in Marseille where relics of John Cassian are housed.

It was a privilege to spend a day with Veronique who has such a close association with Mary Magdalene. She says, "The more I study and search for Mary Magdalene, the more I discover a splendid woman, who doesn't deserve a bad reputation."

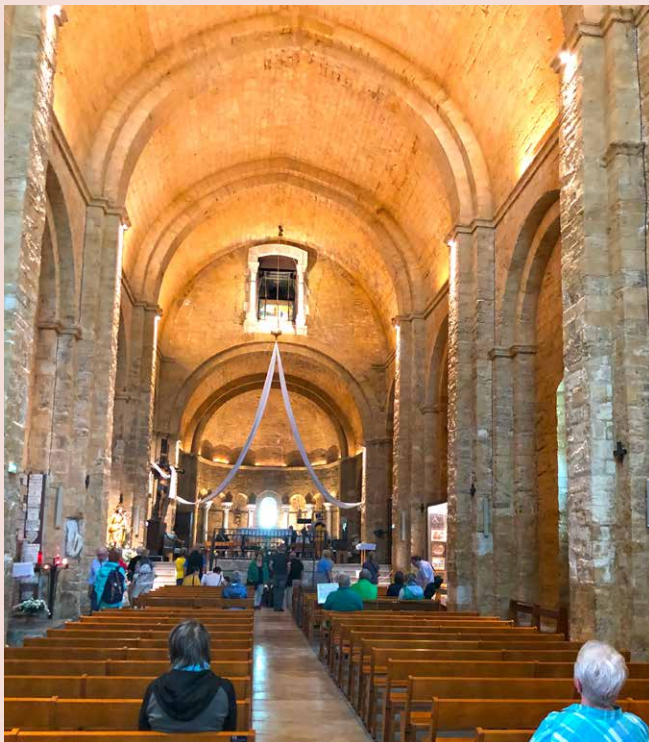
See: <https://www.magdalenesacredjourneys.com/#home>



Beach at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer



Marie Salome and Marie Jacobe



The church of Notre-Dame-de-la-Mar



The cave where Mary Magdalene lived the last years of her life is now a chapel



The relics of John Cassian in the Abbey of Saint Victor



www.wccmaustralia.org.au

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