



WCCM

Newsletter of The World Community for Christian Meditation

Registered Charity No. 1182213

The Language of the Body

WHAT IS THE SACRED LANGUAGE OF CHRISTIANITY? LAURENCE FREEMAN EXPLORES
THE MEANING OF THE RESURRECTION



The Easter Tree in Bonnevaux (Photo by Laurence Freeman)

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Dear Friends

A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

The Easter vigil began for us by lighting the fire near what we call the Easter tree at the end of the Bonnevaux valley. It was such an intense fire I couldn't get close enough to it to light the Paschal candle. The next morning the vigil ended with us standing, a little chilly, watching the sun push up like a giant orange above the treeline. With many sharing the Holy Week ceremonies online, each part of this three-day initiation reminded me how powerfully we can be united locally and globally across continents and in each other's now. My understanding of the Resurrection was again mysteriously deepened and I again saw that we celebrate it not because we understand everything but in order to understand it a little more.

Understanding anything is less about getting more information than being vulnerably open to what we don't know. Letting go of preconceptions and prejudices, of fixed ideas and opinions is the precondition of all learning. Our minds, however, can so quickly close and become defensive. Learning challenges us because it changes us. We fear change and so it takes real courage and an open mind to learn.

When older people complain it's too late for them to learn – for example, a new phone – they may be revealing more about how they see themselves than about the new challenge scaring them. True, all our brain cells aren't being replaced but the ones remaining are still good for learning into the fourth age. I met a hundred-year-old nun who once announced to her community that she wanted to learn to drive and asked her nervous-looking sisters to teach her. Lifelong learning (with realistic goals) is part of the new era of longevity that we have entered. The alternative is premature senility with retirement equating a long twilight of meaninglessness. Not every older person has the means to em-

bark on new pathways of learning but if they do, then like the young, they bring benefits to those who can't.

Meditation is a continuous learning process that can be started at any age. Because we will never complete it, it teaches us how to become a perpetual disciple, a true learner. It teaches us how to learn anything better, how to let go of pessimistic habits and judgments about ourselves and instead be open to greater depth of field in every area of experience.

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If we celebrate Easter in fresh faith every year, we learn more about the Resurrection and the human mystery

*A commonplace in
mystical teaching is that
silence is the deepest,
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understanding reality*

it illuminates. We emerge from the three days thinking, not only 'what a great thing God did in raising His Son from the dead', but 'I thank you, Lord, for the wonder of my own being'. Science often seems better at awakening a sense of wonder – the beginning of learning – than religion. Religion can approach even the most sacred mysteries with minds closed up by formulas and explanations. Through childlike, first-hand learning, contemplatives crack these open exposing the living mystery. Science, too, can be reductionist and dogmatic. But when a new discovery is made (as is happening now in physics) a wave of humility and wonder is released: 'we've found a new bit of the puzzle but there's even more to learn about the world and even what matter itself is'.

Incarnation. Word made Flesh, Death and Resurrection. The risen body. The sending of the Holy Spirit. These terms are not answers we must believe. They are among the best terms yet invented to lead us into discovering what they point at. They are not passwords into a restricted website but words throwing us open to a reality that is new and open to all. A commonplace in mystical teaching is that silence is the deepest, completest way of understanding reality. Deep prayer of the heart teaches the deepest truths we can learn.

There is nothing so much like God in the whole universe as silence.
(Meister Eckhart)

Silence gives answers. (Rumi)

The silence of revelation fills us with wonder; the silence of absence teaches us fidelity. The Word is in both. (John Main)

The thought-free experience of the Self is silence. It is eloquence, the best language. (Ramana Maharshi)

Silence still works even while speech and other pathways of communication are in operation. It is tangible in any act of communicating through the quality of attention. The real presence of silence in all communication bestows authenticity and authority. Where it is absent, communication falters and smells false. Eventually, it even breaks down or becomes deliberate deception. This is painfully visible today in our noise-polluted world – physically and mentally. Even the basic distinction between truth and falsehood seems often to degenerate in political life into vitriolic attacks between the contestants. It is also an additional cause of anguish in the present health crisis. Whose opinion do we trust during the pandemic, do the wilder theories have any merit, where is the authority needed before trust can be bestowed?

When we use words ever louder to hide the absence of silence in communication they become an additional layer of inauthenticity, separation and distrust. We just want to say, 'shut up!' Communication becomes cloudier, noisier and busier. So, the primacy and purity of silence affirmed by the mystical tradition can be seen to improve the social relationships that are made by our speaking, writing, listening and reading. If meditation creates community it also sustains it. It sounds naïve but I think the day will come when all business meetings will routinely begin with a period of silence because people have realised how much better the results are when they do. Silence purifies language.

At his talk in the Bonnevaux Speakers Series, the philosopher Charles Taylor spoke of the urgency of reviving democracy by fostering conversation among people who don't like each other and whose attempts at communicating often end by hurling insults or threats. But how can we even begin to encourage redemptive dialogue? Charles described the promise of bringing together small, local, low-key, face-to-face groups. I also thought how these groups could be sisters to the weekly meditation groups that form such a vital aspect of our WCCM community. Silence and talk are distinct but they could learn to dance together.

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This is not abstract stuff. Whenever human beings become abstract, they are distracted from the truth. Then we call the individual women and children killed in military conflict 'collateral damage', an abstraction insulating us from criminality and tragedy. When we speak of those who 'belong here' and of others say they 'don't belong', or claim that some have rights and others don't – this is the language of populist politics – the abstraction distracts us from and denies

the equally precious value of each person. It dehumanises people on all sides of the argument.

All of this has a place in the meaning of the Resurrection. The death of Jesus was justified by a great cruel abstrac-

puzzled. We know the sacred language of Hindus, Jews and Muslims. But the Christian sacred language? Greek? Aramaic? Latin? When these answers fail, people start to become more abstract: Love? The Church? The Eucharist?



The Washing of the Feet on Holy Thursday at Bonnevaux

tion: 'it's better for one man to die for the people'. This is how inhumanity is justified and locks us into ancestral patterns of oppression and injustice. The Resurrection explodes this hypocrisy of abstraction and dehumanisation by revealing the complete embodiment of the human at the peak of its evolution. The risen body of Jesus is not a sign of divine privilege but an insight about our destiny. Seeing the risen Jesus – what does 'seeing' mean? – is tasting the first fruits of the human harvest. But why insist on the bodily resurrection? It seems absurd. (Wittgenstein said it could not be understood by reason but only by love.) How does the body change its form? Why is the body so important, and why more important in Christian faith to human meaning than in any other tradition?

When you ask people 'what is the sacred language of Christianity?', they are

The sacred language of Christianity cannot adequately be put into words. It is not essentially verbal although it is an essentially oral, embodied, and interpersonal transmission. Its language is the whole mystery of the human body. Not the idealised bodies of Michelangelo but your body and mine, as they are as I write and you read this. The gospel is only sketched in words, amazing words, but it is fully written in flesh, in 'body language', because God was translated perfectly into flesh when the Word was embodied in Mary's womb. In the Christian revelation, God didn't send us a written message. God incarnated in a body that grew from infancy to maturity, felt tired, hungry, knew desire, pleasure and pain, wept and died. Like us: he lived and died – and rose - in an embodied state.

In the apocryphal Acts of John Jesus is described dancing in a circle after the Last Supper with his disciples (having

drunk at least three of the ritual glasses of wine). He summons them all to join him because 'if you do not dance you will not know what we know'. I remembered this scene on Easter Sunday evening. We were in Bonnevaux sitting in front of the cloister finishing a BBQ. When someone brought a speaker and linked it to their phone music filled the air. The first piece was the irresistible dance music of Zorba the Greek. Before long, people were dancing, though some (as Mt 28:17 says) 'doubted'. They thought perhaps they would look silly, so started to take the dishes indoors. But they let themselves be pulled into the dance. Jesus's teaching is not dogmatic but choreographic. The Kingdom is a dance that anyone can join and that everyone is needed to complete.

If you layer conditions and qualifications onto this call to fullness of life you discredit it. This is what institutional Christianity has done over time especially with respect to the body. If the language of Christian faith is the body, how can you communicate that faith by layering fear, repression and guilt onto those aspects of the body especially connected with pleasure and happiness? The body is not only made to suffer and die. As institutional Christianity re-forms, incarnational Christianity is once again being recognised. The active agent in recognising this incarnational form is contemplation. As in the meditation journey from head to heart, the first great discovery is the sheer wonder of our embodied state.

Our body is an encyclopaedia comprising every kind of knowledge because human beings are a microcosm of the universe. The body knows more than we do; and it never lies. Formed from the material energies of the universe, the body has potential, far beyond its material form, to be boundlessly extensive to the edges of the universe. We can take the gospel to the whole world as Jesus said. In Mk 16:15 Jesus says 'preach the gospel to all creation'. This incarnational,

universal evangelism is not a membership recruitment drive. Nor do we have to preach to trees or distant galaxies.

It is about awakening in the Mind of Christ. 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ' (1Cor 2:15). The word we translate as 'preach' does not mean to try to convert or coerce from



Easter morning sunrise at Bonnevaux

a pulpit but to 'herald' or publish news about an event. We do it from within the dance, overcoming our fear of inclusion and union and losing self-consciousness: the dance then speaks for itself. By shedding its fear, even hatred, of the body, incarnational Christianity generates a more authentic evangelism through a contemplative way of communicating. Its words resonate with the boundlessly embodied experience of faith witnessed by the Resurrection.

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Those following Dr. Barry White's current WCCM talks on Health are learning a richer understanding about what health means and so how they are *embodied*. With good scientific reasoning Barry puts meditation at the centre of his model of health and this approach allows the meaning of health to expand into wholeness and even beyond wholeness into holiness. The 'sacred' language of Christianity is the body, in all its evolutionary forms, because the body itself is both the road and the vehicle of the human per-

son. The Resurrection stories use language as it has never been used before showing how we evolve through death into new and unlimited forms of embodiment.

The ego's survival depends on the physical body. When it dies so does the chain of self-consciousness. Death is a terrible dark tunnel - worse perhaps for those at the bedside than for the person

dying into their new bodily form. Scientific studies of near-death experiences (NDE) are still controversial and the defenders of current models of medical orthodoxy are sceptical as it is their role to be so. Yet academic research about the universal elements of NDE is advanced and recognises a permanent life-transforming effect on the subjects they study. People who have undergone such experiences report across cultures and beliefs a new experience of time and thought-awareness, insight, peace and joy, universal oneness and the sense of coming to a border, a point of no return (which obviously in their case they did not cross). The loss of blood or oxygen should technically induce extreme panic. Yet those who return report the profoundest peace they have ever known.

I raise this only to suggest that, if the Resurrection of Jesus is an event we can relate to here and now, it is because we already have intimations or glimpses of what it shows us about the goal of the human journey. The New Testament

speaks of the disciples' Resurrection experience as a complete personal transformation expanded in community. At the core, is a recognition by the disciples of the risen Jesus after they have overcome misrecognition, fear and doubt and, of course, feeling themselves recognised and addressed by him. This revitalises and energises all those who 'see and believe', sending them back to their daily lives with new commitment, purpose and freedom. They feel something new – not yet everything – of the life Jesus is now living in and through them. They feel embodied and grounded yet filled with a spontaneous liberty of spirit that cuts away whatever chains still hold them back from the dance. After a while, like meditators who feel the transforming effects in their lives, they begin to speak about what they have found.

John Main said that the great fault of the church is to underestimate the power of the gospel by reducing it to morality and social conformity. This is how the mystical tradition has long challenged institutional Christianity. Science today often reminds us, better than the church does, about the wonder of reality. Electrodes touching the brain during surgery frequently restore a past experience to the patient in full vivid detail and all the immediacy of the original event. A concert is 'remembered' with every note played, laughter erupts at a long-forgotten funny event, an insignificant object from childhood re-presents with total recall. This remembering is not the replaying of a video recording observed 'now' in opposition to 'then'. It is inexpressibly real, as present as in the 'past' and the individual is wholly present with it. Is not this the meaning of 'anamnesis', the making-present in the Eucharist or of Christ who is 'the same yesterday, today and forever' (Heb 13:8). The risen Jesus is equally present across all dimensions of time and in all places. 'Split the wood and I am there. Lift the stone and I am there (Gospel Thomas 77). Recognising him, like waking up

from sleep or falling in love happens by stages. It makes us present to all that he is present to.

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My point is that these are credible wonders even if they are out of our comfort zone of the stream of familiar reality. They show our capacity for an expanded life and consciousness linked to and present in the body, even here and now. The body is the field of experience and is itself transformed. It becomes both strange and familiar: 'whether in the body or out of the body I cannot say' as St Paul described his mystical experi-

*In Christ, in that little
space in the heart,
we are in all and all
is in us*

ence (2Cor 12:9). The embodied self that each of us manifests is a microcosm of the cosmos and of an eternal reality that extends through all its time zones. Microscopic pictures of the interior organs look amazingly like photos of galaxies and star clusters. The body is a 'nano cosmos' (a nano is one billionth of a metre) and a wondrous beauty unites the cosmic and microcosmic.

The little space within the heart is as great as this vast universe. The heavens and the earth are there; all that now is and all that is not: the whole universe is in Him and He dwells within our heart. (*Chandogya Upanishad*).

In Christ all the fullness of the Godhead dwells embodied. In him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible; and in him all things hold together. (*Colossians 1*)

In Christ, in that little space in the heart, we are in all and all is in us. Space

and time are no longer what our separated ego consciousness is used to because in that embodied unity we are included in the whole of all life experience. We haven't reached the borderline point of no return yet. Yet how we live now is deeply enhanced by a growing awareness of this reality.

Recently and ecstatically, physicists reported the discovery of a new, fifth force in the universe. If verified, it will change how we see everything and help us develop new powers. It was a welcome bulletin, lifting us to a greater panorama in this time of Covid. Why should there be competition between science and faith? The news of the fifth force, small by comparison with the story of the Resurrection, is like it a part of the evolutionary learning process of the journey of humanity

If we forget the body as the sacred language of Christianity, we won't be able to speak authoritatively about the discoveries our faith reveals. If we saw the wonder and beauty of the body rather than its moral dangers, the programming of the institutional church would change allowing it to dance out into the world. An incarnational Christianity perceives the barely describable signs, vivid hints and glimpses of Christ's risen body, penetrating and forming us even as he forms in us.

Great mystery is revealed in small things. The contemplative mind finds infinite riches in a small room and our emptiness attracts his fullness. Remembering that contemplation brings incarnation to fulfilment helps us be present to how the Word that spoke creation emerged from the infinite, silent depths of being. The silence of a self-emptying love that has come towards us and awaits our arrival – this is what is announced in the Resurrection.

With much love,

Lawrence

Special

Lessons from Pandemic Times

THE WORLD IS BEGINNING THE SECOND YEAR OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS. WE ARE STILL IN PANDEMIC TIMES. UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE IS INCREASING. WHAT HAS OUR MEDITATION PRACTICE TAUGHT US THROUGH THESE CHALLENGES? WHAT GRACE MAY BE PRESENT IN IT ALL? WE INVITED MEDITATORS FROM OUR GLOBAL COMMUNITY TO REFLECT ON THAT.

Recovering the depth and mystery of our being

BY GIOVANNI GIAMBALVO, ITALY

In this time of pandemic the precariousness of our lives has been slammed in our face in all its crudeness and inexorability. Perhaps we have never felt so clearly the truth of Giuseppe Ungaretti's words: "we, like leaves in autumn on the trees". Fear of the virus, with its potential and awful consequences, like worry for our nearest and dearest, buzzes in the depths of our minds, and serves only to inflate our egos. We tend to pull deeper into ourselves, away from all contact, hoping this will protect us.

More than ever meditation helps us to come to terms with our fears, first of all, fear of death.

In meditation we rediscover the 'value' of our precariousness which, instead of paralyzing us by playing the game of our ego, becomes a spring that spurs us to recover the depth and mystery of our being in the 'here and now'. We see that our journey can only be a journey of sharing.

In meditation we experience a silence in which we are not alone: a silence full of faith that prepares us for an inner listening, an encounter, a communion, a gradual expansion of our being as it opens itself to the Other. This is the help as well as the challenge, at a personal and communitarian level, that we gain from meditation.



People are already finding better ways of living

BY KERRY JAMES, AUSTRALIA



What have I learned by meditating during the pandemic? Interiority and silence reinforced by St Paul's declaration that nothing: (i.e. no loss through pestilence, illness, or even death), can separate us from the love of God. Many must repair mental health after COVID-19, and rebuild trust, confidence, and hope, as well as household economies damaged through loss of livelihoods. This can involve altering pre-existing thought patterns and accepting risk because COVID-19 is here to stay, albeit in gentler forms, and other plagues will come.

Meditation reveals God as pure love, the ultimate creator, which can instil new positive attitudes and action. People are already

finding better ways of living that entail them being kinder: to each other, to previously alien communities, and to the environment, even amidst their present privations.

Meditation breaks down defensiveness, encourages generosity and helps us become more open to seeing all creation forming one extended household or estate on our planet. It can provide greater clarity of thought enabling us to present gentler, more loving, ideas in nonviolent ways to national leaders, who hold the power to advance them. Instead of going backwards and reinstating the old competitive ways in which the strong win always at the expense of the weak, we find a better way.

Special

Inspired by Julian of Norwich

BY PAUL HARRIS, CANADA

My own practice of Christian Meditation during the current COVID-19 pandemic has relied immensely on the beautiful life of Julian of Norwich (1342- 1429), who came close to dying of the Black Plague in England, and received the last rites of the Church. The plague in England and Europe killed 50 million people, 60 percent of the population, and is regarded as the greatest catastrophe in recorded history. Julian continued to receive spiritual revelations during her illness concerning the contemplative direction of her spiritual practice.

During her viral illness of the pandemic, God revealed to Julian his compassionate warmth, closeness, tenderness, and love. One of Julian's revelations is when the Lord says to her: "But all things shall be well, and

all manner of things shall be well". Her revelations from God encompass a wide range of topics, and portray an unquenchable optimism regarding God's power to bring good out of evil.

In one of her revelations Julian says: "For in the human soul is God's true dwelling", and adds, "utterly at home He lives in us forever". Again Julian says: "God is the still point at my centre." John Main picked up on this saying of Julian's, and in one of his talks says: "Meditation is a daily pilgrimage to ones own centre".

Once in a time of prayer, Julian heard these words of the Lord: "I am the foundation of your praying". These words were a great consolation to her in the practice of inner prayer. Is it any wonder that John Main asked to hear readings of Julian in the last days of his life?



Staying awake during the night of uncertainty and fear

BY RICARDO MAFFEO, ARGENTINA

I got the virus in early March, 2020, and was isolated for one month. Meditation, lectio, and other forms of prayer were "the narrow gate" that got me through those days of uncertainty and fear. Once recovered, other challenges emerged, especially at work. I learned that the pandemic is like a desert at night, where meditation and lectio supply the oil to keep the lamps burning, as Jesus teaches in Matthew 25.

In a post-Covid world, I suppose the main challenge will be the temptation to "get back to normal", to remain distracted; to continue denying our vulner-

ability and the urgent need for change the world has. Fr Laurence recalled during a webinar last May that the book of Wisdom says the hope of the healing of the world lies in the greatest number of wise people. By following this path of meditation, of pure prayer, we are contributing to that level of wisdom. The virgins in the Gospel of Matthew who brought oil for their lamps, were precisely called wise by Jesus. In order to face the post pandemic challenges, we will need to grow in wisdom, to stay awake, to be prepared with our lamps shining.



Special

Going deeper in understanding myself, others and faith

BY LUCINDA REDFERN, UK



For me, meditation has been a perfect antidote to the body consciousness that the pandemic has provoked. It has served to remind me of and become more closely acquainted with the universal and eternal which the mainstream media has neglected to do. It has also allowed me the space to go deeper both in my understanding of myself, others and faith.

I think one of the main post-Covid challenges will be re-humanising our social connections. We must learn to not see other humans as a threat to our

existence, but as our neighbours. Meditation helps cultivate the humility and compassion that I think will be necessary in this process. Perhaps more personally, the pandemic has eroded my sense of trust in institutions. Public debate seems to have been stifled throughout the past year and as a naturally curious and questioning person, this has been deeply disturbing at times. Meditation helps me at least strive for the equilibrium and peace of mind that allows me to find oases of trust and positivity in everyday interactions.

*Bonnevaux*Visit www.bonnevauxwccm.org

Guesthouse scheduled to host first in-person retreats beginning in September

Bonnevaux is still unable to host in-person events and retreats, because of the pandemic. The resident Community keeps the routine of meditation, silence and work. The renovation work at the Guesthouse (The Stables) is in final stage and the first in-person retreats are likely to start from mid September.

**Employment opportunities**

Positions we are seeking to fill for Bonnevaux and WCCM International:

- * Bonnevaux Center Manager
- * Assistant Programme Manager
- * Grants Manager

Learn more visiting:

<https://wccm.org/opportunities/>

Meditatio Seminar

New Visions for Today's Leaders

23-26 September

Kloster Fischingen, Switzerland



This three-day in-person retreat in a peaceful setting will allow participants to experience a slower pace and explore a nurturing approach to life. They will be led towards this transformative insight through periods of meditation, talks, small group encounters, moments of silence, and guided experience in the realm of perception. It will include talks by: Bertrand Bouhour, Angelene Chan, Laurence Freeman, Philipp Hildebrand, Peter Ng Kok Song, Melanie Schultz van Haegen and Jenny Scott. More information: <http://wccm.org/newslinks/>

News

“Meditation can help young people to find meaning in life”

A CONVERSATION WITH THE NEW COORDINATOR FOR MEDITATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE

by Paul Freeman

Taynã Malaspina, from Brazil is starting the role of WCCM Coordinator for Meditation and Young People. She is launching the program “Contemplative and Purposeful Life”, dedicated to two groups: 18 to 28 year olds and 29 to 40 year olds. The main goal is to help them to develop their meditation path and also build a life project.

Taynã is 36 years old, an oblate, and in her experience as a university teacher and coach, she has supported hundreds of people in the construction of their life projects. She is married to Marco, and has two daughters, Clara and Maria Olivia.

INTERVIEW; TAYNÃ MALASPINA:

What is the importance of meditation for young people?

Taynã - We see young people today as very anxious, anguished and we live in a time of crisis of meaning. We never had a technological development so powerful, and economic development as well. But we can see that was not followed by a feeling of well-being. We live in a time of a certain cult of happiness, the Instagram-Happiness, where families, relationships seem so perfect. But everybody knows it is not the case. And meditation, for young people, may give them something bigger than happiness - in a sense of giving a purpose and meaning in life. In psychology we see that, when the goal is happiness, it is self-nullifying, we will get frustrated. Meditation allows us to be who we really are. We are capable of meeting with our uniqueness, with our essence. So we stop to act in autopilot mode, or in a way we think we should be accepted by others. And young people face a lot of the process of shaping their identity.

I think meditation brings us to the centre. In a moment where everyone, but especially young people, are very distracted in the face of too many stimuli. Young people are really lost, with so

many references, everything is wider, there are too many places to go... and meditation brings us to the centre. And it is in this centre that the balance, lost in our modern time, is recovered.

In this pandemic stage, where people were forced to stay with themselves, they started to be in touch with things that were far away before. I think meditation helps us to organize this inner world.

Can you speak about your projects in this new role?

Taynã - This is something that has been sprouting in my heart, and I think in Laurence's heart and the Community in general for a while: to bring the Christian tradition of meditation closer to young people. We just started some concrete actions, and the idea is to make possible to young people to taste a contemplative way - and it does not matter if the person comes from a religious background or not. We want also to propose a reflection about our current lifestyle and approach young people with a proposal of a contemplative path.

We have two specific projects to start. I will leave an invitation here:

1) A series of monthly talks led by Fr. Laurence Freeman, especially for



those who don't know Laurence it is a big opportunity. He was a mentor for me and inspired me in this journey.

2) Online Course - it will be an eight-hour course, you can undertake it in your own time and at your own pace. It will be recorded and later we will have meditation meetings. We will speak about our current context, the contemplative life and how to begin a journey in that way. The last part is about you building your life project.

The young people will start a journey, taste a meditation practice and also build a life project, answering two basic questions: what do I want from life? And what does life expect from me? These two questions can only be answered from a level of depth that meditation can provide to us.

Watch the interview with Taynã and learn more about the series of talks for young people here: <https://wccm.org/newslinks/>

News

Research on John Main & Christian Meditation

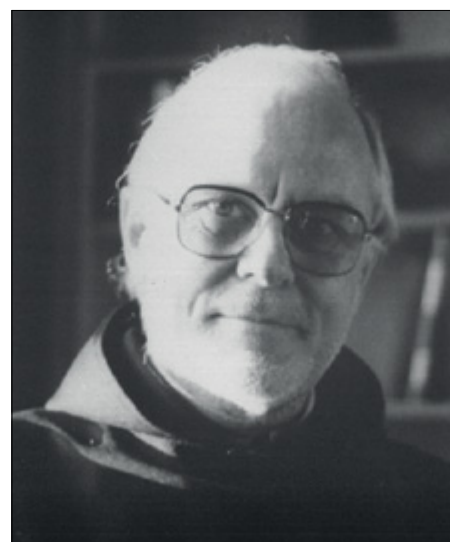
YOUNGER SCHOLARS FROM EUROPE AND THE US ARE PURSUING ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON JOHN MAIN AND HIS INFLUENCE ON OUR TIMES

John Main & Swami Satyananda

BY NICHOLAS SCRIMENTI, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, US

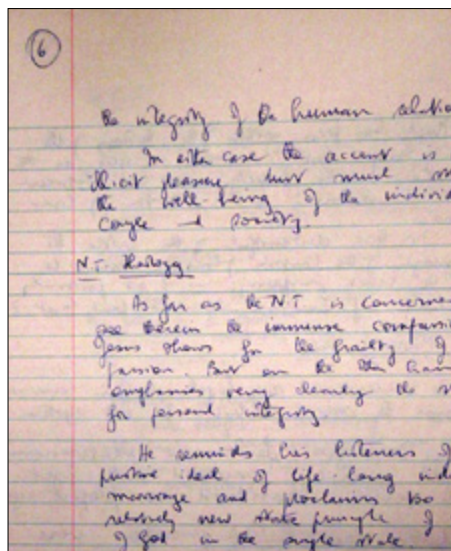
I am working on a project that attempts to historicize and recontextualize John Main's meeting with Swami Satyananda in colonial Malaya in 1955. I argue that their meeting must be understood within the religio-political context of Malaya during the British colonial period and the efforts on behalf of English-educated Hindu reformers to institutionalize a sense of Hindu identity compatible with the perceived values of modernity. Swami Satyananda's connections to Ramana Maharshi and Jawaharlal Nehru have been noted in biographies of John Main, but his connection to earlier Hindu reform movements dating back to the early

19th century are equally important to understand if we are to appreciate the precise form of Hindu religiosity John Main encountered during his storied stint in Malaya as part of the British Colonial Service. By diving more deeply into this context, I hope to chart a new genealogy that suggests that John Main is, in fact, more indebted to Swami Satyananda than we previously may have thought. I also hope to raise some difficult questions about power and the role of colonialism in their relationship, investigating how the colonial origins of this particular form of meditation practice may inform aspects of John Main's later theology.



Redeem us from shallowness: an interpretation of John Main's spiritual teaching

BY SICCO CLAUS, THE NETHERLANDS



John Main's personal notes

This project summarises and evaluates John Main's spirituality in the widest sense of the term (1926-1982). The first part of this study describes and assesses his spiritual theology in the context of the history of spirituality and theology. So far unexamined aspects of this theology, such as his anthropology or his sacramental theology and views on the Church, will be included. It also analyses Main's views on spiritual practices, in particular, meditation, against this historical background. Finally it reconstructs his views on spiritual development. Previously unexamined texts and artifacts from the archives of the library at Georgetown University will be incorporated in this reconstruction. The second part

of this study assesses Main's spirituality against the background of what Charles Taylor sees as central characteristics of the late modern spiritual condition. It asks how it relates to these elements, where they overlap, and how tensions and differences in view with this condition can be understood. Finally, it tries to answer what Main's spirituality contributes to the understanding of our spiritual predicament. The project approaches its finalization, presumably within a year or so.

NEXT ISSUE:

We will highlight others researchers focused on John Main and Christian Meditation

In Focus

Geert Van Malderen, Belgium



became my natural habitat. It is still a joy to me that as a young person I was able to experience a full week of silence at Taizé. When I heard Brother Roger speak of prayer as a flame in the heart, I recognized the truth of his statement. I was clearly looking for God, and God was looking for me.

*Fortunately,
John Main was clear
about how you can leave
yourself behind:
say your mantra*

I couldn't possibly have known what meditation would eventually mean to me when, as a 17-year-old, I first came into contact with the practice of silence at Taizé. There, with thousands of other young people, I experienced 10 minutes of silence three times a day. At first, each meditation period seemed to last for hours. After a few days, they passed all too quickly, and silence became as natural to me as it had been when, as a child, I had spent many solitary hours in a city park that

Many difficult years later, I rediscovered meditation as an adult when a friend introduced me to José Pype, the coordinator of WCCM Belgium. José kindly introduced me to the practice of christian meditation. At that time, I was looking for the simplest form of prayer that could touch my heart, and I had found it. I knew immediately that I would continue to meditate in the WCCM way for the rest of my life, but I didn't know how meditation would completely change my life.

Another decisive period in my pilgrimage occurred about five years

ago. Although I was already involved in the work of WCCM Belgium and led a meditation group, I still did not completely understand how to leave myself behind through meditation. Finally, I read the book 'Silence and Stillness in Every Season.' John Main was clear about how to leave oneself behind: say your mantra. For the first time, it became clear to me how my ego had been selectively filtering my perception. With this new understanding and the simplicity of my daily practice, a radical change began to occur. Meditation began to transform me: the limiting images about myself, about others, about God... they lost their power. I now see that only the pure experience of meditation gives me fullness of life. It gives me back my childlike innocence in an unexpected way.

When my heart opened up, expanded, and became spacious, my life changed quickly. I was more and more attracted towards the larger WCCM community, and I became an oblate of WCCM and of Bonnevaux. This year, I hope to move permanently to Bonnevaux. I trust that there, I will be able to share the koan 'meditation is the self knowledge of God' with many others.



WCCM Newsletter is published four times a year by the International Office of The World Community for Christian Meditation, St Marks, Myddelton Square London EC1R 1XX, London, UK.
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Would you like to contribute to the Meditatio Newsletter? Our next deadline is 10 June.

Resources & Events

WCCM.org: what you need to know about our new digital home



The WCCM's new digital home is launched! When you visit www.wccm.org you will notice a new, clean and simple design, a reorganization of our diverse content and many new features. The new website celebrates the 30th anniversary of the founding of the WCCM. These are some new features:

Supporting Member

This is an opportunity for any meditator to support the WCCM with a recurring monthly donation. All Supporting Members receive unlimited access to our growing library of online courses, recorded retreats and seminars, all of which can be accessed through our new My WCCM platform.

My WCCM

My WCCM (my.wccm.org) is for everyone, not exclusively for Supporting Members. It is a new free platform where users can interact, access free and paid offerings, join groups, learn about events, and receive updates from the WCCM.

Donations

There are various options to support the WCCM: by making a one-time donation of any amount, by becoming a Supporting Member or by leaving a legacy.

Other sections

You will also find on the new website: the essential teaching, outreach initiatives, news, resources for all stages of the meditation jour-

ney, information on where to find a group; a link to easily join our regular live sessions; and the offerings' page listing online courses, seminars, retreats, and other events.

Please visit www.wccm.org and let us know your comments and suggestions via comms@wccm.org.

Online events

Series in Progress:

- * Health Series: next sessions on nutrition, work & movement and the mind
- * Speaker Series: next sessions with Rupert Sheldrake and Liz Watson
- * Talks for Younger Adults with Laurence Freeman
- * National Communities online retreats led by Laurence Freeman

05-09 MAY

Basic Christianity: An Induction into the Life of Jesus the Forgiving Victim - led by James Alison

12-15 MAY

Who Am I? Dancing With Your Shadow, led by Kim Nataraja

22-25 JUNE

Edith Stein, Etty Hillesum and Simone Weil: A Spirituality for Living through a Time of Crisis, led by Stefan Reynolds

MORE INFO & REGISTRATION:

visit <http://wccm.org/events>

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