



Despite everything, Hope

The message from the John Main Seminar on how to develop a contemplative response to our global crisis



Professor Charles Taylor speaking during the final panel at the JMS 2018

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A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

Dearest Friends

As you may have heard, the John Main Seminar this year was a very extraordinary one. It felt for me that, after the 1991 Seminar, led by Bede Griffiths, where we first formed the World Community, this year's was the most significant. It seemed to draw back the veil that usually covers things to show how our community's life and work form our mission to share the gift of meditation and how it touches the world today.

As a young monk I went to Montreal with John Main to start the small community that within fifteen years was to grow into the World Community. My life in those early days soon became very busy. Apart from meditating four times a day within the daily monastic routine, I was studying theology in a foreign language, cleaning the house, preparing rooms for guests, doing the gardening, helping with the cooking and nervously standing in for Fr John when he was away. A bit overwhelmed at times, I never felt it was too much: it seemed a personal adventure giving the meaning to life I had been looking for. And it felt a privilege and relief to be part of a mission so much greater than myself. Soon after arriving, I wrote to a monk, a friend I had made during my novitiate. I described the bustling life of the new community in a new country. But I was sadly deflated when I received his response and read in it a rebuke when he said something like 'personally I think the real monastic life is one where nothing happens, nothing changes'.

Nothing changes? This idea of an immutable reality around which we revolve is deeply embedded in religious imagination: *I am the Lord, I change not (Mal 3:6); the unchangeable character of his purpose (Heb 6:7);*

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and tomorrow (Jms 1:17) It seemed to me both true and untrue. In biblical thought this unchanging reality is projected onto God who has often been imagined as the 'supreme being' – supreme but still 'a' being among many other beings. This dualistic sense of God is both true and untrue. God is other but we can know this other in ourselves in a way where there is the full oneness that Jesus prayed for us to know. In Asian wisdom this unchangeable essence is even identified with our true self – the personal Atman who is one with the cosmic Brahman. The Gita says that *no one can destroy this unchanging reality. Our bodies are known to end but the embodied self is enduring.* In different

When you sense that this stillness is a presence, everything changes for you

ways all wisdoms point to the same paradox of how God mingles, merges and mixes with the human.

The unchangeable means simply what really and truly is. Whatever does change – every moment and each breath, every cell of our body and each thought in our mind – is a step into this union with God. The change that is part of life itself shows us that God is not a being, even a supreme one, but Being. Without Being nothing is. We cannot live apart from this Being although we often think we can. We are therefore on a daily pilgrimage from the unreal to the real, from what seems to be real until it changes into the real and gives us the taste of the blissful fullness of being. We drink from its spring in the now that is in every passing moment if only we open ourselves to it. We open to it by doing what we

are meant to do. Sometimes, when it feels too much, we learn to be content to do the best we can and to find peace whatever happens. By building times of stillness even into the busiest days, we give our wholehearted attention to being, laying aside for a while the endless tasks we have to accomplish. In the times of meditation, we square the circle, allowing contemplation and action to merge. And so each day we do our bit to change the world.

My friend's response saddened me by what to me seemed its lack of sympathy. I had hoped for more understanding and perhaps approval. But it reminded me how I had first been attracted to monastic life because of the mysterious stillness I had already begun to sense in my life. When you sense that this stillness is a presence, everything changes for you. From the outside, however, as with meditation, it might look boring, monotonous or escapist. But, inside or outside the monastery walls, practice builds the contemplative life.

Contemplation 'sees this core stillness'; then it reverses and sustains what it sees. But it is a dynamic stillness that changes the one who sees it. Therefore, we are always contemplatives in action. No two days anywhere in any situation are the same. How they differ will depend on what we are called to do during our times of action. The experience of being – to which meditation returns us even on the busiest of days – is a stillness that is both always the same and always changing.

This is the paradox which connects to the Seminar. This year we invited several individuals – active and successful in their different fields – to reflect on how the stillness of contemplation can help us see the way forward, through our disturbing

global crisis. Such active individuals could address this because, in their own lives through a contemplative practice, they knew what it means to enter the paradox of *being and action*. This paradox – that looks, as it did to my friend, like a contradiction of polarised opposites - is really a simple mystery. It challenges our



world. It summons us to see it in every changing day of our lives.

In the following pages you can taste some of the powerful insights our speakers offered. They spoke from first-hand experience of the crisis of democracy, of leadership, of medicine, of science, of social identity and of religious consciousness. Like biblical prophets who addressed the social issues of their times, our speakers did not pull their punches. The crisis we face today globally is undeniable. We cannot deny it now any more than we can deny climate change. The daily news reminds us of it. The speakers did not offer simplistic explanations or quick solutions. They knew that meditation does not solve our problems. But they also knew that contemplation transforms the way we approach and deal with those problems at every level.

With each speaker we could sense a common pattern in what they were exposing and describing from different fields of action. They spoke of the loss of vision and the misguided direction reflected in the changes in their world. Increasingly social and political lives are suffering from polarisation and the violence always

hidden in extremism. Leaders who should be helping society to reconcile and control the forces of division seem often to take delight in fostering conflict for their egocentric, short-term ambitions. The arts of medicine and science are often hijacked and devalued by mechanisation, greed and power. Economics and finance fail to manage the rampant selfishness that increases the gulf between the richest and the poorest. Religion, too, is marked by polarisation and the spirit of condemnation. When we no longer see that change happens around a centre of stillness, contradiction becomes division. When the bridge between the surface of our lives and its depth dimension collapses, change becomes crisis. Paradox becomes contradiction, and division becomes hatred.

The still-point of the moving world

is a point of unity: where opposites marry and learn to get on with each other, where dualities cease being a cause of friction and smooth out their jagged differences and, where in reciprocal acceptance, we find ourselves in the other. But we cannot prevent differences from becoming divisions without first plunging into the black hole of duality. In the mystical tradition this is the *Dark Night* which for St John of the Cross is the spiritual crisis we must all in some way pass through. In his poem we see how we are driven into this night 'by no other light or guide than what burns in our heart'. There is no escape from the deep interiority which Jesus calls the 'inner room' of our prayer in which we meet the 'Father' (the source of Being) in ourselves and ourselves in Being. We arrive through this vortex in a mysterious experience, a 'place' where

..he was awaiting me,
him I knew so well,
there in a place where no one
appeared.

In the place where duality is pierced through and transcended the 'other' is our self and we are the 'other'. Is this not the same paradox that Jesus means by saying:

The Father and I are one

The entry into this unity is not a running away from conflict and differences. Instead, it is precisely what helps us to deal with the problems they create in our personal lives and in all the great fields of action which our speakers represented. Meditation awakens this awareness from the first step we take on the inner journey. The contemplative mind continues to grow long before we

arrive at full union. Because it is a life-journey, this is why we need so urgently to teach meditation to the children who will have to deal with the crisis we bequeath them. This contemplative awareness is inbuilt even if we feel we have lost it. It is not taught or downloaded into us: it is awakened.

Without it, the dualities, oppositions and divisions of life destroy both us and the wisdom our societies need even to survive. The terminal stage of social disintegration begins with losing the taste of wisdom.

We are physically dualistic. The brain has two hemispheres; we have left and right arms. About 90 per cent of people are right-handed. Does this mean left-handed people are bad? They are different and in many cultures the difference is positive. Left-handedness is associated with wisdom, healing and artistic gifts. But in other cases left-handedness is associated with uncleanness or suspicion. The proportion of homosexuality is thought to be about the same as left-handedness - although the American population thinks (or fears) that 25 per cent are gay.

Demonising the differences between ourselves and any minority dehumanises everyone. Jews, Muslims, gays, immigrants or 'the other side' in politics are then easily exploited and scapegoated. The rising levels of violence or malevolence induce a state of inebriation and become addictive as many areas of political life reflect today. The tragic, often fatal, mistake of judging someone in one dimension in the terms of another, ruptures our contact with reality. When it is too late, the atrocities that arise from this chasm remind us of what we have lost.

A common theme of the Seminar speakers was the polarisation that leads to a descent from crisis to chaos. This is political: as we see in

the forces of divisions being stoked in European, Middle-eastern and American societies. But it occurs too in the professions of medicine or education, for example, when the essential purpose, the *art* of those basic fields of civilisation has been lost and forgotten. In medicine, when the distinction between healing and curing is ignored. In education when the whole person is reduced to economic usefulness or academic categories.

Seventy years ago Simone Weil, one of the great minds and spiritual pioneers of our era (who died at thirty-four), saw all this unfolding in the worst events of the global infection of the Nazi madness. As a prophet, she saw into the truth of her moment and therefore saw truth itself even in the worst. Seeing the truth, which is seeing God, will always be painful when we still have illusions

The contemplative response to the crisis of change: deep, pure, selfless attention

that resist and need to be dissolved. Investing in illusion denies the truth. But, like our speakers, she did more than see and describe the problem: she saw with acute clarity the remedy and way forward.

Attention, in her vision, is the 'only human faculty of the soul that gives us direct access to God'. By attention she meant far more than thought or imagination. She meant what her predecessors in the mystical tradition called the pure and selfless attention that is love. John Main helps us see that this is what we are doing when we meditate and take the attention off ourselves: *in meditation we are not thinking about God or talking to God... We are being with God.*

The contemplative response to

the crisis of change: deep, pure, selfless attention. The test of true contemplation is not just does it makes us feel better or alleviate stress: it is whether it changes, indeed, transforms us. Religious institutions today, especially in the West, still largely lack the contemplative vision necessary to catalyse this transformation. In many religious places, things are improving slowly; there are leaders with the vision to rebuild the broken bridges. But as a whole the institutions of religion still fail to connect with the contemporary crisis or even to understand it.

The acceleration of change paralyzes the capacity to adapt which is indispensable for survival. Even worse, and often among the younger pillars of the institution, the response becomes a call to restore the past rather than explore the future. Religious language then becomes a dying dialect. The preoccupation is 'to go to church' rather than understanding who is the church: the authority of the institution is not tested alongside the authority of personal experience. We pray for traditional vocations rather than seeing how the roles of laity and clergy have irrevocably changed. With the aggressiveness of those who know they are losing, moral lines are defended. In any argument there comes a point when hammering home your answer is counterproductive and it is more persuasive to ask the right questions. At the Seminar we were introduced by Charles Taylor to the difference between those who are *seekers* and those who are *dwellers* within traditions: we need dwellers who are also seekers.

The most important thing worth seeking is the source of being. It goes by many names but this source is universally seen to be experiential not dogmatic. In the end - and the end comes to each of us - we are saved

by what we learn and know not by what we believe. Dogma should flow from experience and insight and this helps with its constant updating. Ideas assist but cannot control access to experience. Jesus' prophetic anger against pharisaical religion has never been more contemporary: it showed how religion itself can block access to the divine experience. With the same intensity Simone Weil says that 'only

you without loving or hating myself? This is what we mean by the dualistic and unified ways of seeing which shape the kind of world we inhabit.

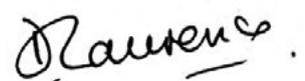
The gospel reflects this. It is a way of life and a way of seeing made up by overlapping dimensions of contemplation and action. Jesus showed this in the two aspects of his teaching and example: on one hand, loving, defending and affirming our

the founder of Contemplative Outreach, our sister contemplative community, would have relished this John Main Seminar. If he had been well enough we would have invited him to contribute his vision of the contemplative renewal of society. The world has been diminished by his passing. But it calls us to feel how thin can be the veil between the worlds of time and the eternal present, between action and contemplation and between the problems of contradiction and the mystery of paradox.

Most importantly, as Fr Thomas understood, we need to be people who see. These issues are not abstract. We live them each day of our lives, in our families and communities. We struggle with them as we try to make the best decision in the face of impossible choices. The great teachers in our tradition all call us to see that contemplation is *seeing* and so that the contemplative response to the challenges of our time is the best contribution we can make to go forward with hope. Experiencing unity within ourselves breaks the stranglehold of polarised views and hostile attitudes. Non-duality means love: including love of our neighbour and whatever 'others' or minorities we fear because they do not seem like us.

Our meditation groups silently influence the direction the world is taking. So do events, like the John Main Seminar, when we come together to grow the community that meditation creates: a universal community of contemplation, made up of many beliefs. This is our human goal as it is also the communion that nurtures hope.

With much love



Laurence Freeman OSB



Fr Laurence and Fr Thomas in Snowmass, 2016

contact with the divine can deliver us from evil! The only alternative to this contact – the contact point is contemplation – is the law of the jungle, the endless multiplication of divisions, the primitive morality of eye for eye and tooth for tooth. When this morality becomes public policy we have already re-entered the dark ages.

Contemplation is vision not ideology. We are changed into what we truly see. Contemplative wisdom teaches us that there are deepening levels of vision, from the physical and scientific, to the intellectual and imaginative and, beyond them, to the vision of spirit. The first two levels must also be developed but they remain dualistic. *I am looking at you.* Do I like or maybe hate what I see? A deeper vision is *to see you in me and myself in you.* How can I love or hate

neighbour and, on the other hand, the experience of contemplation.

It was a deeply serious seminar. The talks and discussions came out of a unified vision of things, a union of heart and mind. They addressed the real fears and sadnesses felt by any wakeful, modern person. Yet the mood was ultimately joyful and, in the end, surprisingly hopeful. Where did the joy and hope come from? They came from a shared seeing of the bright stillness around which all change revolves. I hope you will be able to share this moment that brought such meaning to our community's life and work. You can download the talks or watch them online and maybe listen or watch them with others with whom you can discuss them.

I feel sure that Fr Thomas Keating,

JMS 2018

John Main Seminar 2018 in Bruges

A Mosaic of Hopeful Insights

The JMS 2018, A Contemplative Response to the Crisis of Change (20-23 Sep, Bruges) was a milestone for our Community. Quoting Laurence Freeman: "it was one of the most significant JMS since 1991 when we first took shape as a community". The following pages give a taste of the talks. You can watch or listen (and download) to the full talks here: http://tiny.cc/JMS18_vid. A Meditatio journal will be devoted to the Seminar.

Laurence Freeman: Seeing clearly what is really there

One of the things we hope for the seminar is that we will face — with courage and clarity — the full reality of the crisis, across all institutions and areas of modern life: from politics to medicine, to church, to science and the economy. But we also hope that we will leave here not in despair but with the insight of hope, especially regarding how we discern the way forward. We are most of all seeking to grow in the dynamic of judgment. Indeed, the word crisis in Greek means judgment. And good work, good management, good life or society, requires good judgment, the capacity for criti-

cal thinking. Without that capacity we are merely consumers, not citizens. Without the capacity of good judgment, we are more likely a member of a mob than an active participant of a democracy. Today we readily reject judgmentalism, thinking that somehow judging equals intolerance. But the capacity to see and judge clearly is absolutely essential to justice and mercy, to fairness and balance, to our own well-being and the well-being of the world. The capacity to see clearly what is really there, lets us distinguish between our perception and reality, between our filters and the truth. It

give us the capacity to distinguish between fake news and real news (and those who accuse the real news of being fake news). And through this disciplined seeing, we acquire the power and responsibility of discrimination. We are able to exercise the gift of our freedom not to acquire and secure what is ours, but to create and sustain a greater good for all. So our seminar intends to embrace and educate the whole person, knowing that the quality of our consciousness determines the quality of our judgments and actions and, therefore, the quality of our world together.

Van Rompuy: democracy will not work without love

Democracy is a verb, and the first condition is to learn democratic habits. Dialogue and conversation necessitate a deep respect for every human being. To put it in an old-fashioned way: without love in the broad sense of the word, democracy will not work. Without this conception of a person, without personalisation, nothing will be delivered. Every person counts, everyone is written in the palm of God's hand. Democracy is not only a technique, it is a philosophy. The opposite of extremism is conversation. I love that word: conversation, it's a constitutive part of our democracies. Conversation leads to moderation. The world needs moderation as an

antidote to nationalism and harshness. Hearts are hardened. We have to put moderation into practice at every level of power, every level of responsibility again. Sometimes leaders have to assume their responsibilities, even if it means going against the tide. It is called political courage. In a democracy of course it's the people who have the last word but this shouldn't prevent leaders from showing leadership. We often speak about a democratic deficit, but the leadership deficit can also have serious consequences. Democracy does not mean chaos, although change is part of the game. Democracy is not static but dynamic, some-



times too dynamic. We have to convince people. Dear Friends, in a land where leaders think they are always right, flowers will not flourish in the spring. That land is gray, that land is dull. Winter is then the only season. But for us democracy is life and we are on the side of life. I remain a man of hope.

JMS 2018

Sean Hagan: Meditation makes for better judgement



As soon as I was appointed IMF General Counsel, the range of issues expanded exponentially. I felt that I had lost control of my agenda. I would come in to work with a list of things to be done and by the end of the day none of those things had been done. The list had gotten longer. I found myself not being able to focus on anything, because I was being asked to focus on too many things. That is one of the reasons why my daily practice of meditation has

been so helpful for me. As you know, meditation is effectively about learning to be in the present moment. It's not easy because our thoughts place us either firmly in the past or firmly in the future. As John Main said, it is about developing a "spirit of attention". What I found is that to the extent to which I could retain that spirit of attention outside my meditation it would have important benefits. Dealing with a multitude of issues became easier. Instead of panicking, I would learn to just focus on a specific task in front of me. To be here now.

The second benefit of meditation is in the decision-making process. It is in some respects more important and more profound for me. It relates not to the process but to the quality of the decisions. A key benefit is that it helps you develop a degree of detachment. I think the Dalai Lama uses the word "equanimity". By letting your thoughts go, you realize that

you have thoughts but you are not your thoughts. You are something bigger, better than those thoughts. It's important not to view this detachment as a form of disengagement. That is one of the problems I have with the word "detachment". It suggests that you're disengaging. Rather it gives you the benefit to actually engage more effectively. It helped me engage more effectively. So many of our thoughts are unconscious, we are often driven by them, not just random ideas, broken narratives, but also emotions, anxieties, anger. By separating ourselves from them, by creating this "space", using Laurence's word, they basically have less power over us. It enables us to see things more clearly, as they really are, rather than as distorted by our narratives, our fears, our emotions, our fantasies. This equanimity, this detachment, has enabled me to exercise better judgment.

Marco Schorlemmer: Science is a spiritual practice

Maybe the contemplative core of scientific inquiry hints to the fact that Science is a spiritual practice per se. Because to inquire is to be open to the unknown, to let curiosity and wonder drive this inquiry. It is allowing oneself to be transformed by it. So our human journey of life, our spiritual journey, is basically the journey of inquiry. To be on the way of seeking and to keep the emphasis on the seeking not on what is sought. On the quality of our inquiry and not on the quantity of knowledge that we generate. So this is the way, that is the goal. If we stay with the current

framework that we have inherited from our industrial societies, which is centered on material production and utility, governed by a producer/consumer economy, then we will conceptualize well-being as wealth and measure it in terms of monetary value. If we stay with conceptualizations of artificial intelligence in terms of autonomous rational agents, that maximize expected utility, then I think the science and technology that we produce may continue to provide benefits only for a minority of the human population. It will strengthen current power distribu-

tions and it will nourish a producer/consumer economy which does not lead to liberation but leads to slavery.



JMS 2018

Teresa Forcades: To belong or not to belong



I would like to say something about belonging, it's such a key element for me in what it might mean to orient our economy differently, our politics, our activity in the world. I would like to start by quoting Hannah Arendt. In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she quotes Marcel Proust. When Hamlet says: to be or not to be, this is

the question, Proust changes that, and says: that's not exactly the question. The question is: to belong or not to belong?

Hannah's book was published in 1951. What happened in 1948 was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When it was declared, Hannah started developing her idea of: who has the right to have rights? She started what can be called a critical appraisal of the Declaration. And why would she do that? Because at that time she was living in the United States. But she had been deprived of her nationality in the German state at the time of the Nazi regime. She was lucky to have escaped, she was welcomed in the US. She had a job and recognition but she did not have nationality until 1951.

She questioned: how can we say Universal Declaration? What is it if

you don't belong to a political human community? If you don't belong, who is going to defend those rights for you? What does it mean? What is this vacuum (in terms of human rights), if you don't have the organization, the system so to speak, to really make them effective? It's the same thing we have in this Declaration. Of course it is very clearly stated right? There is a right to be welcomed, to take refuge if you are fleeing from danger, from a war, from a disaster. Tell this to the people who are drowning in the Mediterranean today. Even in a more fundamental way, we have the right to decent housing, a job, the right to so many things that are only on paper. They are not happening in reality. So belonging to a community that is organized in a way that these rights are going to be defended becomes fundamental.

Charles Taylor: Seekers and Dwellers

A new spiritual situation has led to there being a tremendous number of people who are what you might call "seekers". They're people who, in terms of their response to the Immanent Frame, very much feel that's not all there is. They're looking for something more, but...they're not simply finding it. The point is: they're seeking it, aware that they haven't fully found it. Aware that there's much more exploration, much more depth to go into. But they're seeking it in very different ways. And this is the way of being, of the seeker. As against that, there's an American sociologist which uses this as part of a binary: seekers and dwellers. People whose relation to their religious life is very much to be part

of a long-standing church structure, the life that's been going on within it, and they are really very happy within that. As against seekers who may or may not belong to the church in that sense, they may have a dweller part of them or not. But basically they have the sense that they have to go further, they have to somehow deepen this, they're missing something very important, they're wanting to move forward. They're looking for various disciplines and that of course is where meditation can enter people's lives. It's not a surprise to me from the standpoint of this analysis why this movement (WCCM) started off, and I was around at that time not so long ago in Montreal, with a few dozen people and has now bur-



geoned into this vast organization, thousands of people, all countries that you could name. That's part of what you'd expect in a world where so many people are seeking. Lots are seeking elsewhere, this doesn't capture all the seekers, but a large number of people because they are seeking, are looking to this community.

JMS 2018

Robert Johnson: Economic Fictions

When you go offshore you know you don't know where you're going. An economist pretends that the future is certain and known, and I think that's absurd. One of the big critics of economics was a Stanford University professor, Rene Girard, who has a lot of, you may call, energy related to the intersection between analytic thought, intellectual life and spiritual life. When I criticize economics, I always talk about how they make up these fictions. It is not known well that Jeremy Bentham wrote a book called *The theory of fictions*. But my favorite title for the economics profession comes from a New Yorker article by George Trow called *Within the Context of no Context*. They act like the world is a neutral fair whiteboard upon which you place your life and the outcome

is a verdict on your value and your worth. I think that is rather childish and naive as a way to formulate economics.

Perhaps my favorite economist and the one who I think is most under recognized is a man named Frank Knight. He is known for the notion what they call "radical uncertainty" the unknown unknowns, and I think this little statement is quite interesting about how people exercise what you might call scientific method on economics in an unscientific way and they leave their graduate students perplexed by trying to explain change:

We live in a world full of contradiction and paradox, a fact of which perhaps the most fundamental illustration is this: that the existence of a problem of knowledge depends on

the future being different from the past, while the possibility of the solution of the problem depends on the future being like the past. The key to the paradox, as we have argued above is to be found in two facts. In the first place, we analyze our world into objects which behave more or less consistently. That is, we recognize in things the unchanging property of changing in certain ways. If this process could be carried out to completeness, we should have a completely knowable world. It would also, however, be in the practical sense an unchanging world...

...It is a fact familiar to students of our thought processes that we thus explain change by explaining it away. - Frank Knight RISK, UNCERTAINTY, AND PROFIT.

Barry White: Healing and the Sense of Unity

We know what cure is, we know what the technical solutions are: I want my gene therapy, I want my chemotherapy to treat leukemia, I want the antibiotic if I've got a pneumonia, I want my leg fixed if I break it. They're all really good I don't want to throw those out.

Healing is different. It can occur when I don't have an illness, when I do have an illness and I'm getting cured, the treatment is working great. It can occur when the treatment is not working, and it can occur when I'm dying. Healing very often occurs at the point of death itself. It is very much experiential, very much rooted in this space of being, this deep awareness.

Healing is certainly peaceful, it's associated with an increased abil-

ity to see clearly, with awareness. It is associated with the reduction in the ego where the self is rising above the ego. It's associated with the reduction therefore of selfish desire and the other side of that coin, which is the fear of the loss of those desires. Healing, probably most importantly, relates to this sense of unity, the capacity for us to see unity through the illusion of multiplicity and diversity. It is Jesus in "let them be one with me as I am one with you". What the Upanishads talk about: the Unitive State. And healing is in many ways the practical application of non-duality. Because this experience of unity is a non-dual experience.

I see the world, I see the unity, I am connected to it. I am still differ-



ent but I am not two. I'm not one, I'm not two. So healing is an example of non-duality living within the science of medicine. More than living: underpinning it.

News

The First Pilgrimage to Bonnevaux

The visit (12-14 September) celebrated 25 years of WCCM Malaysia and the group also included members of the Hong Kong, Australia and USA communities

By Edmund Lai, Religious Education Teacher



The pilgrimage to Bonnevaux was an outward sign of a deeper internal journey from our heads to our hearts, where God dwells. The word "pilgrim" comes from the Latin word "peregrinum," which conveys the idea of wandering over a distance. The distance from head to heart can be symbolised by the walking of a labyrinth. At the start of the journey into the labyrinth, we can see the centre, and we know in our heads that we want to get to the centre. But we must follow the twists and turns before we reach the centre – our hearts, where God is at home. When we first arrived at Bonnevaux, we sensed that we had reached the centre of the labyrinth. We could feel that this was holy ground. The land, the massive old trees, the stream, the vegetable garden, the chapel, the buildings - all radiated a warm welcome to the sacred space. Even the noise of construction could not drown out the silent radiance of wel-

come.

We also experienced the life-giving beauty of the springs of Bonnevaux. The pure cool flowing water is a perfect metaphor for life, as water is the basic building block of life.

The embrace of welcome by Fr Laurence was like a welcome home for the three days we were at Bonnevaux. When he showed us around the place, we could not withhold our excitement and awe as we immersed ourselves in the spirit of the land. It was as if we had just come home after a long, long journey. Even though this was all new to us, there was a certain familiarity, a kind of knowing that this was a spiritual place of peace, warmth, security and harmony.

Fr Laurence and Fr Gerard celebrated the Eucharist, and we all meditated together in the chapel on day one, and outdoors on day three. The celebration of the Eucharist and meditation together ignited the ex-

perience of Real Presence within each of us. The hospitality extended by those who were there brought out the true meaning of the phrase "meditation creates community." We felt deeply a part of the meditation family. Our Pilgrimage was a coming Home to our Creator who is at home within us and around us if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear and mouths to taste God. When we are at Bonnevaux we can't help but have our senses "home-in" to our creator God.

ONLINE: Watch a video on the pilgrimage here: <http://tiny.cc/BnxPil18>

Completing the Guest House



Thanks to the generosity of our community and friends, we have almost raised the funds to renovate the central house. We now need your help to complete that and then to raise 3.4 million euros for the conversion of the stables as our guest house. A regular monthly donation would be a great help and support.

Visit: www.bonnevauxwccm.org

In Focus

Elba Rodríguez, from Colombia



A blue sunny sky and a gentle breeze cuddled the mid morning hours of an early autumn day. I noticed how peaceful and carefree I had been feeling as I strolled towards a narrow alley. I swerved to a quiet luscious garden after seeing that a man on the other end was absorbed in the task of pressure washing the path I was to follow. My attention turned to the quietness of the garden; the noise from the pressure washer had dwindled away and the sound of chirping birds was now moving through the air... What if I wore a helmet that would let me experience the frenzy of London life, as most people know it? It all seemed bizarre considering that my latest experience of London had

been anything but hurried frenzy; I discarded the idea and returned my attention to the different colours and motions around me. I would have lived that same moment in a different manner had not been for the deepened affinity with life gained through the intense and nourishing work of prayer and meditation, especially during the past year.

My journey with contemplative practices started when I was a post-graduate engineering student in Florida and the active connection with the community appeared more than a decade after that. A combination of career burnout, a subsequent career pause and an underlying search for meaning were the triggers that pushed me to re-evaluate my personal, professional and spiritual journey. I was led to the Oblate path at that pivotal moment. If this path would allow such inner transformation and a new outlook on life altogether, it was then worth to experience it and allow myself to be propelled by that force which nurtures one's daily existence. After a period of pondering that included conversations with other Oblates and Father Laurence, I was determined to extend my al-

ready stretched career break for another period in order to be part of the small lay Benedictine community in London.

It has been a year since that day in early October when I arrived at Meditatio House. Little I knew about living in a contemporary form of community like ours. The lessons learned have been enormous and my understanding of our community has been expanding, disassembling, and assembling organically over time. Despite all fluctuations over the months, the meditation periods have always been there to be honoured and to recount what is important in the finitude of the daily hours.

The 30th of September symbolises my entry as an Oblate of the WCCM. Looking back, I am able to appreciate how this time of deepening has helped to gradually unpack answers to some of my complex questions. I can say that the intensity of this year has granted many things including an infused new vigour to traverse the unknown, a feeling of being embraced by the sweet love of God and a passion to effusively embrace life as the special gift it is.



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Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is 10 December

Resources & Events

Thomas Keating (1923 - 2018)



I first met Thomas Keating when, as a very young monk, I was sent by John Main to visit him at Spencer and bring him his greetings. They hoped to meet in person later: unfortunately, as Fr John's health declined, these two luminous teachers of the Christian contemplative

tradition were not able to meet. But, when I told Fr John how kindly Fr Thomas had put me at ease and spoken of the common mission we shared, he saw this as expressing the human authenticity at the core of all Fr Thomas' teaching. Over the years, as we met or taught together, I saw how this authenticity marked his intelligence, gifts of inspiring and organising and his prophetic sense of the spiritual challenge facing the modern world. In 2016, he asked Richard Rohr, Tilden Edwards and myself to Snowmass to meet with him and I saw how, even in his physical weakness, he felt the need for contemplative renewal in the church

and world. But deeply as he felt it, he was always a loving-hearted monk, attentive to each person, considerate, selfless and courteous. The world is diminished by his departure. But his absence will reveal more and more how much of his spirit and wisdom there is yet to unfold. It will especially guide Contemplative Outreach as its members grieve him. On behalf of the World Community, I send our deep condolences to his friends and students in our sister community. We celebrate his life and entry into all that his open mind and open heart allowed him to see.

(Laurence Freeman OSB)

Audio & CDs

The Experience of Being Laurence Freeman OSB

These talks touch on meditation as the work of silence, and the levels of silence involved in the journey. The deepening silence leads to the experience of being. As the Psalmist said, 'Be still and know that I am God' (Ps 46:10). This is the experience of our own being and our connection to the source of our being, Being itself.

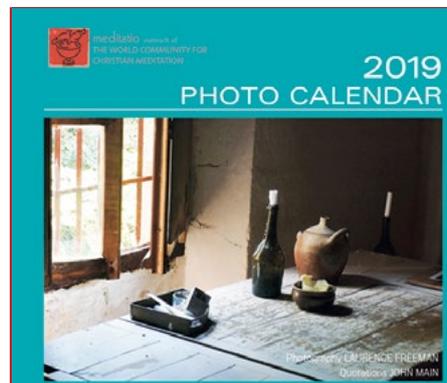
To download the tracks:

<http://tiny.cc/MED2018>

To order the CD:

<http://tiny.cc/ExperienceBeing>

2019 Photo Calendar



The calendar 2019 brings photos from Bonnevaux by Fr Laurence with words from John Main. Order here: <http://tiny.cc/Cal2019>

John Main Seminar 2019



A Contemplative Christianity for our Time (Aug 5-11) led by Rev. Dr. Sarah Bachelard - Vancouver, Canada.

More information:
jlcullen1@telus.net

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



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Morning of Meditation Held in Western Springs, IL

On August 25th of this year, the meditation groups at St. John of the Cross parish in Western Springs, Illinois held their twice annual Morning of Meditation. More than 60 meditators from the sponsoring meditation groups as well as groups from St. Celestine parish in Elmwood Park, St. Clare parish in Joliet, and Holy Spirit parish in Schaumburg came together for the event.



After sharing hospitality, the group came together for a period of meditation, followed by Lectio Divina. The group listened to and reflected on a reading from the first Chapter of the Gospel according to John. The period of Lectio concluded with a short reflection by Kevin Callahan, who shared the following,

“The relationship between God and the Word, and its importance for creation is also important for our knowledge of ourselves and the creation around us. If all that was created was created through the Word, then the expression, ground of all creation comes to life. It also means that the Word is the ground of creation for each of us as well. In other words, we each personally have a relationship to the Word through our creation.”

“To me, meditation is the path to the Word within my heart, within our hearts, which then leads us back to the Father. John Main said, “The reason why in the Christian tradition we meditate is that we believe that Jesus has sent His Spirit to dwell in our hearts. Or to use other words: The Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Creator of the Universe, dwells in our hearts, and, in silence is loving to all. Meditating is simply being open to the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of God.”

Following a second meditation period, Kevin Callahan made his Final Oblation as an Oblate of WCCM. During the ceremony, Kevin reflected on his bout with cancer during his oblate novitiate year, and, how he realized what

that experience taught him about one of Fr. John Main’s expressions, poverty of spirit:

“Fr. John spoke often of poverty of spirit. In *The Way of Unknowing*, he wrote: “the way to it is a very simple way, the way of poverty of spirit. A generous poverty is a joyful one in which we surrender all our thoughts, all our imagination, all our words and stay with one word, the mantra.” And surrender is where I arrived. Here I was, completely dependent on others, my wife, but also all sorts of friends who drove us places, said many prayers, did things to keep our spirits up and so on. In the meantime, I could only lay in bed or on the couch, so exhausted that I could not say the mantra for more than a few times. In that silence and simplicity, I cannot say that I found joy, but I did find moments of peace, when I was able to let go of cares, so that I could simply be in the peace of God. And His peace changed me, in ways I am only beginning to realize.”

Following these remarks, Kevin pronounced his Final Oblation which was received by Mary Robison, the U.S. coordinator of WCCM Oblates. All present agreed that the Oblation was a special moment that the group shared. Special thanks go to the Western Springs meditation groups, and to Betsy Spiering, Mary Novotny, Joan Binder, Mo Dunne, Meg Munaretto and Marlene McAuliffe for planning and hosting the Morning of Meditation.

Please support the work of WCCM-USA.
You can donate online at: <https://wccm-usa.org/support-our-work/> Thank You!

2018 St Augustine Reflections: An Essential Teaching Weekend

From Kathleen: This time was a very important part of my meditation journey. I had an inconsistent meditation practice for years and the Essential Teaching Weekend (ETW) grounded, re-energized, and solidified it for me. Hearing from the leaders, the masters, and my fellow meditators was educational and inspirational. Since the ETW, I have meditated twice daily and I just led a meditation group for the first time at my weekly group. I only want to grow in this practice, this WCCM community, and in my walk with God. Thank you!

From Laura Waters:

“Meditation is a learning process. It is a process of learning to pay attention, to concentrate, to attend.” – John Main

The Essential Teaching Weekend held September 28-30 at St. Joseph’s Renewal Center in St. Augustine, Florida, embodied the learning process as described by John Main. We learned about the history of our meditation tradition, focused on the practice of meditation and presence, and practiced deep listening.

Three parts of the process of meditation resonated with me. In the first, we explored the elements of meditation-silence, stillness and simplicity: “Silence is letting go of thought; stillness is letting go of desire; and simplicity is letting go of self-analysis.” Meditation, in short, is about letting go, about surrendering to the gift of presence and being.

Secondly, in learning more about the history of Christian meditation, the ETW emphasized how the Desert Fathers and Mothers went to the desert for the transformation of being. This is what we do in meditation when we surrender our thoughts, desires, and self-analysis – all the attachments we cling to from moment to moment.

Lastly, learning that we have a relationship with our journey in meditation taught me to attend to the multiple facets and stages of the journey – both my individual journey and the communal one made with fellow meditators.

The ETW deepened my commitment to sharing the gift of meditation, expanded my sense of community with other meditators, and strengthened my intimacy with God. The contemplative walks, meditations, and group activities truly helped to focus my practice. It also empowered me to enjoy the process of learning while being a witnessing practitioner.



Upcoming Events:

For details go to:

wccm-usa.org/resources/upcoming-events/

**Advent Weekend Retreat | Chatham, NJ
December 7-8, 2018**

with Fr. Laurence Freeman

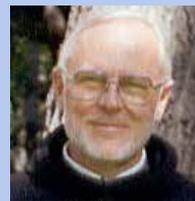
For more information go to our US website:
<https://wccm-usa.org/resources/upcoming-events/>
and click the event for further details and registration.

2019

**WCCM US National Conference | Phoenix, AZ
October 18-21, 2019**

with Fr. Laurence Freeman

Save the Date! Information to come!



*“What each of us has
to do and what each
of us is invited to do is
to begin to understand
the mystery of our own
being as the mystery
of life itself.”*

JOHN MAIN OSB
The Inner Christ

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NEWSLETTER

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