



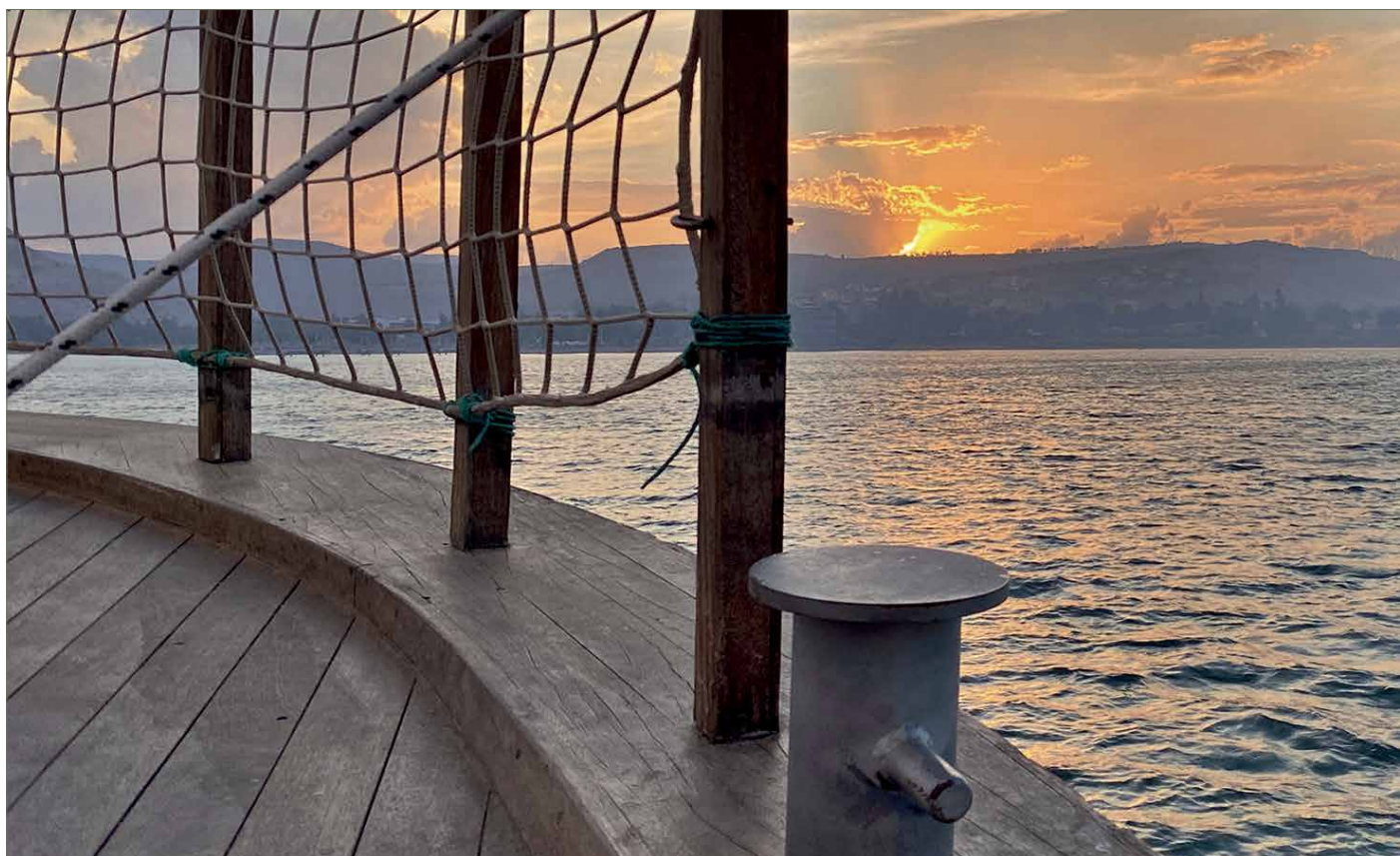
WCCM

Newsletter of The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Sailing With Winds of Wisdom and Compassion

FR LAURENCE DESCRIBES HOW TO LET NEW PERSPECTIVES APPEAR



Sea of Galilee during the recent WCCM Pilgrimage to the Holy Land (Photo by Laurence Freeman)

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Leaver Friends,

A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

The only things really worth saying are the obvious. So let me begin by telling you of a good surprise I received this morning as a voice message from a young friend who lives in a large Asian city. Like all gifts it is given to be shared.

He was walking to work, rushed along on the anonymous tide of fellow workers. At his feet, on the pavement, he registered the precarious presence of a wounded butterfly. He continued walking, carried along by the crowd but, after two more blocks, he was still thinking of the butterfly. Now it was more than a fleeting image. It had become a real presence that brought him to a new level of self-awareness.

In his real mind, as he called it, he had seen the butterfly and felt a wave of tenderness and compassion greater than the inexorable force that keeps the world turning, crushing anything that resists it. It was a wave of an inner ocean of compassion. The gospels show Jesus actively expressing such compassion for those suffering sickness or rejection he met on his many journeys. Compassion can flow irresistibly as it did with him or it can be blocked. If blocked it becomes mere pity or short-lived empathy. But once freed, compassion will become action.

So powerful was his awakening insight, however, that he turned back. The butterfly was still there. Unconsciously making a zone of reality in the surrounding stream of distraction, he knelt down and picked it up. He laid it somewhere safe from the marching feet, whether to heal or to die, he did not know.

What I find harder to describe was the energy of joy and liberation in his voice. It was not that the ego was whispering 'feel good about yourself.' With no effort or self-consciousness, he broke through old bonds of ignorance that keep us passive and content to accept what seems inevitable, self-

imprisoned. In that instant he himself became pure and free. And he did the simple thing. He reached through the illusion that nothing could be done and he touched another.

Certainly the illusion of our helplessness is exacerbated and reinforced by the omnipresent, unreal world of the entertainment industry, intent on holding us in 24-hour distraction from reality. What my young friend understood about himself is true too of this global

pantomime of American politics, reality can itself become the enemy. It can be overwhelmed by a bombardment of lies – though it will never be defeated. In such a world, truth must be shot down and truth-tellers cancelled. But in an instant of true insight all this brutal world of illusion can collapse and we find a wounded butterfly in our hand.

There are, however deceptive, incomplete kinds of compassion. It is natural to feel active compassion for



Image by StockSnap from Pixabay

force of addictive illusion that consumes more and more of our time. It is virtually destroying our capacity to see what he perceived in that instant, the difference between illusion and reality.

He had also been exposed to the truth that we feel compassion for the suffering of *all others*. If it is authentic, and only God's compassion is, it must be felt equally for all creatures and for friend and foe alike. Compassion takes us out of and above ourselves. In this way he experienced how true compassion breaks through the strongest security systems we have designed to keep reality at a safe distance from us. As we see - absurdly and tragically - in the

people of our own party or tribe. American politics is crippled by this self-narrowing which makes us unable even to listen to the other side. The same truth is evident in the revenge tragedy of our day. The hourly moral abominations of the Israel-Palestinian conflict show us, yes on both sides of the conflict, though hardly equally, how compassion can be purposefully blocked against the suffering of the other side. When it is blocked in order to protect our divided view of reality, it is only justified by increasing the suffering of our enemy and our intention to destroy them. But true human compassion reveals the divinity in all of us.

'Kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, shining on good and bad alike, is how Jesus reveals the nature of God. 'And you must be like your heavenly Father.' Compassion for our foes? This must surely be unrealistic? It's as idealistically unworldly as turning around against the tide of common sense to acknowledge the transcendent, tender beauty of a wounded butterfly. The more power and influence we possess or desire, the more brain-washed we are by forces of deception, the more any alternative *will* seem unrealistic. Even if we think it is unrealistic, will *we* say it is untrue? If it seems so unreal, it's probably because it is we who have become unreal and disconnected from our true self and capacity for compassion.

My friend's moment of insight showed him that, when we don't think too much, we can be wise. As he walked to work that morning, he was not drinking from one of the forgotten wells of wisdom I have been speaking about a lot recently and to which humanity needs to reconnect: like sacred scripture or a non-digital connection with the most obvious of all, the beauty of the natural world. Maybe his drinking from these sources of wisdom and his years of meditation, ('on and off' as he would say) helped prepared him for this pure moment. Suddenly he found the most obvious of all wells of wisdom, the one within himself.

*

Looking out over the ocean under a clear sky.

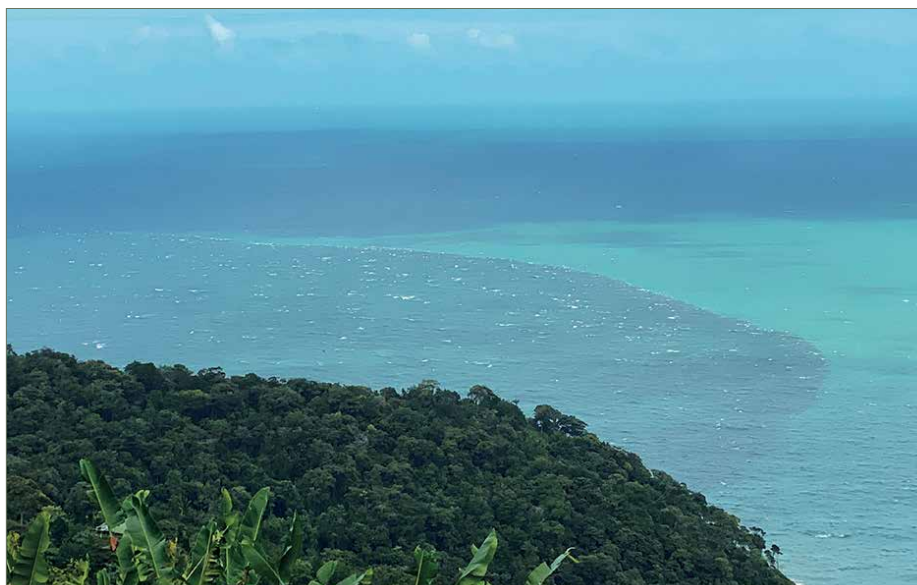
Turn to the left and then to the right, see the great hemisphere that encloses us from our imaginary position in the centre. Behind us is another, unseen, equal hemisphere, an enclosing horizon. Where, so cleanly, the light blue of the sky touches the darker blue of the sea holding all its waves and battalions of white horses. This too is obvious: so

the world must be round. Unless you believe it is flat. But believing something false does not make it true.

Among the beliefs and actions of life some are right and some wrong, often a mixture. But truth exists and truth is also the test of what is good and just. We can deny this. Many do not believe in truth or goodness as absolutes because our dominant worldview is

cells can seem like its deepest validation. 'Science proves it.' For some it proves that consciousness is merely a function of the brain. And so, the best and really only rationale for turning to meditation is that it is a useful tool to make me happier, healthier or wealthier.

If these were theological ideas, they would be pitifully inadequate. They



The Ocean, Trinidad (Photo by Laurence Freeman)

shaped by materialism which claims to be the judge of truth. In the ensuing split between reality and illusion, it seems that we can measure and control everything - whole populations under surveillance, what consumers buy or what enemy to destroy. This self-division has made us dangerously foolish and foolishly dangerous, like arrogant drunk drivers convinced they can drive home. Like those the ancient psalmist described: 'the fool has said in his heart there is no God above'. Even this foolishness craves idols to worship like success, power or celebrity.

There is false and authentic spirituality. The discovery that meditation causes cortical thickening of the brain or improves connections between brain

reject the primal wisdom of humanity, that emerges from the experience of our wholeness, that consciousness is the ground of existence. That meditation leads to transforming consciousness when we stop thinking we are the centre of the world. Meditation is marketed in our transactional world today as a way to increase 'health or 'well-being'. In a wiser world, the 14th century *Cloud of Unknowing* had a different perspective urging us to look after our health so that we can meditate. As I can testify in recent months, it is much harder to meditate when the body is not well. To get me back to meditating properly, I am thankful for medical science, skilled professional care, the love of family and friends, yoga exercises,

warm sunshine and my sometimes-wavering trust in the divine plan.

We are earthen vessels, changeable, emotional, often doubting. But 'God made His light shine in our hearts (and) we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the real power comes from God and not from us'. (2 Cor 4:6-7).

*

Look at the ocean. See how we are contained in a great circle. This is one perspective. Perspective changes whenever things happen to us, for good or ill. We may deny the ill and cling to the pleasant. But life is as changeable as the sea. It always has another surprise for us. Imagine ascending straight upwards from the open ocean and, like an astronaut, seeing the planet from above as a beautiful blue-green and white globe. Go even higher and in another perspective, we'd see it as orbiting a sun in one of countless galaxies. New space telescope images peer deeper than ever into the universe's space-time and stretch our perspectives to new limits. The true scientist who practises science contemplatively is thrilled and humbled with each advance because the more we see the more we know, and the less we understand.

Perspectives can conflict and ideas often mingle good and bad meaning so that we have to struggle in conscience to find the real. The right is rarely right as we first think it is. But discernment is the way to truth and a spiritual process. True spirituality means being willing to have our perspectives continuously altered even though it involves letting go of previously comfortable ways of understanding the world. Surrendering an old for a fresh perspective embraces the way of unknowing as the direct way to wisdom. It is to leave self behind; to lay down our life for our dearest friend, the truth.



Bere Island, Ireland (Photo by Laurence Freeman)

Great teachers of wisdom do not give answers or explanations. They are masters of perspective. Knowing that perspective is unteachable, they wish only for us to see for ourselves. They can transmit everything except our own experience which has to arise from the profound, invisible depths of our uniqueness, our Godlikeness. All their parables and teachings are meant to lead us on the way of transformation of consciousness necessary for the moment of insight to ripen. Their words have been misinterpreted and neutralised by their detractors, and even by their followers. In the case of the Word made flesh, however, there is something more and so obvious that we must always come back to it. It is the entirety of a whole human person: life, death and beyond the horizon of death, all embraced in the Mystery of God.

*

One of the most famous of Buddhist mantras, from the Heart Sutra, begins *Gate, gate, paragate*. It is translated 'gone, gone, all the way over, gone to the other shore of enlightenment'.

In its many voices, wisdom calls us

to 'go, go'. Not half-way but the whole way. It is absolute. Hearing it and feeling an inner response to this call starts our journey, turns us around. Whether after two blocks or decades of delay, it reconnects the real and the illusory in ourselves.

This is a journey of many steps. As on the journey of meditation itself we are not concerned with transient *states* of mind but more with the major stages we pass through. We often have an early intuition when a new stage begins but only time reveals its truth. At each stage there will be an accompanying sense of wonder which is a suspension of our capacity to compare. It is what it is. Under the influence of this wonder perspectives shift and bring on an opportunity for change and fresh growth. It is this moment we must pray and work for today for humanity.

St Paul calls this a way of healing that begins in faith and ends in faith. Faith is the commitment to continuously setting out and going ever beyond. If you want to feel what this means, just say the mantra faithfully at deeper and deeper levels, 'all the way over to the other shore.'

*

The WCCM, including Bonnevaux our spiritual centre, is at such a stage. We are using this year to embrace a process of change and discover new perspectives. When I sensed it beginning last year it was just before my health problems appeared. When they came, I had my moments of fear and a sense of powerlessness – good signs that the Spirit is taking over (as we can say later!).

John Main said to me before he died that everything necessary would be given when it was needed. The last few months have again confirmed it. I felt the skilled, kind, unwavering support and commitment of our leadership, the Guiding Board, the Trustees, our Directors, the National Communities and International Office Team - and especially closely, the Bonnevaux core community. As we shared our sense of new perspective with meditators and national communities, they too could see that we are entering a new stage. The feeling of unity and solidarity is strong. Wherever I feared to find fear or negativity I found a wonderful peaceful power of charity and hope.

Over the last few years there has been rapid and intense growth at Bonnevaux, borne especially by the selfless energy of the core community. We will pause until the summer of this year to reflect on the life of the resident community that many call the 'soul of Bonnevaux'. It will help us share the grace of Bonnevaux with all we welcome 'as Christ himself'. Accordingly, we are re-

ducing events although some, including the Holy Week Retreat and the Young Adults Retreat, will continue. We trust the programme can resume at the end of August, along with the construction of the Contemplative Cloister beginning in early 2025. This trust will be

professional fundraiser, has similarly offered her skills to help us on our way to financial sustainability. Indeed, we are grateful to see, as Fr. John assured us, that what we need is being given.

Change of perspective is always challenging, a dying before life expands



ultimately shaped by the new stage of discernment we have entered.

Bonnevaux is part of the WCCM. Like all organisations today, we are facing challenges calling for new perspectives. In March we will welcome to Bonnevaux a new WCCM Associate Director who will work closely with me and the Bonnevaux and global communities. We will also undertake an 'audit' of the whole organisation of WCCM with the help of a highly experienced professional, a meditator who has offered us his skills for this exciting task we have long felt overdue. Another meditator, a

again. In community we can go through this, reassured that at the deepest level of reality, the personal, the communal and the universal are in harmony. As long as we recognise our wounded butterfly moments and act on them, the energies of wisdom and compassion will carry us forward to new perspectives fuller experience of the great mystery.

With much love

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurence". The signature is written in a cursive style with a flourish at the end.

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News & Articles

John Main Seminar 2024: *Widen Your Tent,* led by Jason Gordon

NEW HARMONY, INDIANA (US), 8-14 JULY

More than thirty years after the WCCM was formed at the John Main Seminar led by Bede Griffiths, Jason Gordon comes to New Harmony to lead a contemporary reflection on where we as a community and as a human family have come. He will raise the question of how we can act hopefully in a collapsing civilisation with such hostile forces of de-humanisation. How can we understand contemplation in this social and spiritual crisis? But in facing these hard questions, he will invite us to consider the twin path of contemplation and synodality: a faith-filled, hopeful way to a better world and a fuller humanity.

In a world collapsing in on itself in a failure to listen and to open to others, the resounding wisdom of Isaiah's call to 'widen your tent' is like a beam of light. It summons us to open our hearts, our ears and our minds in all directions in an ever-widening spirit of universal welcome and solidarity.

Jason has been meditating since the



Image by Ylvers from Pixabay

early years of his priesthood and has long been teaching it in all parts of the church and society. He has also experienced the power of the synodal process at the grassroots level in his spiritual leadership of the Archdiocese of Trinidad and Tobago and later at the global level in Rome. Synodality is simply the ancient wisdom of consultation, attentive conversation in what St Benedict calls 'calling the members to council'. But as Jason will describe the active agent is deep listening which makes it

a contemplative work and the leader of the process is the Spirit. Contemplative experience prepares us and informs such transformative communication and so they should be seen as two sides of one path to recovery.

As always meditation will shape the days of the week's Seminar and there will be sessions too where the listening and mindful sharing of Synodality will be practised (and take the place of the usual silent retreat.) . For more information visit: <https://wccm-int.org/jms2024>

Jason Gordon



The Most Reverend Jason Gordon was born and grew up in Trinidad. At an early age his father died and he successfully assumed the family business. In 1981 he entered Living Water Community, a lay ecclesial community in Trinidad, studied for the priesthood and completed a Master's in Theology at the University of Leuven, Belgium, completing a Master's in Theology (Magna cum Laude) and a BA in Philosophy. He was ordained in 1991 and com-

pleted his PhD at Heythrop, in London, where he first encountered the WCCM. He received awards for his work with disadvantaged youth. In 2017 He was appointed Archbishop of Trinidad and Tobago and is currently the President of the Antilles Episcopal Conference of Bishops. He has authored several books, is a patron of the WCCM and especially supports its mission throughout the Caribbean. Read his full bio on wccm.org

News & Articles

WCCM Theme 2024: *Beholding Divine Beauty - And God Saw That It Was Very Good*

Every year, the WCCM suggests a theme for the general reflection of our members worldwide. In 2024, the theme is **Beholding Divine Beauty: And God Saw That It Was Very Good**. Our events throughout the year will explore Beauty, Goodness and the Act of Creation in all senses, including art, theology and social justice.

In this issue we give you a glimpse of both online events and Bonnevaux on-the-ground retreats in 2024. On-the-ground retreats might be subject to change.



Main Online Series: Beauty, Goodness and the Act of Creation in all senses, including art, theology and social justice



John Philip Newell

16 January - **Charles Taylor**: Reconnecting with the Cosmos in Post-Romantic Poetry
5 March - **Catherine Goodman**: Creativity as a gift of connection
9 April - **John Philip Newell**: Sacred Earth
7 May - **Inge Relph**: Adventure in Uncertainty - Back to the future
4 June - **Marco Schorlemmer**: Being Naturally Intelligent in a Technological society: Recovering the Axiological and Creative Dimensions

23 July - **Diane Tolomeo**: "To See a World in a Grain of Sand"
3 September - **Bernard McGinn**: The Goodness and Beauty of Creation in the Eyes of the Mystics
15 October - **Sarah Bachelard**: Consecrated Ground: Realising Earth's Goodness
12 November - **Guy Claxton**: Teenage Mystics: Educating Our Saviours To Be
10 December - **Robert Johnson**: The Mystical Language of Music: Dylan, Son or Daughter of the Sea

Into the Mystics online series with Prof Bernard McGinn

23 January - **Augustine of Hippo**, respondent is Margaret Lane
21 February - **Bernard of Clairvaux**, respondent is Mark Burrows
19 March - **Francis and Clare of Assisi**, respondent is Daniel Horan OFM
23 April - **Meister Eckhart**, respondent is Rebecca Stephens
28 May - **Teresa of Avila**, respondent is Bernard McGinn
25 June - **Francis de Sales**, respondent

is Prof Edward Howells
24 September - **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**, respondent is Gemma Simmonds
23 October - **Edith Stein**, respondent is Peter Tyler
26 November - **Etty Hillesum**, respondent is Liz Watson
17 December - **John Main**, presenter is Laurence Freeman and respondent is Bernard McGinn

Other options online

The programme includes extra options: **Contemporary Anxiety** (a contemplative response to three of the big issues facing us in the 21st century), **Learning to Meditate**, **The Space Between Words** (both with Laurence Freeman), and many more. Check out the full programme at <https://wccm.org/events>

News & Articles

New Opportunities for Young Adults



These are the main projects planned for Meditation and Young Adults under the leadership of Taynã Malaspina:

Integral Education and Spiritual Intelligence for Universities and Schools Project

An integral education articulates the potential without prejudice to anyone.

Phase 1: Definition of the Research Sample (Selected Countries)

Phase 2: A research project with young people, parents, educators, and academic directors to identify unmet needs and resources used to develop spirituality.

Phase 3: Designing the programme methodology and pre- and post-project evaluation tools.

Phase 4: Implementation of the pilot project.

Youth Council

The council was reorganised after World Youth Day 2023, and is composed of eight young people from different countries discussing projects and bringing insights to future projects.

Young Adults Retreat in Brazil

The retreat, to be facilitated by oblates Taynã Malaspina, Carlos Siqueira, and Ida Mara Freire, is scheduled 31 May to 2 June. The aim is to cater to young people

International Young Adults Retreat

This annual retreat will happen at Bonnevaux from 30 July to 4 August, led by Fr. Laurence, Fr. Patricio, Taynã Malaspina and Giovanni Felicioni. The theme is **Where has the Joy gone? Reconnecting with our True Selves**. The Young Lives Project at Oxford University reports a sharp reversal in the upward trend of young people's well-being, replaced by widespread anxiety and depression. For the first time in the 20-year study, young people are much less confident about themselves and their futures. As a community we support this generation of young adults through meditation practice linked to local and global community experience of friendship. This retreat is an opportunity for young people to share the shadow so that they can feel the light and return to life enlightened by the spirit.

from Latin America who are unable to attend the retreats in Europe.

Young Channel on Insight Timer

Insight Timer is a very popular free meditation app. We developed 20 introductory meditation audios for young audiences in Portuguese (How to meditate; The origin of Christian meditation; John Main, Living in the Present Moment, etc.). The second phase will produce the same material in English.

Course: Meditation and Life Project

Many young people are experiencing a crisis of meaning and are overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety, anguish, and meaninglessness. This programme aims to support them, to help them reflect on their choices, begin the contemplative journey through meditation, re-

cover the experience of the sacred in their daily lives, and finally build a life project in line with their values and their essence. The course was initially launched in Portuguese, and an English version will be ready in March.

Online Group

Formation of an online Christian meditation group for young people, encouraging young people to start local projects.

Actions in partnership with the Laudato Si' movement

Partnership with the Laudato Si' movement to publicise initiatives, joint events, and communication materials.

Formation of a study group: *Laudato Deum*. Learn more about our complete programme for Young Adults: <https://wccm-int.org/youngmed>

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Songs and Sacrifice

MAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS AS THE EARTH SUFFERS

BY JIM GREEN



Image by Peggychoucair from Pixabay

“The world sings of an infinite Love: how can we fail to care for it?” This is one of the questions – perhaps the most important question of all – posed by Pope Francis towards the end of his apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, published on October 4th, 2023. A fitting day to share his words of encouragement, being the feast of St Francis – the instinctive ecologist who heard that song of infinite love and responded to it so joyfully and unreservedly. The choice of the papal name directs our attention constantly towards that readiness to listen and to enter into right relationship with our dear siblings: all the creatures of the Earth and, indeed, Earth herself.

Laudate Deum comes as an addendum to Pope Francis’s celebrated encyclical of 2015, *Laudato si’*, which did so much to change the culture of global debate and fed into the significant advances made that same year at COP 21 in Paris. He pulls no punches in making it clear why he feels the need to speak urgently once again “to all people of good will”, explaining that over the past eight years “I have realized that our responses have not been adequate, while the world

in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point.” What Pope Francis hopes for, he makes clear, must come from each one of us and – crucially – must also come in the form of “major political decisions on the national and international level”. To make a reality of our response to the song of infinite love, there are choices to be made by all of us, at every level – perhaps, really, at every moment – of our lives.

The swell of feeling about these issues is strong among many members of our meditation community. That yearning to listen to the Earth and to join with her song as part of the healing chorus has given rise to a number of initiatives and responses nurtured by Meditatio: *Contemplating Earth*, an online self-directed, multi-media course; a series of international *Earth Crisis Forums*; an *Earth Crisis* blog where members of the community can share their concerns, their grief, their information and their hope; an *Earth Crisis* weekly online meditation group where members come to listen to each other and to sit together in attentive, open-hearted silence.

After one of these recent online

meditation sessions, a member of the group shared that – after long and painful reflection – she and her husband had decided to cancel the long-distance flights and the train tickets that would have taken them to a much looked-forward-to retreat. Refunds were not possible – they lost a large amount of money. “I had thought, oh well – let’s just make this the last time we fly such a distance,” she explained. But that thought didn’t work. What they were proposing to do felt deeply at odds with the changes they saw had to be made. The tickets were cancelled.

The story isn’t offered as an ethical stick with which to beat those who flew to that retreat, or who fly to any other destination in the world. Choices have to be made in the context of unique and complex lives. The same member of the group said that she would still make some airplane trips within the US to see family members 3,000 miles away. Because she *had to*. But she decided that she didn’t *have to* fly to the retreat. It didn’t harmonize with the way she heard, and wanted to sing, the song of infinite love. The gift of her example is that it brings us to the important questions we need to keep asking: Do I *have to* buy those new clothes? Do I *have to* take that car journey? Do I *have to* eat meat? (Or so much meat?) Do I *have to* have my money where it supports the extraction of fossil fuels? Do I *have to* join in with Christmas as a retail bonanza? Do I *have to* remain ignorant of, or indifferent to the values and policies of our political leaders?

And, of course, as we ask ourselves these vital questions, *do I have to?* will at some point change into the much ►

News & Articles

more interesting question of *do I want to?* It roots the 'problem' in a deeper part of our being and starts to indicate the way forward, the possibility of making a choice and knowing a greater sense of fulfilment than any new clothes, new gadgets, fresh meat or long-distance travel can ever possibly provide. The practice of meditation can open up for us, perhaps for the first time, the possibility of connecting with the deepest resonance of *do I want to?* We begin to hear another question: what does it want? What does the Earth and its song (of which I am a part) want? Entering into contemplative silence allows, as Mother Julian of Norwich puts it, the *oneing* of that want and my own. It also helps us get closer to the questions Pope Francis, in *Laudate Deum*, urges us to sit with: "What is the meaning of my life? What is the meaning of my time on this earth? And what is the ultimate meaning of all my work and effort?"

Exploring this path through each of our individual lives might help us to have a completely different understanding and experience of sacrifice. Jesus has already given us a clue: "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" The pain of some financial loss or of breaking old habits can be considerable but are short-lived when held against the possibility of living a life that feels authentic, that is ready – no matter how clumsily or incompletely – to respond to the Earth's song of infinite love.

And, at the organisational and structural level, how much pain is involved in the sacrifice of – for instance – dis-



Image by Silvia from Pixabay

entangling your finances from a bank that invests in fossil fuel exploration and extraction? (As Christian Aid has just successfully managed to do, getting its money out of Barclays.) Some pain perhaps - in terms of logistics and overcoming inertia - but such a step is surely one to be celebrated in the process of healing and recovering from an unreal life in an unreal world. Every organisation of good will – the World Community for Christian Meditation included – has a duty to look at all of its activities, the implications of its financial arrangements, its travel requirements - every aspect of its life, to ensure that we are not failing to care for our common home.

At the live online presentation of *Laudate Deum*, Johan Rockström, a leading scientist of global sustainability, urged us to free ourselves from unhelpful – and just plain mistaken – ideas around sacrifice. He pointed out that what we are dealing with is wrongly characterised as simply an "environmental crisis". Properly understood, it is a challenge to "human dignity, wellbeing, health, security, peace and economic stability".

The way to safeguard all of that is to face up to the reality of the climate crisis and to take action. There is, he insists, no need to go along with the old narrative that this will involve crippling costs and that there will be painful sacrifices to be made. Embracing the need to change is the only way to avoid the otherwise inevitable social instability, conflict and economic chaos. It can be clearly demonstrated that it is the path to a "smarter, cheaper, more modern and attractive" way of life.

We have the technology to do it, only the will is missing. If the will can be found and harnessed, then leaving our old and damaging way of life is no sacrifice at all, if we understand sacrifice as pure loss and nothing else. But Jesus has given us a clue about this as well, not just in his words, but in his death and his life. There is, we have been shown, everything to be gained, to be loved, to be sung. As Johan pointed out, "All we have to do is simply change the story."

"The world sings of an infinite Love: how can we fail to care for it?"

Get involved! Visit the Earth Crisis: Climate and Ecology page at https://wccm-int.org/med_eccm

In Focus

Jose Cuervo Castro, Colombia/Canada



My exploration of meditative practices started in the context of psychological training and the search for tools to improve my mental and physical well-being. Given that I have been very involved in the Christian tradition, I started to wonder: is there a way I could meditate as a way of prayer? As a way of deepening my awareness of the presence of God? I soon became aware of Christians who integrated methods of Eastern traditions with contemplative spirituality and started to practice them. Later, I was introduced to WCCM, and I felt surprised at the existence of such a community in the Christian tradition. It made me think that the legacy of the desert fathers, the “prayer of the

heart” was still alive.

During and after the pandemic, given the stress and personal challenges of that time, meditation became an essential part of my life. I realized that I could not afford to live at the surface of my being, that I could not live immersed in my mind. The glimpses of bliss, presence and clarity in the previous years of meditation nourished in me a yearning for a different way of being, and for this to become my dwelling place. But I realized I could not walk

encouraged me to continue. I especially remember the meditation hall at Bonnevau, in which the prayers and scriptures of the Christian tradition, full of the spiritual power of divine love, were integrated with times of stillness, simplicity and silence. I was amazed also at the inclusion of sacred texts from mystical traditions of the East, which I appreciate and respect and which have influenced me deeply.

I would also say that meditation, in a way that I do not fully understand, has immensely enriched my Christian life. It has deepened my relationship with Christ, present in the Eucharist and scripture, spaces that feel denser with life and mystery. It has also increased my awareness of the presence of God in all circumstances of life, and despite my limitations and tendency to distraction, this Presence continues to invite me constantly to open my eyes to it. I also feel invited to God as a mystery, one that I cannot grasp, comprehend or fully understand, as Love that is infinite and inexhaustible. Finally, I want to express my gratitude to WCCM, since through the support of this tradition I started to see my meditation practice as an act of love, as self-giving, as “getting out of the way” so love can act freely in me.

I would also say that meditation, in a way that I do not fully understand, has enriched immensely my Christian life.

this path alone, that I wanted to be in the presence of people who I could walk with and who could support me in the journey. This is why I decided to go to a retreat for young adults in Bonnevau in 2022 and to the World Youth Day with WCCM in 2023. These events, and the encounters that happened during them, reaffirmed my commitment to the contemplative path and



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Would you like to contribute to the WCCM Newsletter? Our next deadline is 15 March.

Events & Resources

Bonnevaux Retreats Calendar

The retreat centre at Bonnevaux is in a period of transition, and we are therefore pausing retreats at Bonnevaux from April to August 2024 to review the situation. These are some of the retreats planned for before and after that break:

27 February - 03 March - **Spirituality and the Arts in the Benedictine Tradition**, with Cynthia Bourgeault (fully booked)

23 - 31 March - **Sacred Life is Death and Resurrection** - Holy Week Retreat, with Laurence Freeman

30 July - 4 August - **Where has the Joy gone? Reconnecting with our True Selves** - Young Adults Retreat, with Fr Laurence, Fr Patricio, Taynā Malaspina and Giovanni Felicioni (see more on page 8).

24 - 29 September - **Flesh, Truth,**



and Sacred Body: Exploring Dance and Movement as a Spiritual Journey, with Ida Mara Freire.

08 - 13 October - **“And the song remains beautiful”** with Mark S. Burrows.

19 - 24 November - **The Marriage of**

Wisdom and Prophecy with Br. Martin.

03-08 December - **The Beginning is Faith, the End is Love** - An Advent Retreat with Laurence Freeman.

Check out more information at <https://bonnevauxwccm.org>

Monte Oliveto Retreat: invitation to Silence

This year’s Monte Oliveto retreat is an invitation into deeper silence in the form of a WCCM Intensive Silent Retreat. “There is nothing so much like God as silence”. This mystical truth is proven when we discover that silence allows us to be who we are and God to be who God is. Each morning Fr Laurence will give a short teaching on this theme, **It Is What It Is: We Are**

Who We Are, which takes on more meaning as your own experience of silence expands. Frequent meditation, a simple eucharist, a short daily meeting with your guide, natural beauty, healthy and delicious Italian food and the friendship of the monastic community beside us – all these elements support and enrich this week’s experience.

**It Is What It Is:
We Are Who We Are**

Monte Oliveto Silent Retreat
6 – 13 October 2024
Led by Laurence Freeman
With translation into Italian and Portuguese
For more information:
<https://wccm-int.org/mo2024>

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The disciplines of meditation allow God to ‘live in us’

by Roland Ashby

The disciplines of meditation are critical to becoming receptive to the being of God, and learning to be the people we are created to be, Sarah Bachelard said in November.

Leading a retreat at Pallotti College, near Warburton in Victoria, 12-17 November, on the theme *The Priority of Being*, Dr Bachelard said the disciplines of meditation, “the simple, repetitive, undramatic disciplines of taking the attention off ourselves, and off our thoughts and feelings, are critical. These disciplines are what lead us beyond ourselves; they’re our way out of the trap of self-consciousness.”

These disciplines, she said, provide a process “of letting God live in us”.

Dr Bachelard is a theologian, retreat leader and founder of the Benedictus Contemplative Church, based in Canberra. She is a leading teacher within the WCCM, and she gave the 2019 John Main Seminar on the theme *A Contemplative Christianity for our Time*. Her books include *Experiencing God in a Time of Crisis*, and *Poetica Divina: Poems to Redeem a Prose World*.

During the six day retreat, which was organised by the Victorian Committee of WCCMA, Dr Bachelard explored in illuminating depth* the core elements of the John Main practice of meditation – stillness, silence and simplicity.

Stillness, she said, is about “recollection; becoming present, being here and now, our whole focus turned to God. Without this, there’s little

possibility of live encounter – since I am not sufficiently available to be encountered.”

Moreover, stillness is about trust. She said that when Pharaoh and the Egyptians were advancing on the Israelites, “Moses told the people not to be afraid ... ‘The Lord will fight for you, and you only have to keep still’” (Exodus 14:10-14)

“What the Israelites really want is to take control of this terrifying situation for themselves ... But Moses calls them to a different course – the necessity of waiting on God’s action.”

“To cede control of growth, maturation, deepening love ... really, really to let ‘the Lord fight for you’ isn’t

Continued over page

The disciplines of meditation allow God to ‘live in us’ – from page 13

(for me at least) easy. It’s an insight to be revisited over and over again.”

Dr Bachelard then considered the practice of silence, and in particular how the mantra enables the work of silence.

The mantra, she said, is a method “for starting to tame our discursive, distracted thought”; and it moves us into a liminal space in which we can “glimpse something beyond our fragmented self-consciousness”.

“Simplicity has to do with being present to God, without conditions and without reserve, not hedging our bets or dividing our loyalties.”

As the practice deepens, the mantra, she added, “leads us to a different level of attention”. At this point, “we simply give ourselves to the mantra, we cleave to it with all our heart, mind and strength. John Main speaks of a ‘work of love’ ... Martin Laird speaks of becoming ‘one’ with the prayer word. Here the word is not one thing and God somewhere else; rather the word is our prayer, our friend; it is the ‘one thing necessary’;

it is how we enact our consent to yield ourselves beyond the observation of the self-conscious self, our entry into the ‘cloud of knowing’. And here the words of Simone Weil come alive – ‘attention is the substance of prayer’.

“This work is our prayer. And the more wholly and generously given we are to the mantra, for its own sake – not with an ‘in order to’, but just because this is our prayer – the more we are turning from

self to Other.”

The third element of meditation that Dr Bachelard reflected on was simplicity.

“Simplicity has to do with oneness, single-mindedness, whole-heartedness. It’s opposite, then, is dividedness, double-mindedness, half-heartedness. Simplicity has to do with being present to God, without conditions and without reserve, not hedging our bets or dividing our loyalties.

“In his discussion of purity of heart, Rowan Williams refers to the story of Martha and Mary. ‘Mary sees that one thing is necessary and directs her desire to that’. For Williams, it’s ‘a story about integrity and fragmentation – wanting one thing, [as opposed to] wanting all kinds of things’.

Williams goes on: ‘Purity of heart involves and includes poverty’. This is because it involves the willingness to be dispossessed of what is not God, letting go extraneous ambitions, securities and distractions. Ultimately, it involves the willingness to be dispossessed of one’s very self ...

“To become simple, one-pointed, pure in heart means going beyond self-consciousness, self-reflexivity: ‘the eye that sees but does not see itself’.”

**Lack of space does not allow for sufficient coverage here.*

See Roland’s blog, *Living Water*, at www.thelivingwater.com.au

1. Rowan Williams, *The Truce of God: Peacemaking in Troubled Times* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005) p91

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.



Volunteering at *Campfire in the Heart*

by Fran Pegrem

It has been my delight to volunteer at *Campfire in the Heart* during October this year. After attending a retreat there in July with our David's Place community, I felt drawn to come back and be a part of this amazing place.

Being there for a week was a wonderful taste, and we experienced many of the joys of being in Mbantua (Alice Springs), including going out on Country to the Telegraph Station and Simpson's Gap, where we had the opportunity of reflecting on the history of the place and just being in the environment and listening to what it was saying to us. We also were welcomed to both the Uniting and Catholic Church communities and Keith and Stella's home at White Gums.

Being there for four weeks was a really good amount of time because it gave me the chance to get to know the place a bit better, and to really experience the many aspects of *Campfire in the Heart* more deeply. Being able to assist Nicola, the Manager, was a joy and the fact that I was able to be a part of and support the two different retreats really enriched my time there. So many interesting and wonderful people to get to know, so much to reflect upon. Being accepted as a part of



the that little community of Nicola, Jorge and Huss, plus the visitors who came to the Monday evening meditation, the Tuesday Contemplative Book Club and the Wednesday evening pot luck supper and campfire reflection, was precious to me. So many other experiences of welcome and community punctuated my time there, but the enduring memory is of the deep silence, the birds, the magnificent skies, sunrises and sunsets, campfires, spending time in meditation, listening to people and the country. I had a real sense of freedom and joy being there and would love to return.

A few words about volunteering from Judi Taylor...

<https://campfireintheheart.com.au>

Campfire in the Heart welcomes enquiries from those who would like to volunteer, as Fran says, to be part of the small community there, part of the vision for the place, in the ancient and wondrous setting of the Eastern MacDonnell Ranges, 7km from Alice Springs/Mbantua. The details are here Applications to volunteer:

<https://forms.gle/zgS5Z9f4EKDtXcbpp9>

Next year a particular opportunity exists to volunteer as a meditator-in-residence:

- staying a minimum of 2 months, up to 6 months
- a spiritual presence to work with and complement the offerings of the mangers there
- to offer daily times of meditation in the WCCM tradition
- embodying the Benedictine values of hospitality, generosity and humility for all who visit *Campfire in the Heart*.

We are calling for expressions of interest among WCCM meditators both internationally and within Australia.

See below for Campfire in the Heart WCCM affiliated retreats in 2024.

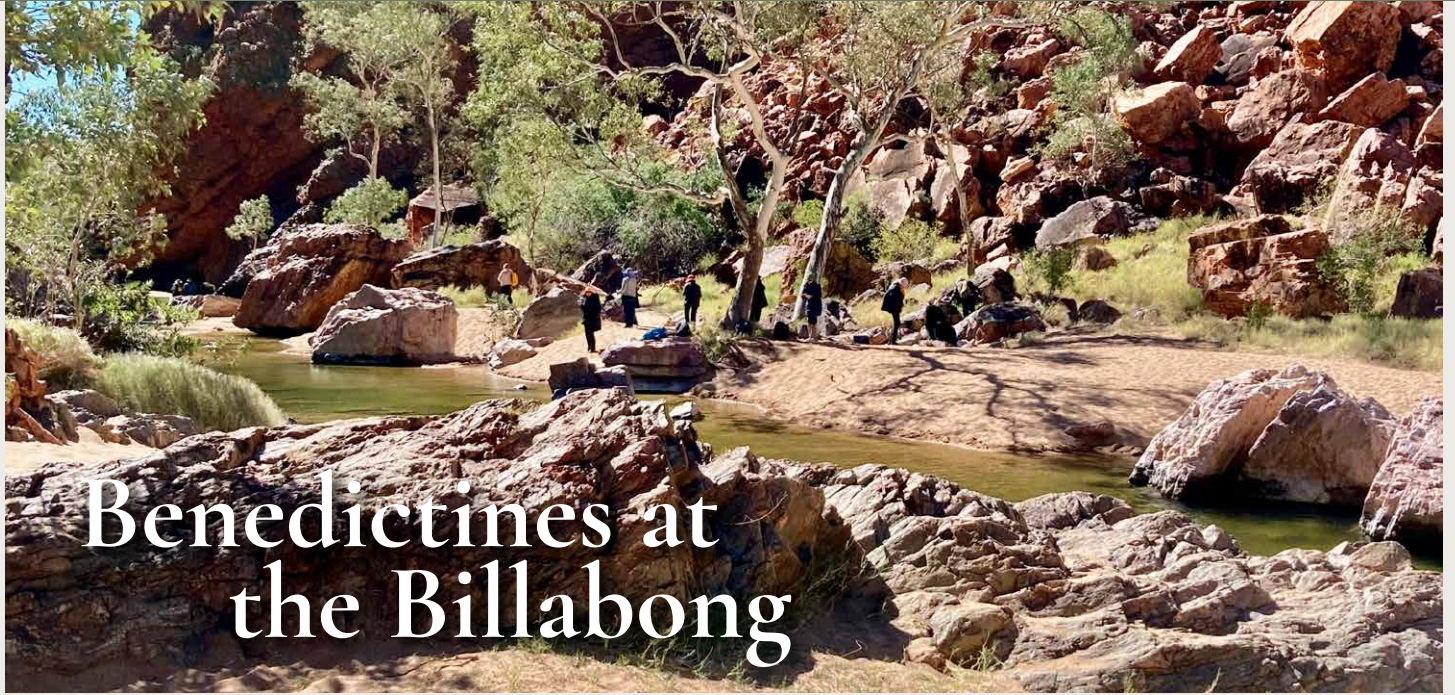
Campfire in the Heart WCCM affiliated retreats in 2024 ...

See <https://campfireintheheart.com.au> for more detail and to register

- **28 April-3 May** – 5 day interfaith retreat *Exploring the Pilgrim Path of the Labyrinth, a call to the Sacred Centre* with Donna Mulhearn, Judi and Paul Taylor
- **10 -15 May** – 5 day retreat, with Judi and Paul Taylor, a Christian meditation retreat *Beholding Divine Beauty*
- **11-16 August** – 5 day retreat, with Bernard McGrath osb, *Mind the Gaps or Gaps and Giant Caterpillars*
- **25-30 August** – 5 day retreat, with Bernard McGrath osb, *Desert, Dangers and Divine Disinterest ... the Need to Pray Without Ceasing*

Details will be on the website soon or feel free to email taylor.judi@outlook.com with enquiries.





Benedictines at the Billabong

by Joy Hayes

In July 2023, 14 oblates from around Australia responded to a call to be pilgrims at Alice Springs in Central Australia, on a national oblate retreat. This landscape is characterised by dry sandy creek beds, giant ranges of yellow, red and ochre, vibrant blue skies, wind and cold – and everything between light and dark.

Campfire in the Heart, the retreat centre, is situated in the East MacDonnell Ranges. It was established 20 years ago by meditators David and Sue Woods and now continues in the safe hands of oblates Judi and Paul Taylor. We were in a splendid bush setting, with varied flora and fauna. A Chartes style labyrinth, created with red earth and red stone demarcations was life-giving and healing. The campfire, set in a circle of seats, was perpetually lit. It challenged us to see, to listen, and to be. The circle embraced us, and we it. There were many transcendent experiences, treasures for us to take home in remembrance.

A walk into the East MacDonnell Ranges on our arrival was a sacred walking pilgrimage. Memories of the songlines of our indigenous, and the treks of early explorers came to mind, and we left our footsteps on the earth.

We had a precious Welcome to Country by Mali, a beautiful indigenous lady. As we sat around the campfire she shared how by listening deeply we could hear the groan of of the land and the gumtrees

drinking water. In the silence she opened us to feel the spirit of the land. In seeing deeply our faces shone in the desert landscape – Beaté Derek, Judi, Paul, Josephine, Mary, April, Barbara, Cheryl, Gloria, Janet, Lorraine, Adele and Joy.

A pilgrimage to Simpsons Gap in the West MacDonnell Ranges was splendid. Known as *Rungutjirpa* to the Arrernte Aboriginal people, dreaming trails and stories cross at this important spiritual site. In the footsteps of our indigenous ancestors we walked to the gap and had

lunch by the billabong, sitting under the gumtrees. It was reflective, a space full of majesty, wonder and awe.

The retreat days were filled with a deep sense of community. They were marked by the rhythm of the daily office, prayer, meditation, kitchen duties and some silence. We had a moving ceremony in the prayer room of receiving Cheryl and Adele as Novices and the renewal of Oblation vows for everyone else.

A post retreat pilgrimage took us to some sacred aboriginal sites which were inspiring. We could feel the land beneath our feet, drawing us into its embrace. We were called to be desert pilgrims at the heart of our nation. We left transformed, each in our own way, and open to the insights that will come in the future.

Our Benedictine Oblate community was strengthened by this time together. In this place, in the busyness, in the silence and in the stillness we could feel the fire in the heartbeat of God.





Judi Taylor, Beate Steller, Fr Laurence Freeman, Derek Steller and Paul Taylor—at our final oblation at Bonnevaux Centre for Peace, September 2023.

Why we became Oblates

by Beate and Derek Steller

It was in Shantivanam, Fr Bede Griffith's ashram in India, that we learned of Christian mediation over thirty years ago. Each morning and evening we sat on the banks of the Cauvery River learning to say our mantra and listening to the wisdom of John Main.

We were travelling for a year after getting married and were visiting intentional communities to see if we were drawn to any of them. We had no idea that 33 years later we would be at the Bonnevaux Centre for Peace, taking sacred promises to support and grow as part of the world-wide WCCM oblate community. We were in this beautiful sacred place, connecting with the spirit of Bede Griffith and with a contemplative community with a vision broad enough to encompass the traditions of East and West. So how did we end up here?

On returning from our year of travel we quickly settled into the 'householder' stage of life with a young family. We continued to meditate most days and formed our own small community during the years of raising children. Jamberoo Abbey south of Sydney was a precious spiritual oasis for us during these years, giving us a space for renewal in the business of life. It was only when our boys finished school that we felt a natural drawing to meditate with others. We joined local meditation groups and by chance heard of the Interfaith meditation group in North Sydney that Paul and Judi Taylor were convening. Paul and Judi have been wonderful friends and role-models

as oblates over the past 10 years. We learned of the oblate path through them, however we each have different stories on how we came to decide to become oblates.

Beate's story began with her time at Shantivanam several years before meeting Derek... "I was in my early 20s when I went to India and spent a long time at the ashram. This was a life changing experience in which my personal and spiritual world was opening to new ways of seeing. Although I continued to be connected to the Benedictine tradition for a long time, I have now come to a point in my life where I want to take it deeper and grow further. So now, 40 years later, through the joys and pains of life, discovering the gift of motherhood and learning through leaning into life itself, I feel I'm returning to a more serious, committed spiritual path in becoming an oblate with WCCM. To take this step together with Derek has been especially profound for me. We are supporting each other on our journey and consciously share a commitment of stability, obedience and conversion through the practices of meditation, spiritual reading, and service for God. As I described my experience at the Oblation ceremony; 'becoming an oblate with WCCM has been a journey of home-coming'."

Derek's journey towards becoming an oblate goes back five years to an intense inner conflict relating to work direction... "In the midst of the conflict I had a sense of being called to surrender to the Divine more deeply. While self-surrender is the work of a lifetime (still in progress!)

what's grown within me over this time is the deepening sense that my spiritual life is less about myself as an individual, and more about a service to something beyond me that is growing in the world. I am drawn to be a part of this process and to support it in some small way.

Being of service is primarily about doing the inner work of meditation and transformation. The calling to the oblate path comes out of this and has emerged as an outer structure or form to support it. In the oblate community we can join together with others who have the same purpose and intention of bringing meditation into the world, and God willing, as an energy that can change the world."

Over the past two years we entered the process of formation as oblates within the Sydney cell group and with our mentors. We came to Bonnevaux to volunteer in the community as a part of this formation and were delighted to have the opportunity to receive our final oblation with Fr Laurence and the community there. While we don't know what the future holds, we both feel that the sacred promises we have taken as oblates have launched us on a new life path.

In taking this journey, we are very grateful to our mentors, Anne-Marie Doecke and Barb Hoare for their encouragement and wisdom, and to Judi and Paul Taylor for their example of living a dedicated oblate life. We have also greatly appreciated the support of Gloria Duffy, the National Oblate coordinator, and the gentle and kind guidance of the Sydney Cell Group.

Living out meditation practice in contemporary culture

by Pam Nair

I live in Brisbane and am Malaysian by birth. I came to know about the WCCM Malaysia 30th Anniversary Pilgrimage to France and Bonnevaux through my contact with Fr Gerard Theraviam. I was privileged to attend the Pilgrimage (thanks to Dr Patricia Por, the Malaysian WCCM Coordinator) and was blessed by the many friendships I have since formed with these inspiring meditators.

In Brisbane, I belong to a WCCM group of ecumenical meditators and we meet every Thursday in the mornings where we meditate and then listen to a reflection by Fr Laurence Freeman.

Since my WCCM pilgrimage in May, I have been reflecting further on the sacred value of meditating and I offer below a reflection in light of my time at Bonnevaux (pictured right).



Born a cradle Catholic, my prayer life has evolved over the years from the usual family devotional style of prayers: 8pm kneeling and reciting the Rosary and Litanies to the louder than loud Praise & Worship in my 20s until I discovered the gems imbedded in the Christian Scriptures whilst studying Theology at the Pius XII Seminary here in Brisbane.

The Word came alive in a new way for me and thus began my commitment to the *Lectio divina* – a time of dialogue with God that embraces my whole self: thoughts, images, memories, hope ... etc. This contemplative manner of prayer, guides me in my self-reflections and in my engagement to counsel those who seek my expertise as a Clinical Mental Health Practitioner. Yet I desired and thirst for more...

I recognised that my professional world of words and sacred narratives of individual stories would sometimes be a cognitive overload and despite using known unwinding strategies like journaling, supervision, walking (whilst angels talk...); yoga, a good glass of red etc., these still did not cut it, so about a decade ago I decided to simply **sit and be**. I had by then already started attending a couple of retreats when Fr Laurence was in town and subscribing to the *WCCM Newsletter* (hard copy I must say as nothing beats the touch and feel of words!).

Gradually, my prayer time took on more the ritual of *Lectio Divina* followed by meditation using a mantra. There were 'peak experiences' (to use Abraham

Maslow's terminology)¹ during this prayer discipline but I also had to live 'off-peak' in the messiness of human stories and tragedies of grief and loss. However one thing I began to recognise in my own life was that I was able to **hold** these sacred narratives in a loving and supporting manner without feeling overwhelmed. The words of counsel that I would convey sometimes even surprised me as the words of wisdom were beyond my own human intellect or skillset. I began to recognise and attribute these 'wins' to my discipline of meditation.

Reflecting further, I was beginning to understand that most human/ cultural experiences i.e. the way we think, live, feel, respond based on our value systems, and celebrate life can sometimes be a dichotomy between *Lectio divina* and culture. Almost 50 years ago Pope Paul VI spoke of this tragedy of our times² and if only we can learn to live a more congruent life. Culture continues to bombard our senses and fill our minds and much of the time we are oblivious of its sway on us. If only we can learn to bridge this gap and herein I believe lies the answer – **meditation!**

Despite being trained in various modalities of therapeutic practices and its associated strategies, and with 30 odd years of clinical experiences, I come back to the basics as an intervention – **sit and be**. I have begun to advocate as a starting point this strategy to my clients – the discipline of meditation to deal with grief, loss, and anger, the seductiveness of addictions and the pressures of life etc.

More and more there is a real and positive regard for the power of meditation so that tranquillity replaces fretfulness, thoughtfulness replaces busyness, and the desire for instant satisfaction (in a fast-food/world) is replaced by considerate attention to the working of the Spirit and for the common good of all. A beautiful quote from St Augustine comes to mind – God is *intimior intimo meo*³ deeper within me than my own inner self. In the unseen recesses of our soul Creator meets creature, Divine Spirit meets human spirit. Further Karl Rahner's renowned maxim "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he (sic) will not exist at all"⁴ espouses the importance as we continue our journey of seeking God as individuals and as collective.

Through the discipline of meditation we begin to experience a deep centered interiority (a kind of everyday mysticism) and it is not as if we are called to escape from our cultural setting. It is also not about being self-centered (inward looking), rather I believe that because of our discipline of meditation, the fruits and effectiveness of this discipline influences us to be 'better' human beings and to relate to the our common earth and all peoples in a way that "acts justly, loves tenderly and walks humbly with God."⁵

May we become what we receive.

1. A. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, New York, Penguin, 1964.
2. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), No. 20.
3. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 3, 6, 11.
4. K. Rahner *Theological Investigations* 20, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981, 149.
5. *Micah* 6:8

Living joyfully with uncertainty: On retreat at Bonnevaux

by Tristan Guzman

“Your position is being made redundant,” are not the words I wanted to hear three weeks out from a trip to Europe.

But sometimes, life does not give us what we want. It gives us what we need to start over.

And here I was, on the verge of flying to Europe for two compelling reasons: Visiting Bonnevaux for the first time to attend the John Main Seminar, *New Wine, New Wineskins* and to catch up with my relatives in the UK.

I last connected with the Christian meditation community in Europe a decade ago when I stayed at Ealing, London before going on pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago in Spain. And Bonnevaux, now the beating contemplative heart of the community, was calling me back.

It was a quiet, sunny afternoon when my taxi pulled into Bonnevaux. I could see why it was named as such – ‘Beautiful Valley’. At the end of the driveway was the old farm including the stables and barn converted into a modern retreat centre and accommodation while maintaining its rustic charm.

A little down the hill interspersed with oak trees was the farm chateau built on the remains of a 12th century abbey. Alongside was a stone chapel and a Chartres inspired labyrinth to walk.

For the next week, Bonnevaux was my home. A sanctuary for myself and about 60 other retreatants as we all came together from various backgrounds and stages of our life journeys to practice meditation, be in community and grapple with deeply thought through teachings by Fr Laurence, Cynthia Bourgeault and Andrew Harvey.

The teachings that resonated with me centred around the core theme of the conference. That we are living in difficult times where traditional structures (religion, government institutions, capitalism etc) are being questioned, and that this reflects a greater pattern in the evolution of consciousness. Cynthia unpacked this in detail focusing on



Gebser’s work in ‘The Everpresent Origin’.

Contemplation must play a crucial role in the birthing of this new reality where structures ‘new wineskins’ can grow so that a more compassionate, enlightened approach to our existence ‘new wine’ can nourish communities, and the wellbeing of ourselves and the planet.

I remember Fr Laurence saying, “The winemaker tramples me. The crushing of grapes is the necessary process in creating new wine. It helps us continue to flourish through times of loss and loneliness.”



Loss and loneliness. Two recurring themes in many of our lives and yet, the past few months particularly have been formative for me. The trip to Europe, the retreat at Bonnevaux, walking the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral, the people I met, ideas encountered and a slew of other activities since returning home have been stitching together a new wineskin in my life.

From this new wineskin a series of affirmations have poured forth that, like

the yellow arrows on the Camino, have helped give me what has been needed to start over and guide me on the path of resilience as I journey from the known into the unknown with the job hunt and whatever else may come.

They are: To be joyful. To be patient. To ‘do the work that must be done’ – a statement inspired by Fr John Main’s last words to Fr Laurence Freeman. To serve the growing Christ – Bede Griffiths last words to Andrew Harvey. To listen deeply from the heart. To let go. To not control the outcome. And finally, to love.

Joy and love. There were so many moments like that at Bonnevaux. Little things like enjoying the aroma of freshly baked bread wafting from the kitchen to sneakily showing a fellow Aussie retreatant, Paul Taylor, my vegemite jar at our ‘silent’ breakfast, which almost caused him to trip as he laughed. Or one time walking along a track feeling a little despondent only to look up and see a wooden cross on a tree, reminding me that God is never too far away.

There was also the amazing ‘entertainment’ night where we ‘the Australians’ banded together and turned the place into a rock concert for ten minutes with our musical performance of ‘Hey Mate’ (*Hey Jude*). We even had Cynthia Bourgeault get up and dance with us on stage! That and many more moments filled my cup while staying at Bonnevaux.



www.wccmaustralia.org.au

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