

# NEWSLETTER

The Christian Meditation Trust (UK)  
St. Mark's , Myddelton Square, London EC1R 1XX  
020 7833 9615 uk@wccm.org



SPRING  
2007

## FROM BETH PARFITT

As this is my first time of writing in the Newsletter since taking over the Chair from David Wood, I would like to say a warm thank you to him for all his kind help in the handover. During his term as Chair, David capably steered the Community through some very important changes in its growth in the UK and did so in his uniquely kindly and thoughtful way. So, special thanks, David and every blessing for the future.

I am also extremely grateful for the welcome and support I have received from Fr Laurence, Roger Layet and Liz Watson, all of them have helped to make my learning curve a little less steep!

You will note that there is an insert in the Newsletter inviting donations for the support of our UK Community. Perhaps a little explanation might be helpful. In the past, there has been some confusion in our UK Community as to whether their donations were going to the UK Trust or the World Community (WCCM). At their meeting in December, the Trustees considered this question and decided that it would make the position much clearer if the requests for support for the UK Trust and WCCM were made at different times of the year. Consequently, the Newsletter for the first quarter each year will carry the request for donations to the UK Trust, and the third quarter for the work of the World Community. May we ask you to respond as generously as you can to each of them in turn.

As you know, the development of our community world-wide is an on-going process and to this end, WCCM has drawn up a New 10-year Friends Programme and has sought financial support from the national communities. The UK Trust has donated £12,000 to the World Community in support of its new initiatives which the Trust wholeheartedly supports.

As I get to know more and more meditators around our Community, I am truly touched by the warmth and sincerity I find – so much good can emanate from our groups around the country – may we continue to look into the depths and see with the eyes of the heart and reach out to those around us.

*Beth Parfitt, Chair of Trustees*

## IN BRIEF

### FR LAURENCE IN EAST ANGLIA

Fr Laurence is touring the East of England in June – see the Regional Events section for details.

### UK WEB SITE

Carmel Cannon has re-built and updated the web site for the UK – please note the new address:

**[www.christian-meditation.org.uk](http://www.christian-meditation.org.uk)**

For technical reasons the old website still exists, but the sooner the new website is visited and linked to, the quicker Google and other search engines will register its existence – so start surfing now!

### INTERNATIONAL LINKS

At the national coordinators' meeting last September we listened to Susan Spence talk on the international aspect of WCCM. We were all most impressed with the work being done. It is good to know that small groups are meditating around the world throughout the day and night.

I suggested that UK groups or meditators might like to link up with an overseas meditator or group for correspondence and/or support, as well as with resources.

The national action group discussed the idea, and is fully supportive, and the International Office has agreed to put UK groups in touch with others overseas. There are meditation groups in approximately 100 countries around the world.

If any group is interested in the project, they should contact The International Centre at St Mark's, Myddelton Square.

*Gina Garrett*

### 'JUST THIS DAY' – 28TH NOVEMBER 2007

To find out how you or your group can share your gift of meditation for the benefit of all, for 'Just This Day' please visit . . .

**[www.justthisday.org](http://www.justthisday.org)**

**Contributions to the newsletter are warmly welcomed. Please send items for inclusion to the Editor:**

**David Simpson**

**39 West Street, Coggeshall, Essex C06 1NS**

**Tel: 01376 562 168**

**email: [davidjsimpson@btinternet.com](mailto:davidjsimpson@btinternet.com)**

## YVONNE DINWIDDY RETIRES

Yvonne Dinwiddy is a name that will be unknown to the more recent members of the Christian Meditation Community. However, hers is a name that is both well known and much loved by those of us who, in meditation terms, are a little “longer in the tooth”.

It must be nearly twenty years ago that I met Yvonne and her husband Hugh in Bognor Regis. Immediately I was struck by their warmth, openness and general enthusiasm for life and living. The Dinwiddys lived in what was then a parish in the care of the Servite Friars, the Order to which I belong. A friend and fellow friar, Fr. Bernard Deegan, had introduced them, as he had introduced me, to the practice of Christian Meditation.

Not only was Bernard instrumental in introducing us both to meditation but he was also responsible for introducing us to each other. This was not done directly but through his quiet insistence that I should meet the Dinwiddys if ever I were to visit Bognor. Thus began a friendship that has endured over the years and led to my going to visit them in Bognor and give a talk on Christian Meditation at least once a year. Over the last few years this custom has fallen by the wayside owing to my own ill health and Yvonne having a stroke that has slightly incapacitated her.

Having a stroke is a traumatic event in anyone’s life but in Yvonne’s it must have been doubly so. In her earlier life Yvonne was an accomplished concert pianist and so a stroke could have prevented her from expressing a deep part of her personality. However, with the discipline that is endemic in the lives of serious musicians she exercised and has regained the greater part of her mobility. Within a relatively short space of time she was once again able to play and teach the many pupils seeking to benefit from her teaching abilities and deep love of music.

When staying with Yvonne and Hugh one could not help but overhear the gentle way in which she corrected her pupils and the praise she meted out for a good performance of a piece. The personal discipline and gentle encouragement of her teaching were also utilised in her teaching of the practice of Christian Meditation. Her teaching of meditation was primarily by example and, like her teaching of the piano, firmly rooted in personal practice.

Yvonne and her husband Hugh were frequent visitors to the then Christian Meditation Centre in Camden Hill Road, London. These visits, together with her personal commitment to the practice of meditation, led her to become a member of the John Main Trust; a group which at that time was responsible for the running of the meditation centre. It was not an easy time to be a member of the Trust

## Christian Meditation Newsletter, UK News; Spring 2007

because many changes were taking place within the meditation community. One of these changes involved the incorporation of the John Main Trust into the WCCM. In addition to this there was also the issue of disposal of Camden Hill Road Centre and discussions about the possible relocation of the meditation centre.

It was a taxing time for all involved and after the completion of her term of office Yvonne returned to her first love, the co-ordination of Christian Meditation in her own region along the south coast. This is a role she has occupied for many years with the sense of duty and care she brings to everything that she does; a sense of duty that “old hands” like me have come to expect of her. But it is now time for her to pass on the “baton” of responsibility and to concern herself only with her local group.

When Roger asked me to write a tribute to Yvonne I was delighted to have the opportunity to do so: delighted because it gives me the opportunity to inform more recent members of the meditation community about those who have made a great contribution in the establishment of Christian Meditation here in the United Kingdom. People such as Yvonne are part of our history, people who have laid the foundations for the next generation of meditators and established the structures that we now take for granted.

Infirmity and increasing age are taking their toll upon a number of us who have given years of service to the community in former times and it is imperative that, as in the case of Yvonne, this service be recognised. It is a new and exciting time as we “golden oldies” pass on the baton of communicating the Good News of meditation to others and quietly retire to the sidelines confident in the belief that the tradition of meditation will continue in other people at other times.

*Peter Broadhurst*

## REVIEWS

### “THE BURNING HEART – READING THE NEW TESTAMENT WITH JOHN MAIN”

EDITED BY GREGORY RYAN

After John Main’s death in 1982 his personal copy of the Bible was found with favourite passages marked and annotated with his personal reflections.

These have been collected and edited by Gregory Ryan resulting in this rich little book, full of inspiration and guidance. Re-reading familiar writings of Scripture, and then seeing them freshly, aided by the reflections of this great teacher, refined insight and gave glimpses of the depths of these extraordinary texts.

And yet more than that...

In moments of darkness, or when the need to remain faithful to the twice daily practice seems to have sloped off somewhere, when we feel bereft, dry, fed up and unable to pray - I guess we need a little help.

And maybe, speaking personally now, this is the problem. Because the texts are so well known, we think we know them, and sometimes we just don't hear them, really hear them, anymore. This collection stops all that. Just opening it and reading almost at random you are reminded that there *is* somewhere to go, and the journey *is* worth making.

However grim your morning, however dark the spectre of your day – this pure gift of a collection will refresh and revive you with its illuminative interpretations of well known, well loved and perhaps, almost too familiar excerpts of Scripture.

In addition the book contains an introduction by Fr Laurence, which could be described as a gem in its own right. In it he vividly describes Conversion, what it meant to the early church and its contemporary meaning. He portrays John Main, as nourished daily by Scripture, and the “re-discovery of the inter-connectedness of all forms of prayer in the Mind and Heart of the praying Christ, that meditation makes so richly possible.” Also described is the “split” deep in the modern psyche of the separation between the sacred and the secular and the consequence of this split level vision of reality.

This book has been around for some time (1996) but I only discovered it last year during the UK CMT conference at Worth Abbey. Since then it rests permanently at my bedside as an inspiration and guard against aridity.

I hope you can discover it too.

*Jacqueline Russell*

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## INTO GREAT SILENCE

Fr Laurence reviewed this wonderful film about Le Grand Chartreuse in The Tablet recently. Read the complete article on our website:

[www.christian-meditation.org.uk](http://www.christian-meditation.org.uk)

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## LETTERS

### ROOTS OF 11TH STEP MEDITATION

I have been a sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous since August 1984 and meditation contributes to my ongoing recovery in AA's 11th Step: “We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.” I have belonged to a WCCM meditation group for the past six years and was interested to read the account of the retreat for people in 12-Step programmes, “Recovery

and Spirituality”, in the December Newsletter.

In the 1930s, AA's pioneers appealed to the American business tycoon John D. Rockefeller Junior for funds to help establish the struggling fellowship. His refusal to advance more than a modest pump-priming sum seemed at first a bitter blow, but it led to AA's policy in its Seventh Tradition of corporate poverty and the need to be fully self supporting (declining contributions from non-alcoholic well-wishers).

When informed of AA's request, Rockefeller sent one of his executives, Frank Amos, to Akron, Ohio, to investigate one of the original AA groups. Amos reported, “It is important, but not vital, that the AA member meets frequently with other reformed (sic) alcoholics and form both a social and a religious comradeship.” Commenting on Amos's investigation, AA's official biography of its co-founder Dr Bob (a member of the Akron group), notes, “The AA members of that time did not consider meetings necessary to maintain sobriety. They were simply ‘desirable’. *Morning devotion and ‘quiet time’, however, were musts.*” (emphasis added)

Both Dr Bob, and fellow co-founder Bill W., belonged to the Oxford Group, a 20th century interdenominational Protestant organisation (later renamed Moral Re-armament), which attached great importance to ‘quiet times’ (meditation) and seeking God's guidance in the silence. *Anon*

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## SPRING IS HERE

The birds, the snowdrops and the greening bushes are telling us that Spring is on its way. It is the time when gardeners begin turning their seed packets to remind themselves when planting can begin, and wonder at such names as Physostegia and Platycodon. There seem to be comparisons between aspiring meditators and gardeners – one's hopes are high and plans are made, but unless the seed is sown or meditation attempted, they will remain dreams. Intentions are not enough.

As with seeds, meditation is planted in different soils. Some are immediately receptive, and growth straightforward. With others the way is more problematical. It can take longer for roots to become established, and here another parallel with gardening is established. If we are too impatient and want to achieve results, as with the over-eager gardeners who tug at seedlings and cuttings to make sure that they are rooted, disastrous damage can be done.

Meditators, like plants can wilt!

Once the roots are firm, growth takes place and the plant can flower, even in the most unlikely and inhospitable of places. If we trust in the mystery and have patience, there will be growth. George Herbert expresses the situation perfectly:

Who would have thought my shrivelled heart

Could have recovered greenness? It was gone  
 Quite underground as flowers depart  
 To feed their mother-root when they have  
     blown;  
 Where they together  
 All the hard weather,  
 Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

*Vicky Rodden*

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## WE MADE THE MOVE

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Our John Main meditation group was led for many years by Sister Mary Stephen, of the Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre, at their convent at New Hall,

## Christian Meditation Newsletter, UK News; Spring 2007

near Chelmsford, Essex. When the sisters moved to Colchester in 2005, the group were made welcome by Fr Brian O'Shea, who allows us to meet in the chapel at St Philip's presbytery, New London Road, Chelmsford. I took over as convenor from Sr Mary Stephen, helped by my wife Jenny. We have a settled group of eight to ten regular meditators who moved with us from New Hall and it is always encouraging to see visitors and newcomers. For directions and more details, please contact Laurie or Jenny Andrews, telephone 01621 854360

*Laurie Andrews, Maldon, Essex*

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## FROM THE GRASSROOTS

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### Day One

I had just read the recent edition of the newsletter. To my surprise, while with a group of meditators, I suddenly blurted out that I found the newsletter both encouraging and discouraging. Of course it is encouraging to read of the work of the world meditation movement throughout the globe, helping so many people with specific problems, seeking to promote peaceful interfaith relations and introducing the practice to the young. Also, I like to catch up with what is happening in my own country, the events around the regions, news of friends, poems, and individuals' experiences.

So why did I admit to finding it discouraging? Was I being churlish or slightly envious of all the wonderful events occurring in far away places? Did I feel discouraged that I do so little? Such thoughts came as I journeyed home on the underground. With loud pop music coming out of a boy's ear beside me I was truly back in the immediate and the irritating. For most of us, most of the time, we are enclosed in a certain routine and constrained by our daily needs and obligations. From this base we come to meditate.

Of course we all need, and hopefully have, "peak times" whether in solitude, groups or at special events, retreats and pilgrimages. Yet after every peak we come down with a thud. At the end of a retreat, a wise nun warned us that the elation we can experience over a few special days can often be followed by a dejection and a discontent when we first return to our normal activities.

The high times come and go and it is within the mundane difficulties, irritations and tribulations that we stop and come to meditate. Here the immediate is often not seen as wonderful or uplifting. I can become painfully aware of my weaknesses and failures, of my needs, fears and anxieties, of what I do and of what I fail to do.

The discipline stresses we must be content with this nothing much happening; we must stay patient and faithful, where we are in the present. Every

movement needs those who plod along and perhaps that must be my usefulness.

Out of such reflections, I decided since I had raised the issue, to write an article. I hope it will become a feature where we can exchange our experiences with honesty, humour and creativity.

How it develops is up to the readers.

I have chosen to write a condensed seven day journal. My first title was "The Asides of an Everyday Meditator". Immediately I was struck by the word "everyday": will most days, most of the time do? Everyday can just mean the ordinary, just one of the thousands of little people, sitting in a group or alone trying to meditate. This was worse, no-one is ordinary: we are all unique. None of us can know the contribution we make to the whole as we are all caught up in this universal prayer, this meeting place.

Here we meet as we meditate, and each time we do so we begin anew, from the grassroots.

I had found a title and in the writing of this article I came to realise how often I am helped along the way.

### Day Two

A quotation is humming and singing in my head. I used it as the introduction to a group meditation. "God is joy" wrote St. Thomas Aquinas when asked why God created the world. "Joy needs company." All day I seemed to be wearing rose-tinted spectacles. I smiled at babies, young children and dogs in the park. The grass looked very green after a parched summer and the clouds were shaped like angels' wings across the blue. I noticed simple acts of kindness in the people I met. Of course, by evening, the glasses slipped off and my mood changed. The quotation is still valid though - "Joy needs company", what an invitation to prayer!

### Day Three

I have listened to tapes, read books and heard people speak so movingly of the fruits of meditation. Well, the twenty years is not yet up, pace John Main, but I have yet to be convinced that I have become more

loving. Certainly I am still waiting for someone to mention this change they have noticed in me. Indeed, all I have found is an inner tendency to be smug about being a meditator; I mean it must be having a good effect on me and others, mustn't it?

I write this in a jocular vein but the dilemma is real. The problem lies with returning to the church and with it this call to holiness. Thinking I ought to strive for holiness, or worse, trying to appear holy, is a devious path to follow. In some ways, I was better, or at least more honest, in my years of agnosticism.

Listening to the Gerry Pierson talk on "Becoming Less Bogus" was salutary. I also liked his description of the good-bad person. In the parable of the prodigal son I have to admit to a certain sympathy and affinity with the older son. The prodigal son had been a bad-bad person and so could admit this and fully repent. Well he had nothing to lose, certainly not his perception of being a good character.

#### Day Four

Thomas Merton writes that to be a contemplative we should not even have the desire to be one. John Main sees meditation as going beyond desire. Both mean, I suppose, the necessity of letting go of all desire, since desire is part of the ego.

Yet, as friends know, a favourite prayer of mine is Merton's  
"But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing"

We desire and want to please those we love. In Chapter 6 of "The Cloud of Unknowing" we are urged: "Smite upon that thick cloud of unknowing with a sharp dart of longing love. Come what may, do not give up"

Our desire must be to give up all other desires then?

This is certainly a way of paradox.

#### Day Five

I took out my copy of "The Cloud of Unknowing" to re-read as a few of us are meeting next week to meditate and share our reflections on the book. In the foreword is the warning "you are not to read it, write it or speak of it, nor allow another to do so, unless you really believe that you/ he is a person deeply committed to follow Christ perfectly". I had quite conveniently forgotten this admonition so it was with some trepidation that I read on. So much seems to be expected with so many warnings.

Why then can I come to realise it is such a sane and hopeful book? Because again and again, the author tells of this wondrous exchange if we will only "Look up then, joyously and say to the Lord either in word or desire: That which I am Lord, I give to you, for you are as you are"

#### Day Six

It is four o'clock and I'm sitting at my desk in the study drinking a cup of tea. I look out of the window at the late autumn sunset. There are grey clouds, some lit white by the sun's rays encroaching over the blue sky. Tonight there will be a first frost. The grass in the park is carpeted with brown. The leaves on the avenue of horse chestnuts are thinning out, but now they glow like burnished copper. Along the path a mother and child pick up conkers.

How can I leave all of this? For so many years I have relished this view. Yet all too soon will come the darkness of early evening and many such wintry evenings seem stacked up in front of me.

How do we give up attachments? My mood dulls with fear of the future, old age, isolation, illness, death. Heaven is I know not where, nor can I conceive of it.

In my room is a print of the heavenly City, enlarged from the corner of a painting by Fra Angelico of the taking down from the cross. It is an idealised, white-walled and towered, hill-top Tuscan town. Well of course it must be so, my grandfather came from Florence so how else should I imagine Heaven?

Time, change, stillness, eternity, it is useless to cling to the here and now, the moment of sunset has passed. The high, dark branches of the trees stand out starkly and I notice how sparse the foliage is.

How can I come to you in meditation? How can I sign up for the "whatever" clause? I will come to you in faith and hope whatever happens. So hard to do and yet how can I not?

#### Day Seven

More and more I come to appreciate meditating in a group, especially my local, regular one. It is a weekly haven and it is good to be with friends. Sometimes, if I'm introducing the session, I look around at them all and feel like a broody hen, concerned for their well-being. Now in stillness and silence we will be held and helped individually and corporately.

I found a passage in a book where Thomas Merton is asked about the prayer of intercession. He answered that it is simply a need of his to express his love by praying for his friends, it is like embracing them. He goes on "if you love another person it's God's love being realised. One and the same love is reaching your friend through you and you through your friend".

He was then asked wasn't there still an implicit dualism in all this and he replied. "Really there isn't and yet there is. You have to see your will and God's will dualistically for a long time. You have to experience duality for a long time until you see it's not there. At any moment you can break through to the underlying unity which is God's gift in Christ."