



Stillpoint

Stillpoint is the official magazine of the New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation
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Websites to visit:

christianmeditationnz.org.nz
wccm.org
wccmaustralia.org.au
christianmeditationorg.uk
bonnevauxwccm.org

The Seven Day Silent (Intensive) Retreat – What is it?

Laurence Freeman describes the Seven Day Silent Retreat as:

'Always a special event in the community as much flows from it. An Intensive Silent Retreat is an opportunity to grow in the silence and stillness of meditation over an extended period. For all those I have shared this experience with over the years it is an unforgettable and beautiful time with long-term benefits. It is also a time to deepen your insight into your relationship with Christ and your commitment to the Community.'

With eight meditations a day, it is good that there is a day where you can shape your own retreat, a desert day, and walk up the old disused railway track carrying your packed lunch while enjoying a time of contemplation. **Cat Jehly, Chris Harrington** and **Vincent Maire** reflect on 2023's Seven Day Silent Retreat in Featherston.

Desert Day by Cat Jehly

Starting out the walk along the Remutaka rail track on the morning of our retreat 'desert day', a vivid dream from a few years before keeps pushing its way to the front of my mind.

In the dream I find myself halfway up a steep, angular mountain that reaches into the sky. I am on hands and knees on the narrow mountain track, my back facing up the mountain path. Thick cloud has rolled in so all around is grey and white. I can't see the precipice, but I know it is right next to me. I am almost paralysed by fear but try to awkwardly shuffle backwards towards the summit. Realising I won't make it before nightfall I decide to descend the mountain - but as I begin to, I see that the path in front of me has now disappeared, dropping away into thin air. There is only a ladder on the rock face above the drop. I crouch there petrified, but I don't want to just sit and die on the mountain. Somehow I summon courage to stand up, reach over the edge and pull myself onto the ladder. As I begin to climb I see an opening right into the mountain,

leading to a beautiful green valley beyond. I crawl through the tunnel-like opening, and make my way into the warm sun-lit valley below...

As unnerving as memories of the dream are, I reassure myself that this desert day walk bears no resemblance to it, and continue the climb along the track, into the hills. Passing through an old rail tunnel, then a steeper incline before eventually the view opens up to the expanse of the ranges. I continue round a bend and am shocked to see a swing bridge come into view, strung wide across a gorge and anchored at multiple points to withstand the strong winds in the ranges.

My fear of heights fuels my apprehension as the bridge looms nearer. Reaching the start of Siberia Bridge I pause to gather courage and read the information panel. It is a story about how the area is so windy it blew a train off its tracks and into the gully and people died. Fear churns in my stomach. As I consider turning back a group of cyclists appear on the other side and ride across. Seeing my nervousness they offer to walk me over, and I thank God for support that comes just as it's needed. I'm relieved when we reach the other side - and happy to hear there is a side track so I don't have to face the bridge on my return.



Two more tunnels and I arrive at Summit, stopping to eat before starting the return walk. Cloud and rain start closing in and when I reach Siberia Bridge again I stand for a moment, watching it being rocked from side to side by the blustery gales. I find the side track down into the gully, little more than a goat track covered in brambles and gorse. It descends to a small stream where I negotiate slippery rocks before scrambling up the other side, climbing the thin track. *Don't look down.* Almost at the top and I smile with relief - which is short lived when I see that the path in front of me has now disappeared. A slip has swept the track away and there is no going further.

Mind racing, I consider all the options to avoid a bridge crossing but it's a futile exercise. Flashes of my dream return as I ponder the situation. Looking up, I see the bridge being lashed by the wind and my anxiety heightens as I realise it is my only option. I remember being supported across the bridge earlier in the day; perhaps I could allow myself to trust in God's care and protection. I recall that Mary from the retreat was behind me on the walk and there's a chance I can catch her before she crosses over. I madly scramble back down the track, stumble across the stream and race to the top. Mercifully, Mary is standing there, about to cross. I break silence to explain my predicament.

I feel sick as I step closely behind Mary like a petrified limpet, following each footstep, just like in walking meditation. My senses are on high alert. Then, my heart drops as I hear a roar in the trees below, and a moment later feel a powerful gust sweep across as we near the middle of the bridge, blowing me off balance. I grab for the cable on my left. The wire feels thin and flimsy in my hand and offers no stability to my frantic mind. The wind howls around my head and buffets my jacket, backpack and legs. All around is rain, wind and increasing fear.

I turn my back to the wind and grip the wire now with both hands, trying to steady myself on the bouncing, swaying bridge. My legs weaken and I crouch down, trying to anchor myself. I awkwardly edge myself along sideways, half crouched, hands shuffling along the wire. Looking up momentarily I see Mary slowly making her way across the bridge, the gap growing as each step takes her further and further away. Fear paralyses my body and mind and I tell myself I can't continue. I crouch there, petrified.

A command suddenly cuts across my mind like lightning: *"Stand up and walk!"*

Shocked out of paralysis, I stand up and start walking. I feel no courage but am following this directive that comes from a place that knows no fear. I race forward on wobbly legs - and all of a sudden am at the other side. Mary and I re-enter silence and make our respective ways back down the track, through the last tunnel and down to the valley below.

Among the fruits of this desert day experience is an invitation towards a deepening trust in this relationship with God on the spiritual path. What does it take to let go, to surrender, and to take refuge, amid fear and resistance? Jim Finley describes it well when he says that when someone can still see, they often resist being guided. It isn't until they find themselves in the darkness that they stretch out their arms and allow themselves to be led.

This transformative darkness is likened by St Teresa of Avila to the darkness of the cocoon that the silkworm emerges from as a butterfly: *"But note very carefully, daughters, the silkworm has of necessity to die"* (Peers, 1972, p.101). Finley expands on the metaphor of the emerging butterfly, focusing on the role that meditation practice has in its transformation: *"As long as the transforming power of faith has yet to penetrate and transform the roots of consciousness itself, we are like a caterpillar with wings... We hear the call to fly to God but we remain earthbound... We have faith in Christ, a faith telling us to 'fear not'; and yet the uncertainties of what the future might hold still leave us anxious... We sit in meditation so that the last traces of our tendency to identify with egocentric consciousness might finally dissolve as our habitual base of operations"* (Finley, 2005, p.142).

Alongside this invitation to deep trust, there is a profound encouragement to plant both feet on the earth and walk this journey with an uprightness - to build a capacity to meet, and embody, the path as it unfolds. Brother David Steindl-Rast speaks of this embodied spirituality as our inheritance as humans: *"We belong to both the realm of the senses and a realm that goes beyond them... Our noblest task is to make the most of this creative tension... If we neglect our senses, we clip the very wings on which we are meant to rise to higher spheres"* (Steindl-Rast, 1983, p.20).

On the final evening of the retreat as I look out the window to the ranges I see a group of hawks rising into the turbulent sky; they soar upwards, so high, then drop down, rolling over so their chests face the sky, spinning their bodies in mid-flight, diving, then climbing up again, gliding, *dancing*. They are so at ease in their wild world that they use it as their playground, and there is the clear message that, held in God's hands, I can do the same. *Amen. Amen. Amen.*

References:

Finley, J. (2005). *Christian meditation: Experiencing the presence of God*. HarperCollins.

Peers, E. A. (1972). *Interior castle - Teresa of Avila*. Crown Publishing.

Steindl-Rast, D. (1983). *A listening heart: The spirituality of sacred sensuousness*. Crossroad Publishing.

For the next 7-day retreat at Cross Creek Featherston – note to self by Chris Harrington

You won't have forgotten the wind but, still, it will surprise you – you won't believe how windy and *noisy* it is. Even in the quiet moments, you'll hear the trees higher up roaring like the surf, and then the wind toiling through the shelter belts, flattening the tussock and the grasses in the paddocks. And when it reaches here, it's as heavy as water: the building flexes and rattles, the wind whistles and screams at the windows, the metal chimney creaks and twists on its nails. It's all so incredibly loud.

But you're here for the silent retreat. There are so few places in New Zealand where this can happen. Even in our ideal circumstances at home, we've hardly ever managed to organise a "quiet day" for ourselves; so, to have a place that's suitable, to have people willing to organise it, to lead the sessions, to look after the meals and housekeeping, to sit together through 7 days – to have all this come together is a rare thing.

The structure and the rules are what caught my attention in the first place, and the rule of silence, in particular. It removes the obligation to have something to say. But, more than that, the space without words showed what I would have said and how little of it was really needed. In the same way that fasting shows how you eat and why, the silence shows the workings of your impulse to talk.

The silence of the group: I haven't ever meditated with a group that was so deeply quiet. It was more than the absence of movement and restlessness, more than quiet – call it a profound and deepening stillness. And that's what I've tried to stay in touch with since then, to abide in, to return to.

Reflections on the 2023 Seven Day Retreat (Featherston) by Vincent Maire

Earlier this year a friend died and his sister found in his house a beautiful notebook that had never been used. She kindly gave this gem to me. The moment I held it in my hand I knew I would keep it for the intensive retreat. At the bottom of each page is a quote from the Old Testament: Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Isaiah and so forth. The paper is very good quality, the cover is purple and the pages edged with gold. This is a notebook created for sacred writings that will be read over and over again.

I used the journal to give structure to my retreat. Each morning I recorded my efforts at Focusing / bio-spirituality, which is a recent contemplative practice for me. I also devoted time each day to giving thanks for an aspect of my life. These were my family, my work, my gifts, nature, my suffering, and my walk with my brother Jesus.

Each day's Lectio Divina was also recorded in the journal. I often found a connection between the lectio and the quote at the bottom of the page. I commented on the daily lecture where I always found fruit to record in the journal. And along the way I wrote down many other thoughts and insights as the retreat unfolded.

I am not new to retreats; I generally have two or three a year. Each retreat has its own rhythm and much depends on how I am feeling emotionally, physically, and spiritually at the start. I am loathe to say this was the best retreat I have ever been on. However, it was quite different to any previous retreat. I'm not sure why I say this and to be honest, I'm struggling to find words to explain the impact it has, and continues to have, on me. My final journal entry reads as follows:

At the end, Linda brought the candle round for us to receive a blessing, our hands held over the flame for a moment, then we placed our hands on our heart. I "heard" that (1) I would return home highly energized and (2) new pathways would continue to open. And this has been the case.



My sincere thanks to our leadership team; Linda, Rosie, Raymond and Peter. And hugs and hellos to my fellow retreatants. Thank you for keeping silent vigil with me.

Seven day Silent Retreat attendees:

Back row: Raymond Eberhard. Malcolm Byford, Tim Auld, Peter Murphy, Mary McLister, Vincent Maire, Lois Holmes, Judy Youmans, Anne Lovell.

Front row standing: Chris Harrington, Cat Jehly, Rosie Dell.

Front row sitting: Bobbi Laing, Kitty Chiu Absent: Pip Nicholls, Linda Polaschek

The intention was clear for Rosie Dell and Raymond Eberhard: to attend the Penang School Retreat to be led by Fr Laurence Freeman - this was in celebration of Malaysia's thirtieth anniversary - and observe and note any differences in his style and presentation, then implement these back here in New Zealand. What could be simpler than that?

The first inkling that something was afoot happened at Auckland Airport during our departure for Singapore. We had been there since 7am. Just when it was time to start getting ready to board our flight, an announcement over the public address system. The flight was delayed. An hour later, the same message. A fuel system problem. And so the day passed ever so slowly. Eventually the Captain came to the front desk and announced that he was in no way prepared to fly until he was one hundred percent satisfied that the fuel system was working satisfactorily. Twenty-dollar lunch vouchers were distributed. The day dragged on until 4pm, when it was announced that the flight was cancelled, and passengers should rebook at check in counter one. That caused a rush of some people all with the same intention, to get there as quickly as possible. Those who had previously bought duty free were disadvantaged, as their instructions were to take them back and get refunds. People who had streaked past us ended up at the back of the queue. After a wait of about an hour we were dispatched to the Sudima Hotel, taking the yellow bus.

We enjoyed a restorative dinner, amused by the 'robot waiter' that fetched and carried plates, and even delivered meals for room service. We were surprised when the lift door opened and a robot (similar to R2D2) trundled out saying, 'excuse me, I'm delivering a meal for room service!'

A flight update came through. Our new departure time was to be 1am. So, our beds were not slept in at all. Two weary travellers returned to the airport and off they flew.

We duly arrived at the retreat centre and were stunned by the news that Fr Laurence was not attending due to health concerns. Our Fr Peter Murphy was to take his place.

Fr Laurence had been diagnosed with a growth in his bladder and was due to have this removed imminently. We were shocked.

We decided that the best thing to do was to take the best advantage of the situation, get the most out of the retreat and to focus on developing relationships with the various nationalities present. Besides the majority from Malaysia, there were attendees from Thailand, Australia, Hong Kong and Timor Leste.



Fr Peter did a great job of leading and facilitating the retreat, ably supported by Rosie. The daily talks had been pre-recorded by Fr Laurence, whose theme was taken from his writings, 'The Brick Wall of the Ego.'

He quoted John Main, *'the essence of meditation is that the mirror of self-consciousness must be smashed'*. Everything is mirror image, it's not how things are actually in

themselves. The purpose of meditation is to smash, destroy the mirror, so that we no longer look at reflections of ourselves, of things, and consequently we see everything backwards including ourselves. So here we see John Main's teachings on meditation, how deeply he connects the teaching of the gospel to

the experience of meditation, and to the psychological work that meditation does if we practice it regularly. The mirror gets smashed!

Fr Peter pleasantly surprised everyone by reading out the haikus at the final mass and announcing that they were his homily!

The Australians are very keen to network, as are those from Hong Kong. They expressed a keen interest in our initiatives here in New Zealand. A Malaysian couple expressed interest in the new five day May retreat, which would coincide nicely with their daughter's graduation from Wellington University.

So, we met with the unexpected, and made the most of the situation. Hopefully the new contacts will develop into flourishing relationships leading to a good cross pollination of ideas and attendances, leading to a new era for our community.

Rosie and Raymond



Attendees at the 2023 Penang Intensive Retreat

Book Study (via Zoom)

***The Hunger for Depth and Meaning: Learning to Meditate with John Main* by Peter Ng (editor)**

The first of one of many Zoom sessions started on Tuesday 7th November, with 14 participants, including one from Hong Kong, thanks to recent networking at the Penang Intensive Retreat.

The book is a compilation of talks by John Main and each session will follow the order in which they are written. They comprise firstly listening to one of John Main's recorded talks, followed by a 20-minute meditation, and then discussion on the topic of the day. Each session should last from about 60 - 75 minutes. The book can be ordered from Pleroma Books.

These are all **stand-alone sessions**, meaning it's all right not to attend every session in the series, but to join us when you can.

When - Every Tuesday at 7:30pm. Please email Raymond Eberhard at celebrantraymond@gmail.com to receive the link.



The 2024 Auckland Weekend Retreat - 19-21 July

Our 2024 retreat leader is well-known to many meditators who have visited or stayed at the St Francis Retreat Centre. Br Philip Jeffares OSM will introduce us to the contemplative dimension of Franciscan prayer. The retreat will take place at the St Francis Retreat Centre. Registrations will open in the New Year with more information to follow via email, on the WCCM-NZ website and in future issues of *Stillpoint*. **FRANCISCAN PRAYER: Christ-centred, affective, contemplative, cosmic, evangelizing** Led by Br Philip Jeffares OSM. Contact retreat@christianmeditationnz.org.nz

CYCLONE GABRIELLE – Living in the Aftermath of a Climate Change Disaster

Earth Crisis Forum Webinar Thursday 15TH February 2024 starting at 0800.

The first anniversary of Cyclone Gabrielle will serve as the topic for the next WCCM Meditatio Earth Crisis Forum. Hawkes Bay meditator and oblate Kathy Egan, will share her experiences along with two friends, Marg, who was lifted from her rooftop by helicopter and Troy, who rescued many cyclone victims in his boat.

Images of the devastation that resulted in the deaths of 11 people went global. Massive volumes of water coming down from the hills, people clinging to roof tops, logs catapulting into bridges, houses, animals, cars, farm equipment, farmlands, vineyards being swept away, all made for dramatic viewing. However, the talk will also focus on the impact Cyclone Gabrielle has had on the day-to-day lives of people trying to return to some kind of normality, an aspect of the cyclone that has slipped from the news.

The Earth Crisis Forum is part of Meditatio, a WCCM Outreach that bridges the gap between contemplative experience and key areas of modern society. The February 15th webinar will be widely promoted to the NZ meditation community and attracts meditators from around the globe. Watch your inbox for more details. Put 0800 February 15th in your diary today.

Restore your Sense of Inner Peace

Five-day Silent Retreat – Auckland – 13-17th May 2024

Escape the busyness of daily life and embark on a restorative journey to find personal peace and inner serenity at the **St. Francis Retreat Centre in Hillsborough, Auckland**. Immerse yourself in silence and contemplation in the leafy surroundings.

The Centre offers a perfect haven for self-discovery and refreshment. With comfortable accommodation, quiet gardens, delicious meals, and the availability of Spiritual Companions to support you on your meditative journey, your retreat experience should be rejuvenating.

This retreat is your chance to disconnect from the noise of the world and reconnect with your inner stillness. Commence, or deepen your Christian Meditation Practice following the tradition of the Desert Mothers and Fathers. Reconnect with Nature while enjoying the tranquil beauty of the Centre's natural surroundings and neighbouring St Cecilia Park.

This is a 'spacious' retreat, offering time to reflect and recharge with a generous allowance of personal time and three meditation sessions a day. Artistic materials are available for those who wish to explore this medium, or bring your own. Every evening there will be a short break from silence as we journey through Benedictine Monk John Main's book 'The Heart of Creation', a copy of which will be given to participants to keep on their arrival. Each person is encouraged to use the time and facilities as best works for themselves. No prior meditation experience is necessary, all levels are welcome.

About the Facilitator

Raymond Eberhard has been interested in spirituality since his early twenties. He has a Social Services background, having been General Manager of a Charitable Trust for over twenty years. Raymond is a Benedictine Oblate, an NZCCM Council Member and teacher of Christian Meditation. Raymond actively supports St Peter's Anglican Church in Katikati, by facilitating a monthly 'Tell Your Story' Men's Breakfast and by chairing their Seasons for Growth Committee, which supports school students suffering from loss and grief.

Numbers are limited so early registration is suggested. The price is \$860pp, all inclusive, with an early bird price of \$810 if registered by 1st March. To book your place or for more information contact: celebrantraymond@gmail.com

The Camaldoli Oblates of NZ Annual Retreat (2023)

In September, four of us attended this retreat at the wonderful Cistercian Abbey in Kopua, Hawkes Bay. As well as myself there were Phillip Saunders from Kerikeri (NZ Coordinator), Pat Collins from Kerikeri and John McKay from Napier. We decided together to base the theme of the retreat upon Cyprian Consiglio's recent publication *Rediscovering the Divine – New Ways to Understand, Experience, and Express God* (you can read Phillip Saunders commentary on the book below).

We had four meditation periods each day of the retreat. Readings before and after were chosen from Cyprian's book as well as from John Main, Laurence Freeman and Henri Le Saux. Each day we attended Mass, Lauds, Vespers with the monks and Kopua Community.

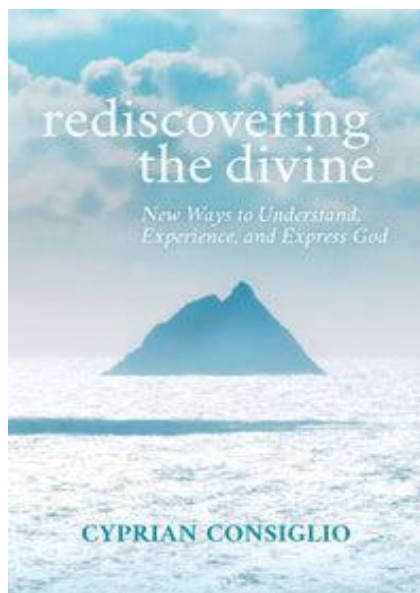
The monastic rhythm, silence and atmosphere added to the richness of the retreat. We had chosen to have a silent retreat except when we came together for our collatio (group lectio) sessions. During these sessions we focused upon specific parts of Cyprian's book. Prior to the retreat we had been reading the book in sections, so that when we came together during the collatio sessions we shared our insights, queries, thoughts for ongoing reflection and lectio.

Much of Cyprian's work is built upon the work of Bede Griffiths, Henri Le Saux, Bruno Barnhart, Raimon Panniker, and countless others, including other traditions, for example Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Sufism, Judaism. We took telescopic aim with our whole being (*Spirit, Soul, Body*) immersed in the four quadrants: Silence, Word, Music, Dance. Our sharing together during the collatio sessions was very helpful, insightful, pertinent and nourishing for the ongoing spiritual journey.

The hospitality of the Kopua Monastic Community, both lay and monks was welcoming and inspiring.

Michael Dougherty (Whangarei)

Book Commentary by Phillip Saunders



Rediscovering the Divine – New Ways to Understand, Experience and Express God by Cyprian Consiglio (published 2023)

Without expressing too much of what is in the book, I felt to write a review was a massive task. To that end I have put a link at the end of this commentary to the overview of the book on the publisher's website. Here is a comment from the overview:

"This is the best book on contemplative spirituality I've read in years. Fr. Cyprian represents the future of Christian contemplation. Following in the footsteps of spiritual masters like Bede Griffiths, Bruno Barnhart, and Abhishiktananda, he helps us touch what a deep practice feels like."
- Adam Bucko, director, Center for Spiritual Imagination (NYC); author, *Let Your Heartbreak Be Your Guide*.

However, from experience of reading and working with the book, I think I may be able to help those who wish to approach this enormous resource. The reason I say this is the Aotearoa/New Zealand Camaldolese oblate community held a retreat in September 2023 at Kopua which was based on the book and several sessions of collatio, nine hours spread over two days.

We all prepared for the retreat by reading the book in advance, some fully, some in part. We had discussed previous to the retreat the chapters which might be most relevant and also sought advice from Fr. Cyprian OSB Cam.

If not going into a deep period of collatio then I would say the best way to approach the book would be in the order the author gives us the chapters, as one leads to another. However, we all found it beneficial prior to the retreat diving into various chapters, marking items that resonated personally and those we felt open to discussion.

The book is a diamond mine, there is so much material to work with over time. It needs to be read as lectio and even better as collatio (group lectio) so you can have the influences of others' different life experiences to draw on and widen the discussion.

I found the book very much in tune with my Camaldolese understanding and would recommend it highly, especially to our contemplative communities.

<https://orbisbooks.com/products/rediscovering-the-divine-building-a-house-with-god-from-the-ground-up>

Julian of Norwich Part 2 (Part 1 was in the previous edition of Stillpoint) by Cat Jehly

Prayer

Julian's spirituality has been described as being fundamentally about *compassion*. She wanted to share in Jesus' suffering, and in doing so she held the whole of humanity in her heart. At the same time she saw the eternal joy of God, which transcends all pain.

With regard to prayer, Julian was less focused on practices and methods of prayer, and much more concerned with nurturing a direct relationship with God through our longing for him. It is this relationship that is able to heal our distorted self image.

Julian wrote about trust as a significant aspect of prayer, saying: *'..often we do not trust him completely, for we are not sure that God hears us, because we are unworthy - it seems to us - and we feel absolutely nothing. For often we are as dry and barren after our prayers as we were before. And feeling like this... is the cause of our weakness - for I have felt like this myself. And our Lord brought this suddenly into my mind and spoke these words... "I am the ground of your praying. First it is my will that you should have this. Then I make it your will too. Then I make you ask for it, and you ask. How then should you not have what you pray for?"'*

So our yearning or seeking to connect with God is not coming from *us*, but has already been gifted by him. Julian describes our role then as to trust that what we need will come to us.

God as Mother

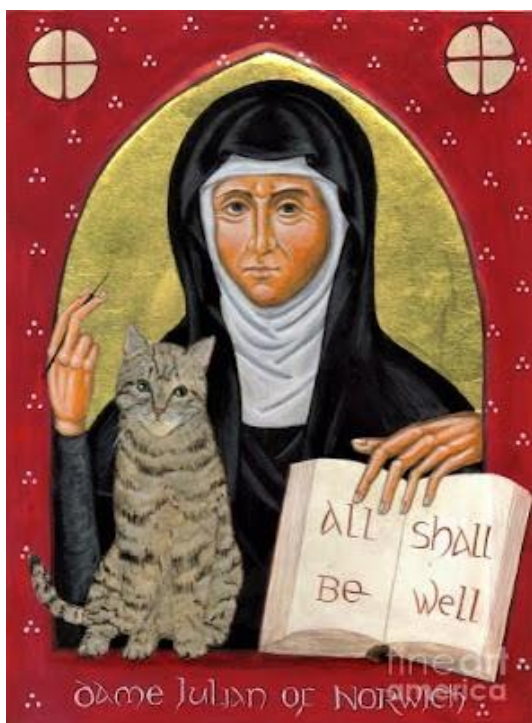
When reflecting on the nature of God, Julian wrote at length about the Motherhood of God, as seen in Christ's nourishing us through his own body: *'A mother's care is the closest, nearest and surest - for it is the truest. We know our own mother bore us into pain and dying. But our true Mother Jesus, who is all love, bears us into joy and endless living.'*

Spiritual teacher Jim Finley highlights the feminine aspect of God as being significant in Julian's - and other mystics' writing - particularly in the discussion of body, sensation, emotion and intuition as means of being

with God: *'And so you have the femininity of God... I think really part of these teachings of the mystics is this reintegrative thing by the divinity of the feminine. We see this birthing tenderness. It's in all of us as a part of God's nature.'*

Sin

In reference to sin, Julian's visions revealed a God that could not be judgmental or angry, but one that was completely loving. Sin was described as having *'not a particle of substance'*. It is not a thing in and of *itself* but can only be known by the *pain* that it causes - and even that pain is passing and has value in that it brings us closer to God by making people humble and repentant. She wrote: *'The lowliness and humbleness we shall gain from looking on our failure... because of this we shall be raised high in heaven. And we could never have reached such height without such humbling.'*



God said to Julian: *'It is true that sin is cause of all this suffering, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'*

In discussing Julian's revelations, theologian Rev Robert Fruerwirth points out that saying 'all will be well' isn't to pretend that everything is okay in the world, but that it can be an invitation to be open to *all* of life; not only the parts that are acceptable to us, but also the parts of life we find unacceptable, or the parts we don't want to look at because they're too painful. Julian understood that *all* shall be well - so perhaps the encouragement is to bring awareness to the things in our life that we refuse to allow God to be present to - and to make well.

When Julian questioned God: *'What about all the suffering that comes from sin? How can all of this be well?'* God's response was that when we reach heaven, all will be revealed to us, and we will have some insight into suffering. Some of these

revelations, particularly around sin and judgement, were difficult for Julian to reconcile with the teachings of the Church, but she sought to do this.

Towards the end of Julian's visions when she started to doubt everything she had seen, God came to her with words of comfort and said: *'Take all this and believe it. Keep yourself in it, comfort yourself with it, and trust yourself to it, and you shall not be overcome.'*

Ultimately, Julian expressed these divine revelations as a potent message of God's love: *'God wants us to heed these words so that we shall always be strong in trust - both in sorrow and in joy. For he loves us and delights in us. And so he wills that we love him and delight in him, and firmly trust him - and all shall be well. And soon after this, all was shut away and I saw no more.'*

References: Chilson, R. (Ed.). (2008). *All Will Be Well: 30 days with Julian of Norwich*. Kirsten Oates (Host). (2022, August 30). *Turning to the Mystics with Jim Finley: Turning to Julian of Norwich*. [Audio podcast]. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7KnT7xQ3HCOEDNwntGUikw> *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love*-Robert Rushworth. (2016, October 6). YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uykbymSbBo> Upjohn, S. (2021). *All Shall Be Well: The Revelations of Divine Love of Julian of Norwich*.

Christchurch Community Day 21st October 2023 – Christian Universalism with Tony McMahon

A reflection by Mary Carshalton

After the 17 participants had introduced themselves, Tony started his session by giving us a definition: Universalism is the belief that eventually everyone who lives, will be restored and will end up with God after our death. It includes belief in hell, but hell is not an ending. Hell has a remedial restorative function as a means to a wonderful end as all of creation. Everything that God has made will be fully restored in love. We are all on a journey which is the belief of the early church.

Tony then told us about Delta Community Support Trust. The trust began in 1992 where Tony was manager, pastor and chaplain and one of the founding community workers. Delta is a home of acceptance to all walks of life, the marginalised. This could be due to poverty not only financial but psychological poverty, sexual abuse, depression and many other conditions. The community accepts them as they are, giving them a second or third chance plus. Some are fully healed and changed, others not changed but stay because they feel safe. Tony then showed us a beautiful picture which is used to help the community to understand life and belief in a God of love. I found this "talked" to me. It is our basic Christian belief.



Top left hand of the picture shows a marginalised person in a world of devastation being welcomed into a place of growth and acceptance. Top right hand picture shows a community of acceptance of any walk of life and being lead (bottom left) to healing of physical and mental health. The last quarter shows a future of happiness and joy through Jesus. The centre being the story of salvation through the cross. As many of the people who come cannot read well the picture draws you slowly in and helps your journey of life. Continuing on the subject of Christian universalism, we do not have an angry God. He is the God of love. Jesus

came to build a church of love. Jesus died for the whole world including all of creation. Recognising this we find an inner freedom. The Beatitudes are the key to this.

There are many different people through the centuries who understood Christian universalism. Florence Nightingale, Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Beatrix Potter, Julian of Norwich to name just a few. Tony gave us some Bible readings to meditate with, which help us with the belief of Christian Universalism. The parable of the one lost sheep. John Chapter 3, read further than verse 16. The parable of the sheep and the goats, we are both the sheep and the goats.



Back row- *Bobbi Laing, Yvonne Reinheimer, James Cliff, Carol Duggan, Tony McMahon, Joanne Cormack, Bill Black.* Second Row- *Delwyn Beattie, Margaret Nouwens, Lynda Clarkson, Mary Charlshalton, Kathryn Fernando.* Seated- *Chrissy McKeage, Paddy Walker, Richard Carr.*

Abbaye de Bonnevaux, geographically speaking, being in mid-west France is half a world away. But spiritually speaking as it is our new meditation and retreat centre it is very much part of us.

It was at the third international co-ordinators' meeting in England in 2016 that Fr Laurence posed the purchase of this site for the community. For some years he had in mind the need for a physical centre. For 25 years since the founding of the community in 1991 he had been the centre through his travels including a number of visits to New Zealand. The community was now based in over 100 countries and he was aware that age was catching up with him (He has just had surgery for a growth in his bladder). Prices of land in England made such purchases out of the question. They had looked at properties in the south of France but again prices were too high. They had come across this property which had been on and off the market for ten years. It had once been a Benedictine monastery until the French Revolution and since then in private ownership but the "sacred feel" of the property was still there.

I have been fortunate to spend over ten weeks there in this my sabbatical year and the experience has been profound. There are four meditation periods a day (the first is voluntary) and the readings accompanying these meditations are from other religious traditions besides Christianity. This gives Bonnevaux an international flavour. But more than this it offers a taste of the religion of tomorrow. Religions are deeply divided, and when combined with nationalism such as in India (which I have visited recently) they can be the source of violence. The Western approach has been to escape into rationality, presuming that by abandoning religion people can find common ground. A secular government in its true sense is one that allows different religions to co-exist in peace.

Co-existence, however, is not enough. The rise of fears and anxieties in our world has led to an explosion of conspiracy theories and right-wing groups committed to violence. The mosque killings in this country have been an extreme example of this. Rationality has given way to irrationality. It was the theologian Hans Kung who said that world peace would not be achieved unless there was peace between religions. His basis for this was primarily ethical, however, this too presumes a reliance upon rationality.

It is in contemplation where true unity is to be found. The Bonnevaux prayer book includes writings from other religious traditions including Native American. It is here that you find true common ground in the seeking of truth. It was St Thomas Aquinas who described contemplation as "the simple enjoyment of the truth". If religious practice remains at the level of saying prayers, then the complexities of human nature remain unchanged. One can be a daily churchgoer and completely oblivious of the needs of others. It is this that has led to people emphasising actions against prayer. For 'doers', 'pray-ers' are escapist, dodging the needs of the 'real' world.

Contemplation breaks through this artificial division. Meditation when practised seriously and regularly has the power to heal many of the psychological needs and wounds that afflict all of us. While the normal level of distractions is the monkey-mind, occasionally repressed memories come to the fore while meditating. The approach to deal with these is simply to let them go. As they have come up naturally the body is being told that one can let them go and be healed. The approach here is the same as with the surface distractions, 'say your mantra.'

The call to contemplation is not simply for our personal well-being and sanctification. It is the pathway for all humanity to come to peace. As meditators we need this vision to sustain us in a practice that at times can seem meaningless because of our inability to find stillness. There is no other way than to meditate twice a day for 30 minutes (optimum time) as a minimum for growth. Anything less, as Fr John's teacher would say, is frivolous.

Retreat at Abbaye de Bonnevaux, France, 2025



We are looking for expressions of interest in taking a group of meditators from this country to Bonnevaux for a five-day retreat in either the northern spring or autumn of 2025

This could include a pilgrimage to either: Lourdes or Chartres or Lisieux or Taizè

Please notify Peter Murphy frpetermurphy64@gmail.com or Vincent Maire vincentmaire12@gmail.com



Questions & Answers by Fr. Peter Murphy

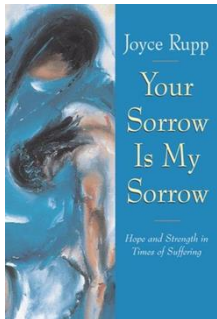
Q. I have come into Christian meditation by way of Transcendental Meditation where I was given a personal mantra. Do I need to change to Maranatha or can I retain my present mantra? And why use a mantra?

The teaching of Christian meditation has always been to stay with the same word. To chop and change is like drilling a whole series of holes in a floor without getting through instead of persevering with the one hole. If the original mantra continues to serve you by all means continue with it. However, since you are now practising Christian meditation I imagine this has been an experience of coming home to your Christian roots and a certain discontent with your previous practice. In this case it might be desirable to change.

If you do change your mantra, generally speaking, the time to change is not when you are finding difficulty with the meditation. At such times the mind plays tricks, for example "I'm not doing it right" or "I need a better word." When John Main began meditating his teacher did not try to convert him. He simply said "Your teacher is Jesus" and he recommended he say "Jesus" as his mantra. However, when he started teaching he felt Maranatha was better as it is an open-vowel word, it is in the language of Jesus, Aramaic, and it does not have any emotional or mental association. Perhaps that is why he did not recommend "Jesus", as this immediately creates an image. Fr Laurence usually prefaces his instruction on Christian meditation by offering "Jesus" or "Abba" – the name by which Jesus addresses the Father – as alternatives, but always the recommendation is Maranatha. If you are desiring to change the time to do so is when you are on an even keel.

For the second part of the question, the purpose of the mantra is to still the mind by giving it something to do. You naturally begin by saying the mantra in the mind but gradually as stillness grows the centre of energy moves to the heart. Meditation after all is prayer of the heart. One image of the value of the mantra that appeals to me (having just returned from India) is that of an elephant wandering through a market place and creating havoc but give him a stick to hold on to and he is quite happy. The mantra is like the stick, the still point or the narrow gate that opens into the joy of the kingdom. However, saying the mantra does not always mean the mind becomes still. We often speak of a two-track system, that is you are saying the mantra but your mind is all over the place. The objective is simply to keep at it and eventually you will come to see the source of your distractedness.

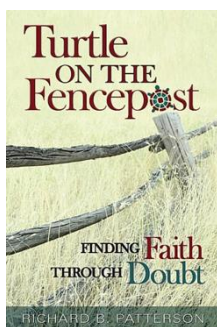
During a recent visit to Pleroma I took a trolley and in best book-hound tradition went hunting for topical treasures available at bargain prices. Here are some of them:



Your Sorrow Is My Sorrow by Joyce Rupp

Published 23 years ago the content of this book is fresh and pertinent and offers hope and strength in times of suffering. The author takes what are known as the Seven Sorrows of Mary relating them to our suffering. The cover and text have not aged and the message is so right for navigating today's world of intolerable suffering. The book includes questions for personal reflection or group use. Clear, easy to read, print. 189pp. A few left at \$15.00.

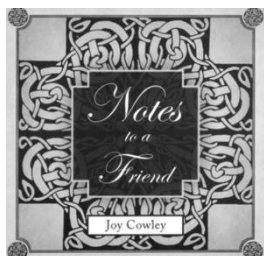
<https://www.christiansupplies.co.nz/products/search/?s=Your+Sorrow+is+My+Sorrow>



Turtle on the Fencepost by Richard B. Patterson

The author is a clinical psychologist who helps us understand that doubts are totally ok on the spiritual journey. With humour, stories and reflection points Richard Patterson shows us how to grow deeper in our experience with faith by embracing, questioning, and even encouraging our doubts as we develop an informed conscience. Only 10 years old this book could be ideal for "retired" or current Catholics who feel confused on their spiritual journey. Annotated bibliography. 128pp. \$20.00.

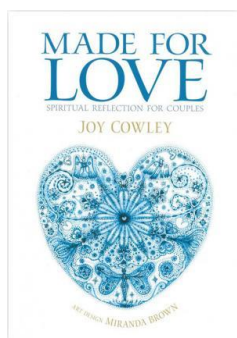
<https://www.christiansupplies.co.nz/products/search/?s=Turtle+on+the+Fencepost>



Notes to a Friend by Joy Cowley

Joy wrote this book to meet the needs of seekers living outside religious structures yet seeking "maps for the journey". Here is the Christian spiritual heritage without the church labels in a beautifully presented gift book. 104pp. \$10.00.

<https://www.christiansupplies.co.nz/products/search/?s=Notes+to+a+friend>



Made for Love by Joy Cowley with Art Design Miranda Brown

In her introduction Joy Cowley talks of "love as the creative force of the universe, infinite and without boundaries". This exquisite gift book, with stunning illustrations, is a gender neutral book of spiritual reflections for all couples who live in faith and hope. Check out the Pleroma Website for more details. 103pp. Giftbook \$10.00 with E-Book format \$19.99.

<https://www.christiansupplies.co.nz/product/9780992262761/made-for-love-spiritual-reflection-for-couples-ebook/>

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To contact our treasurer email: treasurer@christianmeditationnz.org.nz

**Stillpoint wishes all its readers a wonderful Christmas
and happy New Year**



*God goes to those who have time to hear him
— and so on this cloudless night he went to
simple shepherds.*

Max Lucado

EVENTS 2024

December 2nd 2023 AUCKLAND Pilgrimage and Bonnevaux.

10am – 2.30pm, St John's Catholic Church, 180 Centreway Road, Orewa. Vincent Maire, 027 276-6032

ONGOING ONLINE weekly book study and meditation evenings, Tuesdays 7.30pm. Studying Peter Ng's compilation of John Main's talks in his book, 'A Hunger for Depth and Meaning'. This book study will run for approximately 18 months with Zoom. Contact: Raymond Eberhard, 07 5495329 or celebrantraymond@gmail.com

February 15th ONLINE 8am Earth Crisis Forum Webinar. Vincent Maire, vincentmaire12@gmail.com

February 17th NELSON Community Day. 'Shared Wisdom: How the contemplative voice can be heard and how the language of silence brings harmony'. Led by Janet Robbins, UK Oblate and retreat leader.

10am – 3pm Venue Catholic Church hall, 35 William Street, RICHMOND. BYO lunch, morning tea provided. Koha. Please RSVP contact person Marie Shepherd: mshpherd54@gmail.com or 0278658032

April 5th ROTORUA Community Day St Mary's Catholic Church Hall cnr Ranolf & Seddon streets.

10am – 2.30pm. Contact: Raymond Eberhard, 07 5495329 or celebrantraymond@gmail.com

May 3rd-5th CHRISTCHURCH Three day non -residential Retreat at All Souls Church.

Contact: Paddy Walker paddyrose.walker@gmail.com or 02102230579

May 13-17th AUCKLAND 5 day retreat at St Francis Retreat Centre.

Contact: Raymond Eberhard, 07 5495329 or celebrantraymond@gmail.com

June 1st – 22nd & July 6th ONLINE Introduction to Christian Meditation (and Refresher Course) This free 5 session Zoom based course is on Saturdays 3 - 5pm.

Contact: Raymond Eberhard, 07 5495329 or celebrantraymond@gmail.com

July 19th – 21st AUCKLAND Weekend Retreat St Francis Retreat Centre

FRANCISCAN PRAYER: Christ-centred, affective, contemplative, cosmic, evangelizing. Led by Br Philip Jeffares OSM. Contact retreat@christianmeditationnz.org.nz

August 3rd – September 7th ONLINE Essential Teaching Workshop

Saturdays 3 - 5pm using zoom. Contact: Raymond Eberhard, celebrantraymond@gmail.com

*Stillpoint is the official Newsletter of the New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation.
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