



Stillpoint

Stillpoint is the official magazine of the New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation

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National School Retreat at Tyburn Monastery, Ngakuru

A report from Nick Polaschek

NZCCM recently held the fourth National School retreat at Tyburn monastery, Ngakuru, near Rotorua on 8-14 October. Tyburn monastery is located in a beautiful rural setting overlooking a lake. The monastery is inhabited by enclosed nuns from the Catholic Order of Benedictine Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Singing the seven Offices each day in their chapel following the Rule of Benedict, they also have regular periods of silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, a distinctive form of Catholic piety. Although founded relatively recently in 1901, the Order is quite traditional in dress and outlook, very prayerfully oriented. The monastery has a modern guest house for people making retreats. The nuns are very welcoming. Retreatants who wish to can join the nuns for their Office.

Seven of us undertook this retreat which was facilitated by Fr Peter Murphy and Australian Kath Houston from the WCCM leadership team. This five-day silent meditative retreat is available to any meditators who have undertaken the Essential Teaching Weekend and wish for a deeper meditative experience. It provides the strong basis for leadership

in the community. Each day of the retreat was the same, with seven periods of meditation and three meditative walks; in mid morning a short spiritual talk from Kath followed by a short *lectio divina*, late afternoon a meditative Mass led by Fr Peter. Each of us participants had a 20 minute spiritual discussion with one of the two leaders every day. There were no shared Daily Office as in other WCCM retreats.

The prospect of spending so much time each day in meditation was a little intimidating before beginning, but the regular pattern of each day enabled one to develop a rhythm of practice. The effect of no conversation of any kind, combined with no access to any form of media (phone, net etc) was to quieten the mind. Not only was there no news to be thought about, one stopped thinking about the topics that make up everyday conversation. As a couple for over forty years on the retreat together, not speaking to Linda for days on end was a unique experience. We were discouraged from extensive reading, getting tied up in our own thoughts. This pervasive silence, deepened by the regular periods of explicit meditation during the day, and complemented by the one shared liturgy, facilitated opening one's heart to the gracious divine Presence. Although we did not talk to one another for five days, sharing the silence in meditation, and respecting the silence of others outside those times, created a certain sense of solidarity among our group, which was finally expressed in our last talkative evening together when the silence was finally broken. A good example of John Main's dictum that silent meditation creates community.



One of the many meditation sessions



A walking meditation during the five-day silent retreat

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NZCCM Directory

Websites to visit:

www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz

www.wccm.org/content

www.wccmmeditatio.org

www.christianmeditationaustralia.org

www.christianmeditation.org.uk

www.theschoolofmeditation.org

Gold Coin Donations



Many groups have a small container placed in the room in which they are meeting so that those who are able, can drop in a gold coin or two to support the work of the World Community for Christian Meditation. The group leader gathers the contributions up and banks them into our 38-9003-0812910-02 account in convenient amounts. We call this collection and the people who give to it, "Friends". Everything collected from individuals or group giving goes to the International Office in London to help support the outreach of the WCCM.

These contributions, collected world-wide, go to support:

- * the operation of WCCM including day-to-day operation of the international office who then provide ongoing support to meditators all over the world,
- * the technical work to support the videos and streaming of talks, the production of the international newsletter and other teaching materials,
- * travel by Fr Laurence and others to the poorer and emerging communities, and some expenses of the oblates and others who volunteer internationally,
- * retreats, talks, visits and presentations by teachers in the community, including Fr. Laurence and many others across the world,
- * translations of key texts, and the distribution of resource materials.

For us here in New Zealand, we have been the beneficiary of Friends. When Christian Meditation was new to NZ, in the 1990's, funds from Friends paid for Fr Laurence to visit us and supplied resources for us to use. Since we have become established, some of the NZ Friends money has helped support Fiji and Venezuela, as well as the general international outreach.

The WCCM Friends programme is vital to continuing to share the gift of meditation, knowing that it has the power to transform lives worldwide, be it those living in the most marginalised segments of society, to those with seemingly everything who are also searching for peace and meaning.

Vincent Maire,

Friends Coordinator

Phone: 027 2766032, vincentmaire12@gmail.com



**Registrations for the
Auckland Meditatio Seminar
Contemplative Care: Healthcare and Meditation
stay open until 7th January 2019**

Details for this Seminar, which shares the fruits and benefits of meditation with all who attend, are available at www.meditatio.org.nz

For any queries, contact:

Linda Polaschek 020 4797955, nandlpolaschek@gmail.com

My journey towards Final Oblation

A Celebration at our National Retreat

by *Kathy Egan*

The last day of our national retreat is a wonderful occasion to celebrate a person's commitment to the WCCM Oblate way of life. At our retreat, January 13-16, 2019, Fr Laurence will receive Kathy Egan's final oblation. It is a privilege for the NZCCM community to celebrate this occasion with Kathy. Kathy describes her journey to this point:

At the silent retreat before the John Main Seminar in 2015, two people made their final oblation. I thought "I want to walk that path too".

I had been meditating for one year and was told it was necessary to wait another year. In 2016 I commenced my postulancy, looking at what it meant to be an Oblate, reading the Rule of St Benedict, praying the Divine Office and meeting with people in the Oblate community.

In 2017 I was received as a Novice Oblate of the World Community for Christian Meditation at a ceremony at Kopua monastery. Hugh McLaughlin, the NZ Oblate Coordinator received me. I received the

medal of St Benedict and I signed a promise that I would be guided by the spirit of the Rule of St Benedict; the precepts of Obedience (to listen, discern, act), Stability (anchored peacefully in Christ, being faithful) and Conversion (turning back, being ready for change). I accepted to read and live out the Rule of St Benedict every day, pray the Divine Office, *Lauds* and *Vespers* each day, plus my twice daily meditation.

Now this may sound a lot of holy stuff, but there has been a deepening of my desire to live this way. I don't consider myself holy at all, just on the journey with the help of God and the Community!

One of the requirements/suggestions of the Rule is that along with Contemplation, is Action. As a member of St Vincent de Paul, this gives me an ideal way of working in the community with the elderly, sick, marginalised and people in prison. Interestingly, I have always worked in Social Services, but I now have a Contemplative work ethic, really



seeing God in all I meet, and I see myself as working for God.

Meditation had given me deeper understanding and awareness of deep prayer and the gifts of the Holy Spirit; being on the Oblate journey has given depths to these gifts, knowing the love of God from my heart. Formerly this was an intellectual exercise!

At my Final Oblation on 16th January 2019 I will recommit my life to the service of God and humanity, accept again the Rule as my guide, living in the spirit of Obedience, Stability and Conversion, and to share in the work of the Community. Please pray for me.

*Thank you
Kathy Egan*



New Spirit in these New Books

contributed by Elspeth Preddey

To work! We're blessed to have a new book by Ross Miller: *Sight Unseen*, again, based on his talks to his Warkworth group and other Christian Meditation groups, as was his first book, *Sharp Darts Of Longing Love*. Each evening I read a talk (no more than two pages); and find so much wit, wisdom and comfort in each one. Thank you, Ross for *Sight Unseen*.

To more spiritual work, with a second book from Joy MacCormick: *Against the Dark*. Again, like her first, *Moments Of Grace*, this is a book of poems with challenging statements and questions, and space for one's reactions on each page facing a poem.

Teenage granddaughter, Hayley MacCormick, helped with this book and has contributed four of her poems. Joy is a retired Anglican priest now living in retirement in Karori. Each evening there's a poem for me to choose and ponder, eg *The Paradox of Silence* with the lines:

"This is no emptiness,
but rather deep in filling, overflowing,
contentment and a peace beyond expression."
Thank you, Joy and Hayley, for *Against The Dark*.

Kia ora Elspeth



Registrations for the Hamilton Silent Retreat

with Fr Laurence
close on 16th December

If you are keen to come
and haven't yet registered,
the details are all on our website
<http://christianmeditationnz.org.nz/>

For any queries contact:
Linda Polaschek 020 4797955,
nandlpolaschek@gmail.com



Vanessa Eldridge meeting Fr. Laurence in Montreal earlier this year. Vanessa is one of our speakers at the Meditatio Seminar, in Auckland 17th & 18th January 2019. Vanessa will discuss *Mauri ora* v Treatment and the *wairua* journey for Maori at the end of life. If you want to hear Vanessa and the other inspirational presenters speak about how to care for others in a contemplative way, register at www.meditatio.org.nz. ❖

Essential Teaching Workshop

The Essential Teaching Workshop was held over the weekend of 7-9 September at Fourviere Retreat Centre, Leithfield, half an hour north of Christchurch. Fourviere is home to the Community of the Beatitudes. It is a haven of silence and is set in beautiful, expansive grounds, an ideal setting for our workshop.

The workshop was led by Fr Peter Murphy. It covered the essence and essentials of the Christian tradition of meditation and the setting up of meditation groups. He had five very keen pupils to work with. With all coming from different backgrounds and with different personalities it made for a valuable but lively and most pleasant weekend. On the Saturday, we joined the nuns for Byzantine Vespers, which was a new experience for us all. The nuns were wonderful hosts to the point of providing wine for our Sunday lunch! ❖



Chris Wilson, Janice Waters, Paddy Walker,
Janice Harrison, Yvonne Smith and Fr Peter Murphy.

Bay of Plenty/Waikato Community Day Saturday 27 October 2018

We were blessed to have 21 people attend our Community Day at the Catholic Church in Paeroa. The weather was fine, which enabled people to drive, in some cases a considerable distance, so their attendance was really appreciated.

Raymond Eberhard led further reflections on the spirituality of Evelyn Underhill, aided by some video clips of interviews carried out at Pleshy, Evelyn's favourite retreat venue. Her work is still packed full of spiritual nourishment, despite some of it being 100 years old. We shared prayer, group discussion and a talk, very ably delivered by Raymond.

We also spent time discussing the rewards of participation in the Essential Teaching Weekend and Meditation School. Three of our group had only recently completed the School Week of Silent Reflection and were enthusiastic in their recommendations for others to take the plunge into deeper participation in the practice of Christian Meditation.

The Pleroma Christian Supplies table yielded sales of \$360.40. We sold the last two of Ross Millar's first edition of Reflections and six of the second edition. Again, we raffled one Pleroma title as a fundraiser for Friends. After expenses, we were able to bank \$95.00 koha into the NZCCM General Account and \$46.00 into the Friends Account.

All in all, it was a marvellously positive day of inspiration and reflection amid our thriving community.

Damian Robertson ❖

Remembering Thomas Keating OSB

by Vincent Maire

In September 2013 I broke my ankle and had to spend a week with my leg up before I was allowed to hobble back to work. I had in my possession, but had never read, *Invitation to Love, The Way of Christian Meditation* by Fr. Thomas Keating. It was not a big book, maybe 180 pages or so, which made it easy reading for my week in bed. I was so taken with this book that I made copious notes, and at least once a year return to these to immerse myself in the wisdom of this very special man.

Fr. Keating died on 25th October at St Joseph's Abbey in Spenser, Massachusetts. His passing was not unexpected as he was 95 years old and had been in declining health. There is much to be found on the internet about his life as a Trappist monk, but he holds a special interest for Christian contemplatives as a co-founder, with William Meninger and Basil Pennington, of the practice of Centering Prayer. Given that there is no such thing as coincidence, only God-incidence, their work of taking this style of prayer to North American Christians happened in the 1970s, the same time that Fr John Main was teaching Christian meditation in the UK and Montreal. Clearly, the Holy Spirit was at work here, responding to the spiritual crisis of the times with a call to a more contemplative way of praying.

Fr. Thomas understood, at a very deep level, the psychological stages of the spiritual journey and how meditation can lead us through these stages to union with God. He opens his book with this statement:

The direction of the spiritual journey at least initially, is toward a confrontation with our motivations and unconscious emotional programmes and responses. ... Once we start the spiritual journey, God is totally on our side. Everything works together for our good. If we can believe this, we can save ourselves an enormous amount of trouble.

On page 18 he writes a paragraph that I quote when teaching Christian meditation.

The work of following Christ is like working with a psychotherapist who has a clear insight into what is wrong with us. With incredible accuracy, God puts his finger on exactly the spot that needs attention at this precise time in our spiritual growth. If we are hanging on to one last shred of possessiveness, he comes along and says, often through some person or event, 'Won't you give this to me?'

Fr. Laurence Freeman often reflects on this theme in his talks. He recounts stories of people who, after a few months of meditating, discover that they have changed. Somewhere along the way they have become more patient, more loving, better listeners, less controlling, more at peace. In other words, those persons or events that used to anger or annoy, no longer do so.

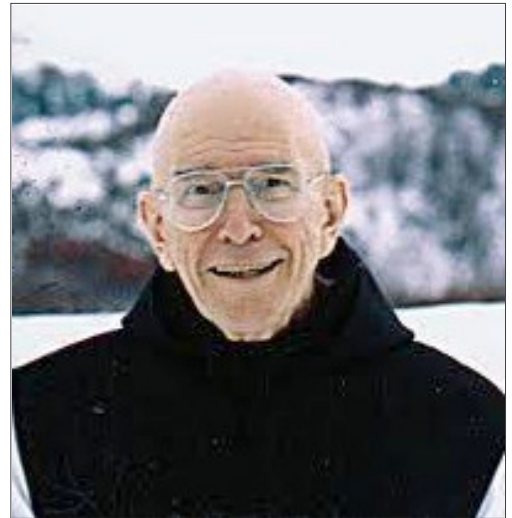
Writing with depth and elegance, Fr Thomas explores the human condition, mythic membership consciousness (problems that arise when we over-identify with a social unit) and mental egoic consciousness. Don't be put off by the language; if you are meditator you will resonate with his wisdom. Mid-way through the book Fr Thomas turns his attention to *The Night of the Senses*. The invitation from God is that we reduce our concepts of him to silence. In chapter 14 he introduces the reader to *The Stages of Contemplative Prayer*. He opens this chapter with perhaps his most famous quote:

Silence is God's first language; everything else is a poor translation. In order to hear that language, we must learn to be still and to rest in God.

This insight into the transformative power of silence leads him to conclude that

the most important element in contemplative prayer is the practice itself, not its psychological content.

We are freed from our role playing and the emotional swings that



Fr. Thomas Keating OSB

so often undermine us. But as we so often say of meditation, it is simple but not easy. Like other writers on the spiritual journey, Fr. Thomas warns that this not a linear path but runs a course appropriate to the spiritual needs of the individual pilgrim. Providing we surrender and put God into the driving seat, the journey, and its experiences of emotional healing, have their own ebb and flow. Just keep meditating is the best and only advice.

In 1998 Fr Thomas Keating led the John Main Seminar. His talks there were a distillation of this book which is in print and readily available. A search of the WCCM website failed to show if his 1998 talks are still available via Soundcloud.com but the CD can be purchased online. I Googled "Thomas Keating John Main Seminar" to find it.

We live in a fractured and suffering world, but then, when haven't we? But the Holy Spirit responds to our inner yearning for healing by sending us teachers that speak to the times in which we live. Both Fr. John Main and Fr. Thomas Keating were two such teachers and I believe the best way we can honour their memory is to keep on meditating.

Vincent Maire



The importance of Christian Meditation Groups

by Paul Harris

Why meditators meet in groups

The heart of the meditation group is the sharing of silence together. This is the primary reason why, spontaneously, people around the world are starting small groups to meditate weekly together. The power and strength of meditation together comes from the words of Jesus, *Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them* (Matthew 18:2).

This is the foremost reason for getting together once a week. It is as if meditators instinctively realize that this is a journey that is difficult to make alone; it is a journey that is so much easier if we make it with others. It is true that no one else can meditate for us, that we meditate by ourselves each day, but at the same time, we realise that we need the support of others if we are to persevere on this journey.

The development of a spiritual bond among members of the group *

Meeting in a group promotes a spiritual bond amongst the members and a mutual concern between those who have set out on a common pilgrimage. The meditation group is really a community of faith, much as the early Christians experienced community in St. Paul's time.

The group setting enables beginners to learn how to meditate.

Newcomers can be integrated into a group at any point in time. Experience has shown that when a group starts in a new geographic area, people who have never meditated before will join the group. New groups introduce new meditators to the teaching.

Small groups give support and encouragement on the spiritual path

* The weekly group meeting provides support and encouragement to those who might be discouraged or experiencing difficulties "on the path". All of us need, from time to time, the encouragement of seeing others faithful and committed to the discipline.

* We also need to absorb the teaching more deeply and we do so at the weekly meeting with talks or readings that give instruction, deepen our motivation, and help us to persevere on the path. They give us a spiritual boost each week: part of the food we need for the journey. ✠



The Unbroken Tradition

from Vincent Maire

On Saturday 23rd March next year, Caryl Haley will lead the Auckland Community Day. Caryl is a member of the group that meets weekly at St Francis by the Sea in Manly on the Hibiscus Coast. For many years Caryl has had an interest in Christian monastic history and traditions. The community day will be held at the home of Tim & Rosemary Auld in Kumeu. Details will be advised closer to the date. Below is a brief outline of her talk.

At the beginning of 2018 I decided it would be interesting to trace the practice of meditation in the Christian tradition from the Desert Fathers and Mothers to the present day. I was inspired to choose this study after joining a local Christian meditation group and hearing a recorded talk by Fr. Laurence Freeman on the Desert Fathers. My research and writing trace the unbroken tradition of Christian meditation from the 3rd century to 21st century, through the voices of ordinary men and women who lived out extraordinary lives.

My first degree was in Medieval History for which I completed a dissertation on the estates of a Cistercian Abbey near to my home town. In the process of translating over 350 Latin charters, I became fascinated by the daily lives of the monks and the charism of the Cistercian order. That interest has never really waned. I have been an educator for most of my working life and have taught at every level from pre-school to tertiary. My last position was as a Senior Lecturer in Education at AUT, but my most fulfilling role came later when I set up the education facility for young offenders at a new Youth Unit attached to Wakeria Prison. However, first and foremost I am a mother and a grandmother. I have four children - but when I remarried in my early forties, my new husband came with three children, so the family grew to seven, all teenagers. It was nothing like the Brady Bunch, but we all retained our sanity and a much-needed sense of humour. And now there are eleven grandchildren aged from 8 to 25. Life is never dull.

Caryl Haley

✠

Darkness in the Market Place

Hawkes Bay/Manawatu/Whanganui/Taranaki Community Day

a report from Shirley Duthie

On the 13th October members of the Hawkes Bay, Manawatu, Whanganui and Taranaki area were invited to Southern Star Abbey for our final Community Day of the year. The weather was not kind, early Spring ailments pounced on some intending to come and the day unfortunately clashed with other events, but for the twelve meditators who made the journey it was a valuable experience.

The theme of the day was "Darkness in our Marketplace" using the late Thomas Green's book *Darkness in the Marketplace* as a guide. Thomas Green SJ was an influential spiritual director in the second half of the last century, writing for those called to follow God outside the monastery walls and vows of obedience. He sought to guide us through the difficult times in our

spiritual journey, not as some kind of lay-monastics, but as men and women integrated into the society in which we live, yet choosing a very focused spiritual journey.

In the morning we explored the theme that we are the wheat of the parable (Matthew 13:24-30) and our "weeds" cannot be totally uprooted before harvest or we will be deprived of much of what enables us to exist in our marketplace. In this respect Thomas Green taught that St Terese of Avila's writing on the dark night of the soul was more relevant to those in the marketplace than that of St John of the Cross who spent his entire life within monastery walls.

After lunch we looked at Thomas Green's teachings on learning to spiritually "float" as we become equipped to "do God's work" rather than suffering the frustration of



Fr Thomas Green SJ

"working for God". For each theme, those attending both listened then worked in small groups to look at the application of the teaching of Thomas Green to their own lives. Attendance at *Sext* and *None* Liturgy of the Hours was optional with some opting for silence on their own and others joining in the Southern Star Abbey community prayer.

The next Community event is a weekend Leaders' Retreat 22-24th March 2019 at Southern Star Abbey. All communication about attending that weekend should be sent to sjmduthie@gmail.com ✕

Skype and on-line groups

Not everyone is able to attend a face to face meditation group and some want to meditate with others more than once a week. We are very fortunate to have the option of skype (in NZ), Sunday 7.30pm, contact Ken Hutchison, ken.hutchi@gmail.com or world-wide online groups at different times, see:

<https://www.onlinemeditationwccm.org/>

In addition to our meditation practice, there are courses available online:

www.theschoolofmeditation.org which we can join and learn more at any time. ✕



Auckland Community Day

Fr Peter Murphy with Paulina Ifopo and Jackie Abraham at the Auckland Community Day held in St Mary's Parish, Papakura, on 17th November.

The theme for the day was "A Contemplative Response to the Crisis of Change".

Fr Murphy's talk covered experience and meaning

The afternoon's dvd talk was by Dr Barry White on the effects and benefits of meditation in the health care sector. His talk was called "A Contemplative Practice to Transform Healthcare". ✕

The Oblates - In Community

by Jane Hole

A couple of weeks ago an oblate phoned me from the North Island. We had a long and satisfying talk about the joys of the oblate life, and comforted each other over its lumps and bumps. She spoke about the mysterious bond she felt between those in our oblate community. "What is it?" she wondered, "What is this thing that binds us?" We sat and thought in comfortable silence. Neither of us ventured an answer, and we moved on peacefully to talk about other things.

Many important questions don't have answers. I remember Fr Laurence saying it's enough just to live with the questions; better that, than trying to get rid of the question by marrying it off to an unsuitable answer.

This question of what binds our Oblate Community has stayed with me...

I understand the monastic life as being devoted to prayer, in the context of community. Fr David Misfud suggests that oblates are "inner monks". I think he meant that we live our outer lives in "the world" out of the monastic spirit we bear within us.

But we're essentially social beings: the riches of our solitude need to be supported by community and shared in community. Laurence Freeman writes: "The oblate vision integrates the twin forms of monastic life, solitude and community".

Perhaps to identify the value of community for an oblate it helps to remember why we first started on the oblate path. Fr Laurence gives his far-seeing perspective:

Practising meditation everyday does not mean one has to become an oblate. Why then do some meditators do so? Because they feel the value of expressing in a visible

human way the sense of community they feel with others seeking God on this path. Because we all need support, encouragement, inspiration and the challenge of others to deepen our commitment. Because the sense of tradition needs to be made real in a living community, and the Benedictine tradition is deep and wide enough



to give hospitality to a very broad spectrum of people. Also because they see that modern life can lack meaning, spiritual focus, and balance. In the Benedictine vision as developed for 1500 years they see the elements of a healthy style of life: a balance and harmony of body mind and spirit. A context for the study of scripture and spiritual thought which the way of meditation naturally encourages and makes a source of delight. The oblate vision integrates the twin forms of monastic life, solitude and community. Basic to this vision is the centrality of prayer - the different forms of prayer which lead us into the pure prayer of simplicity and oneness as taught by the Desert Tradition. It offers a liberating sense of spiritual discipline appropriate to one's temperament and state of life.

And although we each approach oblation from our own perspective, it's likely that something in this writing will find an echo in our experience.

A meditator who was considering taking the oblate path once told me "I feel I need another community". Of course, communities come in many different shapes. People with something in common - family ties, work, interests, opinions, or just where we currently find ourselves - naturally come together; we feel stronger in a group where we can share easily.

And our oblate community gathers together first as meditators - "Meditation creates community" John Main insisted. And out of that meditating community, some of us feel called to explore for ourselves, both in solitude and in another community, the wisdom that inspired our teachers in meditation, Fr John and Fr Laurence. We commit ourselves to studying the wisdom that guided them - the distinctive interpretation of the Christ-life found in the monastic Rule of St Benedict, in the passionate hope that we too may catch its vision.

And the essential link between meditation and the monastic life, as we know it as meditating oblates? On his visit to Gethsemani Monastery in 1976, John Main was asked: "How does meditation fit in with the monastic asceticism [discipline]"

He replied: "The common factor is poverty....I think it is a form of prayer that is peculiarly suitable for monks because there is both essential poverty and essential simplicity: the poverty and simplicity of one word."

Once a month our Christchurch oblates come together to meditate, share food, pray Vespers from the daily Office and study some aspect of Benedict's rule. John Main said: "All that needs to be said about meditation is 'Say your word'. The rest is just encouragement." As oblates on a common path we come

to know one another, to love one another; we come to know just how much encouragement each of us needs – not just in persevering on the meditation and oblate paths – but in lives that often have us cry out (in the words of the beautiful litany for Wednesday Vespers in Benedictine Daily Prayer): “Help us bear the darkness of our world and patiently transform it into light.” And so we encourage each other at our oblate meetings: “How’s your daughter now?” “Can anyone use a few lettuce plants?” “Like your shoes.” “Couldn’t put this book down – don’t need it back, just pass it on.” “I can easily do that – when do you need it?” “You just cry as much as you want to.” “Did you really make that yourself?” Are these just

inconsequential exchanges? I don’t think encouragement is ever just a little thing. And even as we encourage one another in the minutiae of the everyday, I can still feel the vision of oblate life that Fr Laurence puts before us at the end of his *Monastics in the World*, burning at the heart of our small gathering:

Becoming an oblate in this community is an assent and a commitment to the re-centring of one’s life and of one’s awareness in this mystery of Christ and of God. It is one way, among others, in which this universal human journey is given meaning and focus and is enriched, no less for the good of others as for our own, by joy and peace.

Jane Hole

Christchurch Oblate ✠

Meditating by the Beach

A report from Elspeth Preddey, Wellington Regional Co-ordinator

Surf outside, silence inside, on a day in Spring; brisk walks against the westerly gale; food and friendship; a bell to bring us back to our circle. We hosted our third and final event for this year at the beach cottage in Paekakariki gifted years ago to the Sisters of Compassion. It was a blessing to be there for a Community day of Reflection. Oblates, including those from Napier, Taradale and Palmerston North, stayed overnight for an Oblate catch-up and contemplative Mass with Fr John Pettit. We began our Community day with hot drinks, and two dozen introductions.

Our programme was to listen, then discuss three short talks from the Meditatio CDs that are sent regularly to all group leaders. Following two of the talks, we spent 20 minutes in silent meditation. First was a 2018 talk by Father Laurence: *The Work Of Silence*. Next one by Bernard McGinn: *Jesus The Contemplative*. Our question for discussion was “*Did Jesus spend his whole life praying?*” Finally, after a very sociable lunch hour, we settled down to hear Bernard McGinn again on *Teresa Of Avila On The Our Father*. After a short discussion, we said the Lord’s Prayer together.

There was a Sales Table, thanks to Shirley Duthie, selling copies of Ross Miller’s second book, *Sight Unseen*, and at \$10.00 each, all sold. People were generous in their Koha towards the costs of maintaining the beach house. I hope we can come again! Next year we will hold a Community Day for Reflection on Saturday 23 March 2019 at the Island Bay Home of Compassion. Other events will be posted on *Stillpoint*.

Elspeth Preddey ✠



Left to Right: Margaret Moore, Janice Waters, Jane Hole, Sally Dunford
(Unfortunately wild weather in Christchurch and sickness kept Yvonne Smith, Margaret Nouwens, Lynda Clarkson and Paddy Walker away)

Holy Scripture, brethren, cries out to us, saying, “Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted...” Hence, if we wish to reach the very highest point of humility and to arrive speedily at that heavenly exaltation to which ascent is made through humility of this present life, we must by our ascending actions erect the ladder Jacob saw in his dream, on which angels appeared to him descending and ascending. By that descent and ascent we must surely understand nothing else than this, that we descend by self-exaltation and ascend by humility. And the ladder thus set up is our life in the world, which the Lord raises up to heaven if our heart is humbled. For we call our body and soul the sides of the ladder, and into these sides our divine vocation has inserted the different steps of humility and discipline we much climb.

Saint Benedict Rule 7

✠

The John Main Seminar: A Contemplative Response to the Crisis of Change

by Fr Peter Murphy

The John Main Seminar this year took place in the old medieval city of Bruges. There was a great line-up of speakers, some of them leaders in their field, such as Sean Hagan, recently retired Counsel to the IMF, Charles Taylor, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, McGill University, Montreal and Dr Barry White, a haematologist and professor at Trinity College, Dublin.

The pre-seminar retreat led by Fr Laurence was held at a retreat centre about 20 minutes from Bruges. The theme of the retreat was *Experience and Meaning*, an appropriate theme for the seminar which exemplified how meditators, experts in their field, demonstrated the fruits of their spiritual practice particularly in being able to make clear judgments in often highly volatile situations. This article presents a summary of the retreat.

Why do we meditate?

John Main asks the question, “Why do we meditate?” His answer, “This is what we are made for.” Many of us seek out a meditative practice particularly to ease stress in our lives and to provide stability in times of crisis. It is the benefits that we become aware of initially but as we progress the fruits such as love, joy and peace become more evident. The fruits are more an inner experience. The experience of meditation is not like other experiences, such as reading a good novel. The experience of meditation is of a different kind. *We had the experience but missed the meaning. And approach to the meaning restores the experience in a different form*, wrote TS Eliot. The

meaning of meditation reveals itself through the experience, in particular the benefits. It is the mystery of silence which helps us to become aware of this.

Silence helps us make sense of our lives. In our culture we have lost the taste and meaning of silence. We are likely to feel that silence is something that happens when things are not working, for instance you turn on your computer and nothing happens. We are more connected to one another than ever before but are we more present to one another? It is through silence that we become present to ourselves and in so doing to one another.

What do we mean by experience? Is it a process of analysis whereby we zoom in and dissect happenings in minute detail or do we sit back and take a panoramic view? It is both. We often look at our experiences of meditation as good or bad meditations; good when we find peace and a sense of well-being; bad when we are unable to settle and find the whole thing a waste of time. John Main says to “think of meditation as practised faithfully over time.” It takes time for faith to develop, to understand what faith means. It is not short term. We can’t evaluate meditation at the micro level for it is part of a bigger journey of faith. But we could all have good meditations if we prepared for them better.

The experience we talk of is of the central underlying reality, not just the experience of a good or bad meditation. Experience includes the big picture, yesterday, today and tomorrow. We cannot fully imagine the big picture but we know it is there. Day by day, bit by bit, we are making progress. So we can see the

meaningfulness of life revealing itself bit by bit, day by day. Meditation plays an important part in this journey to full understanding. It doesn’t happen instantaneously. Meaning comes down to a sense of connection. If you are not connected, life is meaningless. Note how the UK Government has appointed a Minister of Loneliness. Loneliness is even more hidden than mental health.

In an ordinary meditation nothing happens

In an ordinary meditation nothing happens. At the same time we wouldn’t be meditating unless we knew that at a deeper level something was happening. Sometimes there are good experiences within meditation but we don’t cling to them. Our own experience with meditation is related to a tradition. We meditate within a tradition, not in the sense of a museum of beliefs and orthodoxies, but in the sense that it is flowing like a river, constantly changing but always the same. There is a balance between preserving and evolving. For us tradition is related to Christ whose key experiences were at his baptism, in the desert, the transfiguration and the way to the Cross. As disciples we follow. There is a before and after, our life before our call and our life after.

Is my experience only mine? There is not personal experience that is entirely subjective or isolated to the individual. We must be conscious of being at some level communal individuals, belonging but not to the degree that our individuality is

destroyed. Our experience, good or bad, happy or unhappy, affects others in our immediate range of influence. The understanding of our experience depends upon what tradition we are in, and we are in a tradition whether we think we belong or not. It is very difficult to separate religion from culture. As Catholics we speak of a Catholic culture which to people from other churches is foreign. But there is an underlying experience of transformation of life, of character and personality and the way of relating to people.

What can we do if we have no language, no symbols, and no tradition to express such an experience? We would need to find a language with which to express it. People today living in the fast lane have brief flashes of insight but at a pace in which there is no space to find meaning at all. They become addicted to high peak experiences. This may account for the attraction of drugs or addictive behaviour. They are always looking for results. Impatience is one of the big pitfalls of the spiritual journey. The other is laziness. Or we become trivial, stuck on the surface of things, and sink into meaninglessness.

Respond to the gift of our being

John Main says that we are here to respond to the gift of our being, not just on the surface but to go to the core of our being, the point of origin. The missing of the deeper meaning has always been there but with today's frenetic pace it is more worryingly dangerous. When people begin meditation it is often simply to reduce stress, tension and anxiety, which arise from needing to be in control of everything. But more importantly in order to find true meaning we need to find a new model of God. The image of God as parent who rewards the good and punishes the bad is deeply embedded in our consciousness, both psychologically

and theologically. The reward when we enter into the inner room, however, is one of joy and peace. Here we find God, the ground of our being. This is not mechanical or the result of technique. The experience is grace. We have to do the work and go into the inner room and stay there for some time. Meditation as a technique does reap benefits. In the East they call them siddhis. However, once the experience of peace begins to dawn, you recognise this as gift, probably pre-existing, a gift that was lost and is now found.

John Main said that there are two types of presence of God: one is joy, love, and peace, the other is the absence of God which is another form of presence. This is also very challenging for it helps us persevere in the practice of meditation. You don't give up because you are going through a period of dryness or the batteries have run down. This mystical, contemplative meaning of religious experience is at hand for anyone simple enough and poor in spirit to find it. This simplicity is the key into the deepest mystery. The experience of meditative prayer through silence and stillness can also lead to a deeper devotional expression. There is no first or business or economy class form of prayer. Meditation and devotional practice are not opposed to each other. They can be. There are those who say meditation is not Christian but we can all sit at the one table.

Religion today needs to be considered not so much in terms of what you believe or do not believe but more in terms of holiness, not in terms of progressive or conservative but in terms of holiness. This is perhaps the common meaning of all religious experience. Pope Francis latest exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* is a reminder that we are called to holiness. Holiness is very ordinary and it is not about perfection. It is about being the unique person you are called to be. We don't

become holy by being obsessed with our sinfulness. Holiness makes us realise the power of the church or religious people is not about threatening or using native force, or violence or blackmail, but about being this army of people who have discovered what it means to be forgiven. Holiness is about how we are in discovering new depths, new ways of knowing ourselves. The deeper we go into our self the more we discover the universal truth of non-duality or the unity.

Simplicity is at the heart of the Gospel

The opposition of me and you that causes complications at the superficial level of everyday life reduces the deeper we go into the self. It is very difficult to be a regular meditator and to be a racist, for example. This experience of non-duality or simplicity is at the heart of the Gospel as well: *The Father is greater than I* Jesus says, but in the same breath, *The Father and I are one*. It is only the contemplative mind that can deal with this kind of paradox or apparent uncertainty. This is a common truth in all religious traditions. It is at the core of them all. It is a wisdom that radiates beyond words, beyond concepts, but which finds expression in words and concepts, in structures and rituals. The core is always there. This enables us to share ourselves religiously with peoples of other faiths.

No one believes that religion is made redundant by science and technology anymore. It is very vital that we make sure that the religions of the world are connected through this common truth that we share. They are not the same, but they do have this common truth experientially. We are much closer than we are separate from each other.

continued on page 12

As mentioned, the seminar was an application of the contemplative mind by various leaders in their field of expertise. To my mind there were two that were outstanding: Sean Hagan, *Leadership and Contemplation*, and Dr Barry White, *A Contemplative Practice to Transform Healthcare*. The latter is very much in tune with our upcoming seminar in Auckland. Charles Taylor and Marco Schorlemmeer will require a little more concentration.

The visit concluded with a pilgrimage to the World War I sites and on the second day to Dunkirk. WWI was especially memorable, this being the centenary year of the ending of the war. I could not help but be struck by the futility of it all, despite the bravery of soldiers on both sides putting up with totally inhuman conditions.

The presence of New Zealanders was very prominent, particularly at the graves at Tyne Cot. I kept coming across and praying over the tombs of "A New Zealand Soldier, Known Unto God". The New Zealand presence was very prominent at the siege of Messines Ridge. There was a special memorial to Lance-Corporal Samuel Frickleton, who was awarded the VC for his bravery in taking out two machine gun posts there. In the town of Ypres, the memorial to those who lost their lives is commemorated at 8.00pm every night since 1927. ✂



Memorial to New Zealand soldiers at Messines Ridge



Memorial to New Zealand soldiers at Tyne Cot.



Outside the church at Messines Ridge Memorial to Samuel Frickleton VC. The map of New Zealand highlights Featherston where the soldiers trained.



Bonnevaux

WCCM Contemplative Centre

A thousand years ago a Benedictine monastery was built in Bonnevaux, near Poitiers in France. On these ancient foundations WCCM is developing a contemplative centre for the 21st century.

For more on Bonnevaux, see <http://bonnevauxwccm.org/>

Benedict Backwards: Reading the Rule in the 21st century

A review by Nick Polaschek

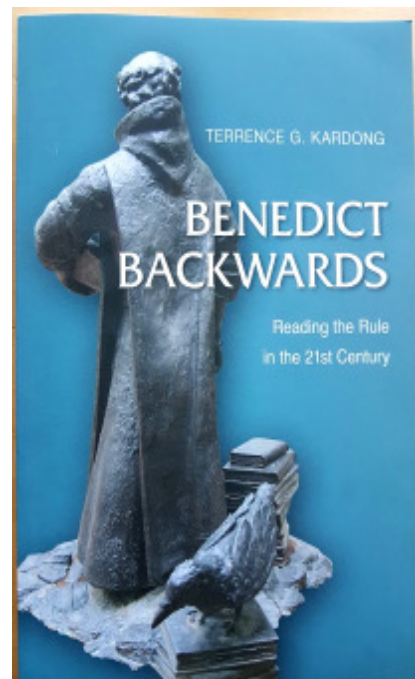
This is a great book. It's a series of essays interpreting key themes in the Rule from a contemporary perspective. Terrence Kardong is an American who has been a Benedictine for 60 years. His translation and commentary on the Rule in English (1996) is in its own class. Why do I find this book so good, better than most others on the Rule? Kardong is open, honest, intellectually acute, self deprecating and witty, with a wise senior perspective. The text is conversational, a pleasure to read. Not only is he very knowledgeable about the text of the Rule, he is an expert on the original social context including Benedict's sources, and also familiar with the subsequent use of the Rule in Benedictine history. He notes the changes in the way the Rule has been practised over time, that almost every specific requirement in the Rule is no longer followed in monasteries today.

As a scholar Kardong is somewhat controversial because, in his approach, he highlights tensions

within the text of the Rule. He is willing to critique some ideas in the Rule in terms of others that are also there, rather than piously attempting to harmonize and justify them all. His work is based on modern scholarship that shows that in Benedict's Rule the early chapters are largely an editing of an existing work called the "Rule of the Master", whereas the later chapters contain mostly his own material not to be found in the Master's Rule.

The different approach in the later chapters gives an insight into Benedict's own distinctive focus, and provides a basis to critique certain ideas in the Rule, especially in the early chapters, that are not congruent with this focus. Hence the Rule is best read backwards, as in his title. Kardong leavens this erudition with occasional amusing anecdotes drawn from his own long experience as a monk.

Throughout the essays he provides many insights into the Christian life and suggests the heart of the Rule as being the development of the



monastery as a community of love. Through his intelligent enquiry Kardong presents the Rule of Benedict as addressing certain questions that are still relevant today. His book is actually a dialogue with the 6th century text of the Rule, an open conversation from his perspective as a 21st century Benedictine monk. For us as Benedictine Christians, seeking to live in what has been called a "monastery without walls", the book is exemplary, stimulating us in seeking our own answers in our lives to the still relevant questions the Rule addresses.

Benedict backwards: Reading the Rule in the 21st century, published in 2017 by Liturgical Press



Bonnevaux

WCCM Contemplative Centre

Much daily manual work involves the organic vegetable garden. It's a joy to see the potatoes, squash, radishes, lettuce and tomatoes and other natural food grow and grace the community table from the pure earth of Bonnevaux. Local environmental agencies have done a survey praising the unspoiled state which the property has preserved. We see ourselves as stewards of the land to help it be a sign of practical beauty and harmony between humanity and the environment.





Much of the daily news in the commercial media describes a world bent on self-destruction. How do we open our hearts and minds to mostly tragic situations – war, poverty, greed, unemployment? The daily practice of meditation helps us to hear and be empowered by another vision, of a world created, redeemed and sustained by Divine Love. We listen with compassion, and find the courage and humility to offer our limited resources and talents in service towards the healing of God's world.

Glenda Meakin, is a retired Anglican minister. A meditator since 1985, she leads retreats across Canada, and the US. She has served the Canadian Christian Meditation Community as a Regional Co-ordinator and National School Co-ordinator. She also serves on the International and Canadian School Resource Team.

This is the fourth in a series of talks given by Glenda at a Silent Retreat held in Canada, March 2010.

Listening to the daily news with a contemplative heart:

The Words of the Daily News *by Glenda Meakin*

I want to shift now to the words of the daily news. They too offer us a certain perspective on the world. They too form us, shape us, and direct our lives.

So you and I as people of faith might ask ourselves: How is my understanding of creation, as an expression of the Divine, shaped by the constant references in the daily news to scarcity of water, food, to the constant references to global warming, famine, pollution, earthquakes, devastation, tsunamis? How is my understanding of creation shaped by the daily news?

We might also ask ourselves how do we hold the power of the words: "Love God and love your neighbour" alongside the words and images of daily news that are filled with reports of murder, rape, bombings, pornography? How do you and I hear, let alone respond, to the prophetic word of God calling us back to God when so many shortcomings, our divisions, clergy scandals, and our imminent demise which I have been reading about for so many years and not seeing? How do we hear God calling us back as God's people, as the body of Christ when the daily news reports our shortcomings, our divisions, our scandals? How do you and I hear the Word made Flesh inviting us into the light of God's love when the news is filled with the

darkness of corporate greed, fraud, unemployment, recession, foreclosures?

Well, if this short overview of the daily news has depressed you, heightened your anxiety, that's the way many of us spend our days. The omnipresent daily news can keep you and me in a state of perpetual anxiety and worry about what is happening in the world. It can keep us in a state of doubt or cynicism or fear. Where is God? What can one person do in the face of such tragedy, injustice, inhumanity? Is there any hope, we ask ourselves? And how do you and I, as people of faith, hold on to the alternative vision of human life and liberation that Jesus proclaims and lives? How do we hang on to that vision and live it?

The starting point, I believe, is the gospel story of the cleansing of the temple. You and I are called, invited, to clear the clutter from our hearts. And we are invited to do that by simply moving into the silence of our own hearts through the poverty of the single word; to come into the silence and become grounded and shaped by the love of God through Christ. Become grounded, rooted in God. It's that experience of the love of God in silence that moves us out of all division, all polarities, including the polarity of either a faith perspective or daily-news perspective.

Instead, the silence, the experience, the knowledge, the participation in the love of God, moves you and me to begin looking for the presence of God in every situation. It is what Jesus tells his disciples when they come into the village and see the man born blind, in John chapter nine. The first thing the disciples asked Jesus is: "Whose fault is it that this man is blind?" "Who did something wrong?" "Was it his parents, or was it the man himself?" And Jesus says: "You know, it's not about looking for fault; it's not about assigning blame." The question we are to ask is: "Where is God in the midst of this situation?" Jesus says what you look for is "Where is God?" And then: "How is the love of God being made manifest in this situation?" ✕

Contemplative prayer is not something you arrive at on your own. You prepare by practising your formula of piety. If you practise it faithfully, God will give you the gift of what Cassian calls *oratio ignita* – fiery prayer, which inflames the heart and also allows you to pray the Scriptures, especially the Psalms, as if you are composing them.

from: *Praying with the Masters Today*
by Bernard McGinn

The Celtic Promise of Spring

Reflections on a Nelson area Community Day

On 22nd September we were blessed to have a very moving Community Day at Richmond, led by Rev. Dr. Hilary Oxford Smith. Julie Dee accompanied Hilary on the Clarsach (Celtic harp) and guitar. Some of those attending provided the following reflections on the day.

Nelson members of Christian Meditation attended an excellent Community Day in September.

There were morning and afternoon meditations, and two remarkable women guided us for the day on the theme of *Celtic Promise of Spring*. The day was inspirational, refreshing, deep. In her unhurried and compassionate manner, Rev. Dr. Hilary Oxford Smith, originally from Scotland, spoke of Iona's history, its profound effect on people, Celtic faith tradition, and our essential connection to the natural world – *God is in all life; every day is sacred; when spring unfolds the heart begins to sing*. Hilary read poetry with rhythmic calm, frequently referring to nature. Complementing Hilary's words through the day was the music of Julie, who played her harp and sang with strength and sensitivity. Julie uses music for healing of grief and she spoke of her own grief from recent loss. Grateful thanks to leaders Marie and Mary for organising this precious day. *Pip*

It was a very successful day.

It began with a very peaceful non-distracting meditation time, making me open to what was to come. The purity of Celtic prayer from ancient times I could relate to. On a visit to Ireland some years ago, I visited a rock sitting in the Atlantic where monks had lived away from others. The life spent in prayer; little vegetation and shelters made of stone, less than what we now consider the basic necessities of life. This was true meditation they practised - the kind spoken to us by our speaker. The talk was enhanced by the beautiful music of the harp. I was truly blessed having this special time. Thank you to all concerned. God Bless *Diane Smith*

A time of silence, stillness and reflection.

Once a year Meditators from Nelson, Richmond and Motueka meet up. This year I can only describe the day as unforgettable. Our invited leader was Rev. Dr. Hilary Oxford Smith, writer, poet, theologian, and retreat giver, whose faith and creativity is grounded in Celtic Christian spirituality. She was assisted by an accomplished harp player from Otago, Julie Dee, who played and sang many



of her own compositions. Julie is also Scottish. We followed the usual format: meditation, the presentations before and after lunch, and a final meditation for the day. Lunch was “bring a plate to share”. Twenty five people attended and the group participants blended kindly with each other. I think this was assisted by the gentle harp sometimes playing in the background. I came away curious to learn more and deeply grateful to the presenters and participants alike. I will continue to have thoughts and memories about that very special day. *Susan Lugton*.

As I am new to Christian Meditation

I thought it would be a good opportunity for me to get a better understanding of the mediation if I attended the retreat day. I was not disappointed. What did surprise me was the emotions that the meditation and the reflections given by Hilary Oxford Smith stirred, so the rest of the day was a bit uncomfortable. After sleep and prayer, the source of these “uncomfortable feelings” became clearer and allowed me to start to inspect some precious held ideas. If I had stayed home I would not have been given the opportunity to move further along my path to peace. *Paula*

The Nelson CM “Community Day” was a true delight,

due to the sincere and honest input from two guests: Hilary, with her inspirational insight to life's heart rendering event of “letting go” and “grieving for”; and Julie whose musical talent quickly became evident as harp, guitar and voice complimented Hilary's spoken words. I came away wanting more and appreciative of what had been given and received. *Gillian*. ✕

Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta was once asked: “When you pray, what do you say to God?” She said: “I don't say anything. I listen.” Then she was asked: “All right. What does God say to you?” She said: “God doesn't say anything. God listens.” And she added: “If you can't understand that, I can't explain it to you.”

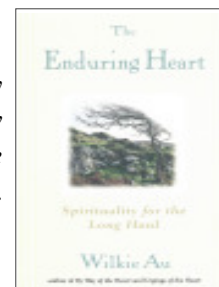
New on Pleroma Shelves: by Shirley Duthie

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This is described by Robert Wicks as *making me feel like I am walking slowly down a country road with a wise and holy friend who is offering me an opportunity to experience how generous God is – even in those dark and gray times of loss and confusion that everyone has at different points in life.* Each chapter ends with a prayer and excellent spiritual exercises.

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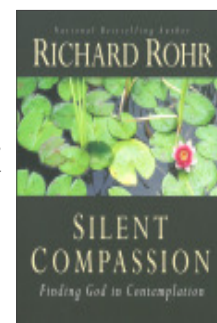
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Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation Richard Rohr

This book focuses on finding God in the depths of silence. The divine silence offers us peace, inviting us to have compassion for others and experience wholeness of being. This title stays on my reading table, my “go to” source for inspiration and solace. Definitely Richard Rohr at his best.

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Experiencing God in a Time of Crisis: Sarah Bachelard

Having a copy of this to hand in times of crisis (our own and others) is recommended by many experienced contemplatives. While the journey resulting from crisis is painful and involves letting go of our old ways, Sarah Bachelard helps us see how to go back into the world free and courageous, with a new sense of being alive, and with a radically deepened capacity to be with and to love other human beings.

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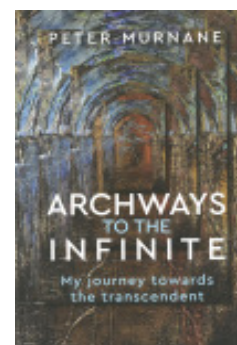
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Archways to the Infinite: Peter Murnane

The author shares his life’s journey using anecdotes and reflections that illustrate the joys and struggles of his life as a Dominican Friar, including his arrest following damage at the Waihopai Valley spy base. From his memories as a young child to his arrest, Peter shares his personal struggles in human rights, censorship, sexuality, celibacy, doctrinal belief, and above all, his relationship with what he terms “The Transcendent”. Launched in Auckland November 2018.

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Questions & Answers: by Shirley Duthie

Q: *Why do we sit in chairs for meditation? As a child I was encouraged to kneel to show respect and submission in prayer and I feel all wrong sitting in comfort.*

A: Meditation aims for a harmony of both our body and spirit, not discomfort or submission. We don't suffer, nor do we doze, but remain alert with a straight back that isn't tense or stiff. Paul Harris¹ reminds us that it is the universal teaching in meditation that a still body is an aid to stilling the mind. This is the primary reason why it is important, right at the beginning, to get into the habit of keeping the head, neck and spine erect in meditation. This will enable us to breathe freely as we say our mantra and help us find stillness without tension.

Meditators who come from different spiritual traditions may wish to sit on the floor, others may prefer to use a prayer stool, and I recall being with a meditator who, for medical reasons, needed to lie full length, but all will be endeavouring to keep a straight back to facilitate stillness.

You seem to have developed a habit of associating an emotion with a particular body stance. Like all habits, this can be modified. Give the described posture for meditation three weeks of regular use and you should find peace and acceptance.

Q: *I visited a different meditation group recently and noticed that they said the meditation prayers at the very beginning and end of the gathering, whereas in the group I usually attend, the prayer is said immediately before the gong commences meditation and immediately after the gong that ends the meditation time. Does it matter when the opening and closing prayers are said?*

A: This seems to result from differing perspective on the use of the opening and closing prayer. Some group leaders use it to encompass the entire gathering time and others only for the actual period of meditation. When I began leading a group I found I often forgot the prayer before meditation unless we had it at the very beginning, but after a number of years' experience, I have come to see that it is essentially a most effective tool to focus on the actual time of meditation.

On the various teaching CDs where Fr. Laurence Freeman is instructing groups in how to meditate, he uses the opening prayer in this way. However, I have attended meditation sessions run by him where this was not the case. We will put the question to him during his question and answer time at the National Retreat at Waikato University in January next year and let you know what he says.

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¹ Harris, Paul. *Frequently Asked Questions About Christian Meditation: The Path of Contemplative Prayer.*

Q & A - A place for your questions relating to Christian Meditation - no matter what! The **Q & A** Convenor, Shirley Duthie, will answer or find an expert to tackle any question relating to your daily practice, your CM Group or Community Days, parish difficulties related to Christian Meditation, Christian Meditation history or writings about Christian Meditation and related subjects.

Send questions to sjmduthie@gmail.com Sender's name not disclosed without permission



The 2019 John Main Seminar - Vancouver, Canada



In the latest (November) WCCM newsletter, *Meditatio*, I see that Sarah Bachelard is leading the next John Main Seminar. It will be held in Vancouver over the period 5-11 August, 2019. Sarah led our last national retreat at Waikato University in 2017. Eighty-four people from around

New Zealand attended and here is what I journaled about her and the retreat.

It was an outstanding retreat. I don't recall such great feedback for a retreat leader as that bestowed on Sarah. Everything she said made sense and was accessible. She gave herself to the task wholeheartedly and the effort she gave to the Q&A sessions was almost heroic.

Sarah's theme for the Vancouver retreat is *A Contemplative Christianity for our Time*. I'm willing to bet that she is already hard at work preparing and revising her talks. WCCM-Canada advises the following:

The 2019 John Main Seminar (8-11 August) and Pre-Seminar Silent Retreat (5-8 August) will be held 45 minutes north of Vancouver at Quest University in Squamish on the road to Whistler Ski Resort. The 2019 JMS website for registration will be available in January 2019. Laurence Freeman OSB will lead the Pre-Seminar Silent Meditation Retreat. The theme of the retreat is *Sources of Wisdom* and his talks will explore the sources to be found in Spirit, Failure, Scripture and Silence. Visit wccm-canada.ca for updates.

A quick look on Air New Zealand shows economy seats selling for about NZD2,000 Auckland-Vancouver return. No doubt better deals could be found if you went searching on the web. Worth thinking about, isn't it?

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Mystical Contact as Gift from God

by Bernard McGinn

Mystical contact with God is a gift. It's not something we do on our own. We prepare through our own efforts in cooperation with grace, but the mystical contact itself is very much a gift. It's not self-help. You can prepare, but the gift comes at God's discretion. All the great mystics insist on this.

There is a famous text in the tradition that is used over and over again by mystical authors. There was an anonymous monk sometime around the year 500 of the Christian era, who wrote under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite. But this very famous text where the author is reflecting on his teacher, who is somebody he called Hierotheus – the holy one. He talks about Hierotheus learning from God, not by his own efforts but by undergoing or being subject to divine grace. He learnt – the Greek is – not by *mathein*, which is your own efforts (think of mathematics), but by *pathein* – by

undergoing or being subject to, being given a divine grace. It is not something that we do on our own. It's something we receive; it's something we undergo. Almost all the great theologians – St Thomas of Aquinas, St Bonaventure and various others who wrote about mystical grace as a reception – cited that passage about Hierotheus.

A mystical contact is something that happens to us as individuals and sometimes happens within human interchange, either with another person or sometimes with a collective body – a body of the church or worshipping community. One of the most famous of all mystical accounts is in Augustine's *Confessions*, at the end of Book 9, where he and his mother Monica are getting ready to sail back to Africa. They begin talking about heaven together and they have a joint mystical experience, a joint moment of mystical consciousness, the two of them. He

says, "As we were talking, our minds were raised up, raised up above the earth, raised up above the heavens, and we came to a brief touch of that supernatural world, and then came back down."

Within the conversation here of mother and son, God gives the gift of some kind of more direct contact with him – very typical of other aspects of the tradition as well. Teresa of Avila, in her *Life* once talks about having a conversation with one of her confessors and says pretty much the same thing – that they were so wrapped up in their conversation about divine things that they both had a kind of joint experience. I think this can be true collectively, both in terms of certain moments of liturgical worship, certain types of prayer groups.

transcript from:
Praying with the Masters Today
by Bernard McGinn



Wanaka Community Day 22 September 2018

a report from Annette Reinheimer

Our Wanaka Meditation Community was joined by friends from Alexandra on 22nd September, a glorious Spring day. From the time we arrived at Pete Chamberlayne's home the beautiful Spring garden was breathing life into our day. Our guide for the day was Rev Yvonne Smith, a Presbyterian minister from St Ninian's Christchurch, who is currently serving an intentional ministry with a focus on Spirituality. The morning included a welcome from Yvonne to different forms of contemplative practices that may reflect our own individual personalities, bringing deeper meaning to our lives.

For our day, it was the affective apophatic practice, emphasizing the mantra and emptying oneself of all distractions, as taught by John Main. Before lunch we meditated then moved out into the garden. We had the option of taking a poem from Pádraig O' Tuama, Joan Chittister, perhaps a Daily Examen, or taking nothing with us. The warm Spring sun had awakened the hellebores, daffodils and violets - a signal perhaps to our own personal season of growth. Bellbirds, tuis and quails, singing and communicating with each other in the trees, were a reflection of the importance of our own relationships and community.

After lunch we meditated again, then were lured back out into the garden again where we participated in a walking *lectio* led by Yvonne - slowly, very slowly, present in our body, present in the moment. Too soon it was time to farewell Yvonne (thank-you again) and each other, giving thanks for the wonderful sense of community we all enjoyed.



2019

Events Calendar: (more details available in Events Calendar at NZCCM website)

- January 13 -16** **Waikato University: National Silent Retreat** with Fr. Laurence Freeman, OSB.
See NZCCM website for registration details or email retreat@christianmeditationnz.org.nz or contact Linda Polaschek - phone: 04.4797955; 0204797955, nandlpolaschek@gmail.com
- January 17 & 18** **Clinical Education Centre, Auckland City Hospital: Meditatio Seminar.**
See www.meditatio.org.nz for registration details or contact Linda Polaschek phone: 04 4797955 or 020 4797955, email: nandlpolaschek@gmail.com
- March 1 - 3:** **Waikato Retreat "Enriching the Pilgrimage"**, led by Raymond Eberhard. *(all places taken).*
- March 9** **Christchurch Community Day**
1:00 - 4:00, Methodist Church Hall, cnr Chapel Street and Harewood Road,
Contact Chris Wilson, cwilson@expensereduction.com
- March 9** **Mercy Spirituality Centre, Epsom, Auckland.**
Introduction to Christian Meditation \$35.00 presented by Cathryn Wiles-Pickard RSM.
to register email info@mercyspiritualitycentre.org.nz or www.mercyspiritualitycentre.org.nz
- March 22-24** **Hawkes Bay, Manawatu and Taranaki** leaders and emerging leaders retreat
at Southern Star Abbey, Hawkes Bay.
All bookings and enquiries to Shirley Duthie sjmduthie@gmail.com
- March 23** **Wellington Community Day**, Home of Compassion, Island Bay.
Contact Elspeth Preddey elspeth.preddey@xtra.co.nz
- March 23** **Auckland Community Day**, T & R Auld home, 748 Waitakere Road, Kumeu.
Tracing unbroken tradition of christian meditation, presenter Cathryn Wiles-Wiles RSM.
- March 30** **BOP/Waikato Community Day** at St Joseph's Catholic Church, 28 Mueller St, Waihi.
Theme to be decided. Leader Raewyn Blair.
Contact Damian Robertson, dae.pete@outlook.com
- May 25** **Christchurch Community Day**
1:00 - 4:00, Methodist Church hall, cnr Chapel Street and Harewood Road.
Contact Chris Wilson, cwilson@expensereduction.com
- May 18** **Mercy Spirituality Centre, Epsom, Auckland.**
Introduction to Christian Meditation \$35.00 presented by Cathryn Wiles-Pickard RSM.
to register email info@mercyspiritualitycentre.org.nz or www.mercyspiritualitycentre.org.nz
- June 22** **Hawkes Bay Community Day at Southern Star Abbey.**
Contact Shirley Duthie, sjmduthie@gmail.com
- July 20** **BOP/Waikato Community Day, St Mary's Catholic Church Hall**, Ranolf Street, Glenholme, Rotorua. Theme "Contemplative Reflections". Leader Damian Robertson.
Contact Damian Robertson, dae.pete@outlook.com
- July 20** **Mercy Spirituality Centre, Epsom, Auckland.**
The Journey and Fruits of Christian Meditation \$35.00 presenter Cathryn Wiles-PickardRSM
to register email info@mercyspiritualitycentre.org.nz or www.mercyspiritualitycentre.org.nz
- July 26-28** **Auckland Retreat, St Francis Retreat Centre.**
Contact Charmainne Tolich, ctolich@me.com
- July 28-29** **Auckland, NZCCM AGM, St Francis Retreat Centre.**
Contact Linda Polaschek, nandlpolaschek@gmail.com
- August 17** **Christchurch Community Day**,
10:00 - 3:00, Methodist Church hall, cnr Chapel Street and Harewood Road.
Contact Chris Wilson, cwilson@expensereduction.com
- August 31** **Introduction to Meditation in the Christian Tradition**, presenter Vincent Maire.
Vaughan Park Anglican Retreat Centre, Long Bay, Auckland.
To register visit www.vaughanpark.nz
- September 21** **Mercy Spirituality Centre, Epsom, Auckland.**
Christian Meditation Retreat Day \$35.00 presented by Cathryn Wiles-Pickard RSM.
to register email info@mercyspiritualitycentre.org.nz or www.mercyspiritualitycentre.org.nz
- September 28** **Hawkes Bay Community Day, Southern Star Abbey.**
Contact Shirley Duthie, sjmduthie@gmail.com

New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation

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