



Dear Group leaders and friends,

Have you looked at our new webpage created by our WCCM IT coordinator Adriano Massi? There are many new links so take the time to explore it. When I was on the site last night I saw others on the twinkling globe from Auckland, Singapore, Montreal, Cork and Uruguay. It's attracting hits from all corners of the world with more than 500 visitors every day. However the WCCM news for Group leaders will still be sent from this address with the Tablet. Because of flood issues I've been a little later than usual in sending this one.

The first WCCM **Meditatio** seminar and workshops on **Meditation with Children**, held in the UK Ireland and Nth Ireland last Dec, were received enthusiastically and over 60 schools have signed up to pilot the introduction of meditation in their schools. Resources from the Seminars are being produced and you'll hear more of them in the coming months. They'll include DVD resources for teachers, a web-based video from the Meditatio seminar and a Meditatio journal about the Seminar.

There has been much media interest and the London Guardian recently featured an article on the introduction of meditation in schools in the Townsville Diocese- **Children Need More Meditation and Less Stimulation**. Read the article [here](#) or on the wccm home page.

This was followed by an article in the UK Tablet about the Community's work introducing meditation to schools –**Small Pockets of Quietness** Click [here](#) to read it or go to the wccm home page.

The second **Meditatio Seminar** on **Meditation and Mental Health** will be held in London **4th and 5th May** at Regents College, Regents Park, London and speakers from different meditation traditions and contemporary psychology have been invited. The seminar will highlight the role of meditation and its effects on mental health and will bring together those working professionally and spiritually on mental health and wellbeing and others interested in this important area.

A Retreat led by Fr Laurence **Spheres of Wholeness, Healing and the Meaning of Holiness** will follow with a focus on the spiritual dimension of 'wellbeing'. It will be held at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire **Friday 6 to Sunday 8 May**. Download registration form [here](#). Click [here](#) for seminar and retreat poster.

Questionnaire on meditation and mental health. In preparation for the Seminar meditators are invited to fill in an online questionnaire on meditation and its effects on mental health and wellbeing. Fr Laurence's letter at the beginning of the questionnaire will explain it further. This is the link to it. <http://www.calinfo.co.uk/wccm/wccm.htm> Click to answer it online and please forward the link to your groups. The WCCM website homepage also has a hard copy for those in your groups without computer access which can be printed off and posted to the International Office address on the questionnaire.

This month Fr Laurence led a silent National retreat in New Zealand followed by the Australian National Conference in Brisbane. He then flew to Kuala Lumpur for a meeting of Coordinators from the Asian, Australasian and Pacific region. There were 28 representatives from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Philippines and Hong Kong. This was the first of 7 global meetings with Coordinators and their key people to plan for the future in this the 20th anniversary year of the WCCM Community. Other meetings will

be held in London, Caracas, Geneva, Poland, Brazil and Florida for Coordinators in those regions. You can view a PowerPoint of the Kuala Lumpur meeting on the website home page.

At the end of the February Fr Laurence will visit Lisbon where he'll meet with students and teachers, give talks at the university and launch the Portuguese translation of John Main's book 'Word in to Silence'. From there he flies to Marrakesh for the inaugural meeting of the *Guerrand-Hermes Forum for Interreligious Study of Mysticism and Spirituality*. The meeting will be attended by leading international scholars and teachers from the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh traditions.

Thank you for your leadership of your group. Remember there are many resources to assist you. Each week there is a Weekly Teaching on the home page by Kim Nataraja the WCCM School of Meditation Coordinator. You can print these weekly for your group to help deepen their understanding of the teaching and tradition. They are arranged in a three year cycle and over that time will cover the essential teaching of our community. There is also a Weekly Reading for personal use and reflection on the home page from Carla Cooper with rich excerpts from our teaching and other traditions.

Peace
Pauline

We are used to dwelling on a world with thousands of mirrors seeing ourselves, seeing how others see us, constantly. Meditation is a definitive smashing of all the mirrors. It is looking not at reflections of things, not at reflections of yourself. It is looking into the reality that is God. John Main OSB



Tablet February 2011

Thought

At dinner I sat next to the French philosopher with whom I was sharing the platform for the weekend and found to my relief that he was earthier than I had imagined. He loved his food and washed it down with plenty of red wine even just before he was to give a talk. He listened attentively, laughed heartily at the good jokes, enjoyed his freedom of spirit and was comfortable with his own eccentricities.

On religious issues Bertrand Vergely has become a national voice in his country confidently confronting the prevailing reductionism and the more superficial reasons for rejecting religion. He is a great ally in the cause of good religion and authentic spirituality and is a man of depth and mission. His series on the great philosophers sells in large numbers. Orthodox faith and spirituality empower him to seek new language for the ancient truths.

"Le Chemin de la Pensee" (The Way of Thought)" was the theme for our French national conference weekend. I can't think of another national community in the Christian Meditation world who would have chosen that. Meditators come with all sorts of leanings, activist, artistic, intellectual and managerial; but they all agree that the art of meditation, according to the 4th century desert father Evagrius, consists in the 'laying aside of thoughts'; or as John Cassian, one of his students, put it 'renouncing all the riches of thought and imagination'. But wanting to think of what it means over a weekend is rare.

We live so much in our heads, we easily think of thought as our highest capacity. We admire clear thinking, creative thinking and, in the Anglo-Saxon world especially, practical thinking. So, this thought-free approach to prayer presents a conundrum: a challenge to the intellect's supremacy that we more readily dismiss or evade than try to understand. Secular approaches to meditation teach much the same but because they emphasise the practical benefits like lowering cholesterol and improving sleep patterns this bold statement about the essential nature of prayer – which touches too on the essential nature of religion – is not addressed.

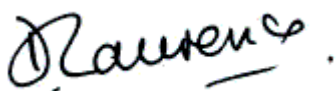
It takes a French philosopher to think with muscular intellectuality about why prayer takes us beyond thought. Because it is a subtle issue it benefits from a sensual and bodily approach. That way we don't get lost in ideas but the ideas can become charges that jump from the processing mind, down the cerebral cortex and whish around the neurological system with the thrill of understanding and a sense of breakthrough as a truth *felt*.

The audience, remember, were mostly French – and so they liked ideas for their own sake. For them, to be engaged in a brisk intellectual endeavour was entertaining and enjoyable. They admired the excellence of a good mind generating and transmitting fresh batches of rationally organized insights. But they were not philosophers. Interestingly, what united us all was a commitment to a daily practice of silence, the silence of the mind when it looks beyond its own mental and emotional operations. Just seeing, not looking *at* anything.

As the token Anglo-Saxon-Celt I played my role in this performance with the admiration the English feel towards their ancestral foes. Some federalists are now asking how realistic is the dream of a European political union. The British, claiming to be at the heart of Europe, look on knowingly from the sidelines again. ("Fog in Channel. Europe Isolated".) As the Euro stumbles, the old tribalism is fuelled by the ineradicable differences of temperament and taste that divide and unite these closest of neighbours. When we are not having to be politically correct, or asking the richer cousins for a few billion to tide us over, Europeans enjoy celebrating these differences in jokes about each other, comic caricatures and satirical stereotypes. This is how we deal with diversity among those we are so alike. But perhaps it is a new mystical theology that Europe now needs.

Read the Fathers of the Church or the Philokalia or Rahner and it is obvious that our need to understand the mystery that lies beyond understanding is irrepressible. Attempting to do so is one of the pleasures of life, along with music and art, food and wine. There is an intellectual appetite in the spiritual life which, in different degrees for different types, needs to be encouraged and satisfied. Good education and unfrightened theologians are necessary for this to happen.

When theology and prayer became separated a split in the Christian mind occurred that distances us from the Mind of Christ and so from the old vibrant European Christianity. If religion is scared to think it becomes as damaging to society as when it forgets that it must also, at times, lay thoughts aside. (As Vergely and the French meditators agreed there are thoughts but beyond them - is Thought itself.)

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

Laurence Freeman OSB

Laurence Freeman OSB is a Benedictine monk of Monte Oliveto and Director of the World community for Christian Meditation www.wccm.org