

Benedictine Oblates of
The World Community for
Christian Meditation

SOLITUDE IS PART OF EVERY OBLATES LIFE

Message from Laurence Freeman OSB



Meditation is practiced in solitude but it is the great way to learn to be in relationship.

Having contacted our own reality, we have the existential confidence to go out to others, to meet them at their real level. In the experience of encountering the reality of the other, we discover our own existence enriched and deepened.

John Main
The Heart of Creation

As the diseases of affluence spread in modern life and the monastic archetype in its old forms seems in danger of extinction, the archetype of solitude is being rediscovered and practiced in new ways. The full eremitical life will always be for a very few. But it expresses and performs a vital role in the spiritual and social health of the great majority. Maybe the rise of solitaries outside monastic communities or formal religious affiliation will serve to recharge and reform the archetype of the coenobium by inspiring new forms of contemplative community.

The liberation of monastic life from clericalism (the early Christian monks abhorred the idea of ordination) must progress if we are to rediscover the essence of living in community, under an authority of love and committed to a discipline of spiritual practice together. A healthy degree of solitude among members of a community allows deep spiritual friendship and trust to form among them. As communities can easily become places of polite isolation, sharing contemplative practice together may be the best way to support the inner life of each member, share it with guests and visitors and build community outwards in new dimensions.

One of the most corrosive effects of contemporary affluence and its chronic distractedness is the atomisation and individualisation of life throughout society. We live online, exposing our children to screens before their little brains are ready to cope with the technology or their minds to handle the content they watch. Reversing the increasing levels of mental illness and increasing levels of suicide is systematically blocked by the callous greed of corporations and some super-wealthy

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individuals and the weakness of governments. Perhaps in the following pages the open, simple witness to the power of the eremitical life today has a lesson for us all. They show that the hermitage is not a sign of rejection or hatred of the world but, by its detachment from conventional living, it speaks eloquently by silence, telling the truth to power in love. It also suggests a surprisingly simple yet challenging truth about health and human wholeness. The cure for loneliness is not immersing oneself in a larger crowd or increasing activity. It is in recovering our capacity for solitude.

The social tendency to mock or fear solitude misunderstands its nature. It shows an inability to handle paradox, like the paradox of solitude and community forming a whole. Solitude is not merely defined by physical or emotional withdrawal from human fellowship. It is the discovery and fearless embrace of our uniqueness. Respect and reverence for human uniqueness underlies civilisation itself, justice and the capacity for love. To know our unique identity means transcending false self-identifications and the shedding of habits that contradict our true selves. Loneliness is a failed solitude and solitude is the cure for loneliness. It repairs and elevates our capacity for relationship with ourselves, with others and with God whose unique creation we each are.

It is not only hermits who should know this. In our time, at least a part of their ministry must be to share this knowledge with the world at large. The real hermit knows that the essential hermitage is the human heart. The cave where we should make our home is the guha, the cave of the heart. However, let's not put the eremitical life on too high a pedestal. The higher the pedestal the further to fall. After all, it is not hermits who will save the world. It is the love of God for all His creatures. To remember this, if possible before it is too late, we need to rediscover across the spectrum of humanity the meaning - and above all the practice - of contemplation. It is to this that the solitary person and every meditator points in silence.

*With much love, Laurence Freeman,
Bonnevaux, June 2024*

Laurence

From Marie Louise Schmidt, International Oblate Co-Ordinator



Dear sisters and brothers!
Writing this message to you, I am sitting in the airport about to enter a plane for Tokyo, Japan. I have never been there and don't know what to expect or what will happen - apart from knowing that my husband, Michael, who is already there, will pick me up at the airport. But even if I know he will be there to pick me up, I don't feel quite sure before I actually see him. So, I have a list of addresses and phone numbers with me - just in case some unexpected things happen.

I became a member of the International Oblate Council in May 2023 - without having any idea what was going to happen. But you were certainly there to receive me and embrace the changes of structure we have had to work on. And if I, during these first couple of months, have been overwhelmed or a bit unsure of how to handle things, I immediately get the response that "you are not alone - we are here to help you". That's a loving Community!

The work of International Oblate Coordinator has changed from being taken care of by one person (our beloved Eileen Dutt) to now being shared by a group of oblates from around the globe: the International Oblate Council. But there has to be one who is the point of contact, chair the meetings, receive emails and give answers, etc. In that sense I am the new IOCoordinator and I hope I can serve you like the porter in RB "who will know how to take a message and give a reply".

Where there is love there is growth - not necessarily in numbers - but we actually do have a growing number of meditators following the Oblate Path. And so, like Benedict in Chapter 21 of the Rule writes about when to appoint deans in the monastery, we have introduced Regional Oblate Coordinators (ROC) who will support and serve both National Oblate Coordinators (NOC) and countries that do not have an NOC. This is modelled on the Global Regional Coordinators of WCCM and their regions.

Many people started their journey or made their final oblation during COVID, and the gift of meeting online has proved its worth in many ways. Also meeting in person can sometimes be a challenge – because of distance, health-issues, work and/or family responsibilities etc. We have to think creatively of ways to make our meetings possible. John Main says that meditation is a leap of faith – that we leave self behind to meet the Other – with no insurance that the Other will actually be there. Thank you so much for being there. I am looking forward to serving you to the best of my ability.

PS: I landed safe in Japan – and my husband was there to pick me up.

A bit about myself: I'm from Copenhagen, Denmark, (hoping my English is understandable!). I made my Final Oblation in Sep 2016 at Bere Island. Former National Oblate Coordinator in Denmark where we have a small group of 4 -5 persons on the Oblate Path and former National Coordinator in Denmark for 8 years. I am a musician, jazz pianist, and also work as a music teacher. 57 years old - mother and grandmother.

Editorial,
New Beginnings on the Way of Life
by Stefan Reynolds
(National Oblate Co-Ordinator, Ireland)

“What is sweeter to us, dear ones, than the voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, in His loving kindness the Lord shows us the way of life.” (Rule Prologue 19-20)



Apologies for a very late edition of Via Vitae this year, after twenty years as Editor I feel it is time to hand on to quicker hands, and am pleased to introduce a new editor to come! I took over editing Via Vitae from Trish Panton in 2004 when she became International Oblate Co-Ordinator. I have enjoyed the work very much and have had much help especially from graphic designers – currently Albert and Maria Zakharovy, from the Ukraine – who have really done the lion's share of the work. It is time for me,

however, to pass on the baton. The Oblate Community has grown and lots of material now comes in for the Newsletter. Up until 2022 I was always able to bring out two Newsletters a year but the last two years, I haven't achieved that – a sign that someone else may have more momentum from here on!

As the Rule reminds us (see quote above) there are invitations and prompts from the Lord. I feel called to devote more time to the Irish Oblate Community which is growing rapidly. So, to be able to play my part in the growth of the WCCM Oblate Community in Ireland, as Regional Oblate Co-Ordinator for parts of Northern Europe and as part of the International Oblate Council, I feel I have to shed something. I am very happy that Andrew McAlister who has often contributed to Via Vitae, who is author of 'Hold the Rope, Carry your Cross: Christianity and the Ten Bull Pictures of Zen' (Vivid Publishing 2021), runs his own website and blog on Meditation linesfrominbetween.com and has been an Oblate for many years both living with the WCCM community in London and active with the Australian meditation community. Andrew has collated and edited WCCM Oblate reflections on the Rule of St Benedict, while he lived with the residential community in London and Bonnevaux which are now online at theruleofbenedict.com

Andrew – of 'Hold the Rope' fame - is well experienced in editing so I hardly need to 'show him the ropes!' I am very pleased indeed that someone with his experience with writing and with the Community Andrew has agreed to take on editorship for Via Vitae. The next edition (in the New Year 2025) will be collated by him. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this Newsletter.

Love from Stefan

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**From Laurence Freeman,
Breakthrough**



Photo by Laurence Freeman

To awaken is to open our eyes. And we open them, as St Benedict said, to the divinising light. In the prologue to the rule of St Benedict he says this, that the call of God to us comes to us through the crowd, through the crowd of our thoughts, through the crowd of our activities, through the crowd of our memories, our unconscious, our ambitions. The Word of God or the call of God comes to us through all of this, it penetrates through all of this noise and distraction, and it is calling us. And he says, 'What is sweeter to us than to hear this call and to feel that there is an opening in the wall.' That there is a window, that there is a path, through the wall and that this is leading us into life into a bigger, broader panorama of life than we had imagined possible. And this is a continuous process, day by day.

**From John Main,
The Heart of Creation
"Making Love's Search"**



Meditation is practiced in solitude but it is the great way to learn to be in relationship. The reason for this paradox is that, having contacted our own reality, we have the existential confidence to go out to others, to meet them at their real level, and so the solitary element in meditation is mysteriously the true antidote to loneliness. Having contacted our conformity with reality, we are no longer threatened by the otherness of others. We are not always looking for an affirmation of ourselves. We are making love's search, looking for the

reality of the other. In the experience of encountering the reality of the other, we discover our own existence enriched and deepened.



REFLECTIONS

**The Fifth International Benedictine
Oblate Congress – September 2023**
Receiving a Call,
by Catherine Charriere, Swiss Oblate

I did not know what to expect when I arrived for the Fifth International Benedictine Oblate Congress but I was immediately struck by the beauty of the location, the Primatial Abbey of Sant' Anselmo at the top of the Aventine Hill in Rome. I was perhaps a little

intimidated, especially since I was a little late, but the warm and helpful welcome I received soon put me at ease.

The congress was my first opportunity to meet Benedictine oblates who are attached to an actual physical monastery and under the guidance of an abbot or abbess and a community of Benedictine religious. I realized that there are significant differences but perhaps even more significant things that bind us together, that there is unity in diversity as there always has been in the Church. We four of the WCCM learned from them and they, through the Islands of Silence workshops and through



our interactions together, learned more about silence and meditation.

The keynote addresses by Abbot Primate Gregory Polan and Abbot Donato Ogliari dove-tailed as they underlined what they find to be particularly meaningful in the Rule for us today: Peace, Prayer, Reconciliation, Hospitality, Listening, Respect, Humility, Silence, Discretion.

I had been wondering about my commitment as a Benedictine oblate, having found an attraction to St. Francis and his love of creation. However, after an intensive week of worship, keynote addresses, workshops, visits to Monte Cassino and Subiaco and meeting Benedictine oblates from all over the world, I was blessed with a new recognition that I had received

a call, a number of years ago, to join my meditation practice to a life guided by the Rule of St. Benedict within the WCCM. This is a special grace that the congress confirmed and for which I am very grateful.

For the full keynote address by Abbot Donato Ogliari, click on the following link: [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)

Accepting the Invitation, by Dorothy Wood (Canada National Oblate Co-Ordinator)

Attending the one-week International Oblate Congress in Rome has been a real blessing and unique experience. Oblates from all over the world gathered at the beautiful 'Badia Primaziale di Sant'Anselmo' under the theme "Moving Forward: Living the Wisdom of The Rule". Beside the rich talks, the interactive workshops, the visits to Monte Cassino and Subiaco and the outstanding and heart-warming audience with the Pope, what touched me most was the hospitality we experienced throughout the event. Not only were we welcomed as Christ when we arrived on the first day, but each day was unique with a special attention and kindness. "Great care and concern" were expressed to each oblate and the times of prayer and meals together with the monks made us feel part of their "family".

Abbot Primate Gregory Polan dealt with the theme of hospitality in his talk on September 14 by underlining how this charism can lead to reconciliation and healing through attentive listening. By welcoming each guest with humility, patience and attention and by inviting them to pray together we can become "ambassadors of reconciliation". His invitation to us, Benedictine oblates, was to go back to our monasteries (with or without walls) and "to be a source of healing and peace for people in the world today who experience significant alienation in some form or another".

This invitation is what I experienced during this week in Rome and it did heal my wounds. I am grateful for the humility, attention and warm-heartedness expressed by those who welcomed us at Sant'Anselmo as well as our fellow oblates. I am taking back Abbot Gregory Polan's invitation with me as a guide to Move Forward by Living the Wisdom of the Rule.

Abbot Primate Gregory Polan's talk can be found here: benedictine-oblates.net

Being Here, by Janet Robbins (UK Oblate & IOC)

Until the week before the Congress, I had no real sense of the significance of this 5th Benedictine Oblate Congress; 156 Benedictine Oblates, representing scores of Benedictine Monastic communities from across 25 different countries. WCCM was represented by Catherine Charriere, from Switzerland, Dorothy Wood from Canada, Leo Correa from Brazil and me from UK. And it was a joy to be together.

It was a very full-time table of key note talks from leading members of the Benedictine community, workshops where challenging questions were raised and discussed and wonderful field trips to Monte Cassino and Subiaco. We ended the week with a private audience with His Holiness, Pope Francis, each of us being received and given a personal blessing. We hit the front page of the Vatican news! And the Pope's address to us was summarised, reflecting the importance of this gathering. See attached.

Being received by the Pope was a very special moment for an Anglican! I was one of only 10 non-Catholics at the Congress, but I felt at home, despite some of my own early reservations. The poem below gives a sense of our stay at the most beautiful monastery of St Anselm. I wrote it on my first day of the week-long Congress.

*Coming home, feel it, touch it.
In this place, with these people
God is everywhere
God is here.
What are you seeing?
The gift of the Holy Spirit
in us.
The quiet voice.
Listen to the voice.
Listen.
The voice of Spirit - small voice of calm.
Come to the place of Being
here,
step aside – wait and see.*



An experience of the diversity of the Church, by Leonardo Correa (Brazilian Oblate & Guiding Board)

My experience at the Fifth International Oblate Congress in 2023, held at the beginning of September 2023 in San Anselmo, Rome, was a truly enriching one, an experience of the diversity of the Church. The theme of this year's event was «Moving Forward: Living the Wisdom of the Rule.» It was a special privilege to share this experience with our small group of WCCM Oblates: Catharine (Switzerland), Dorothy (Canada), and Janet (UK).

From the beginning, I felt a truly Benedictine hospitality from the organizers, and everything seemed to be done with love and «good order.» In the sharing moments at the cloister of San Anselmo, I could see oblates from Africa, Asia, America, and Europe. There were oblates who looked more «clerical,» like a group from Korea, who dress with a monastic habit. Others had a more academic style and language, and others were simple laypeople trying to live under the wisdom of the Rule of St. Benedict.

The program included some interesting talks, and I would highlight the second conference by Abbot Donato Ogliari, OSB. He spoke on «Living Out Our

Oblate Calling in the 21st Century» and touched on many aspects of the Rule that resonated with our WCCM practices. As part of the workshops, «Island of Silence» brought the teaching of Christian Meditation from our Community, in a work put together by Elba Rodriguez, from Colombia.

Another important aspect of the Conference was the visits to Montecasinio Abbey, Sacro Speco Subiaco, and an audience with Pope Francis. Although I could not stay for the entire congress and only attended the Montecasinio session, it was already a special moment, having mass there and being able to see the Tomb of St. Benedict. I had to leave San Anselmo before the end of the Congress due to the John Main Seminar in Bonnevaux. However, I am very grateful for being able to participate in the Congress and especially for being in community with my WCCM Oblate friends and the global community of Benedictine oblates. It was a way of being church vibrant, and I feel that I play a very important role now and for the future.

John Main recognised as the HEART OF REALITY. The reality which is – Who is – LOVE. The torrent of Energy flowing between the Father and Son, who is the Holy Spirit, lavished upon all without measure. This divine self-communication – this self-giving – is continuous and total. ‘God cannot give partially, but it is the complete self-giving of the Generous Immensity,’ Father John never tired of saying. This is the theology of John Main. This is what energised and motivated him. This is what ultimately mattered to him. The intimate knowledge, the certainty, that we are connected, indeed fused in Communion. The Oneness of Being.



Verified through his inner experience, Father John knew that he stood on solid ground, and it gave him freedom and joy; enjoying good things, but not complaining when things did not go his way. I remember him saying, with a smile, that we will be judged, not by the bad things we have done, but for all the blessings and lovely things we have refused from the hand of God. Dom Main knew what is real and what is only peripheral. And had the discretion to make the right choice. He was excited about life – it was a gift to be cherished – an adventure. John Main used his loving, integrated personality, his many natural gifts, to pass on to people this pearl of great price – with passion and urgency. He points the way – a practical way – to the inner experience, which is personal, yet universal - to the centre of one’s own heart – which is the centre of every heart. When asked what makes Christian Meditation, Christian? I remember him saying ‘Because I myself am a Christian and meditate as a Christian.’ If you are Buddhist, or a Jew, or Muslim, or Hindu, you would meditate as a Buddhist, or Jew, or Muslim or Hindu. You don’t even have to believe in anything as long as you meditate. But meditation is Christocentric.

This universal way – the way of the mantra – is

Father John Main’s 41st Anniversary Celebration,
Reflection given at St. Anthony of Padua Church on 30th Dec 2023,
by Polly Schofield, Canadian Oblate

The Spirit who is mind and heart and vast spaces – enfolds the whole universe and, in silence – IS LOVING TO ALL.

I welcome you today with this teaching whose ancient words convey profound truth, which Dom

a discipline. It is work if practiced selflessly and regularly. Less than 20 minutes is frivolous, longer than 30 minutes is self-indulgent. It might lead one into silence. The rest is pure gift. But it is a life-long commitment. There are no shortcuts – no instant mysticism. When John main was about to share in it, changed mine. Over 40 years of meditating, I have come to understand that there is eternal life all around us. Those who love us are always with us, straightening our path. I recall a quote from Yates – Father John's favourite Irish poet. "The communications of the dead are tongued in fire, beyond the language of the living....." Those who love us are always with us – we cannot be separated – they have our backs. Everything is Gift.

A reflection on Benedictine Obedience, by Nick Polaschek (New Zealand Oblate)



Obedience is probably the most alien of the three Benedictine monastic promises today. In our social context we assume we are autonomous beings; our self being affirmed in and through individual decision making. It is what we consider as being adult. So unquestioning obedience is a difficult idea for many of us to swallow. Generally, our obedience to anyone, from our parent to our work boss, is qualified, is not absolute but has limits we define. Certainly, I find obedience

most difficult. In a religious context it rings my bell because it reminds me of the inhuman authoritarian dimension of the Roman Catholic church to which I belong, which has caused so much suffering to many. But, looking at the Benedictine promises today, in one contemporary view (e.g. Terrence Kardong osb) the three promises are not three separate distinctive items, but rather a triple expression of one monastic promise. All three promises – stability by living in one monastery, obedience to the abbot of the monastery, perseverance in the pattern of monastic life within the monastery – are variants of the one commitment to the Benedictine monastic way of life. Be that as it may, it is crystal clear from the Rule that integral to the life of the monastic person is obedience to the monastic leader. Promptly, willingly, without complaint.

The question is what can this mean for Oblates? Unlike monastics, as Oblates we do not have a leader whom we simply promise to obey. So, who or what are we obeying as Oblates? What does promising obedience mean to us? A common thoughtful suggestion today is that obedience for us as Oblates means 'listening', by which is meant paying attention to the divine Word to us in our own life situation. Listening to the divine Word to us: How do we do that? Perhaps through *Mutual obedience*: a phrase derived from Ch 71 of the Rule. "*Obedience is a blessing to be shown by all, not only to the abbot but also to one another as monks*". Although the rest of chapter 71 does not exemplify this in a very helpful way for us today, the principle, *mutual obedience*, does point towards how and where we hear the divine Word to us as Oblates.

Mutual obedience actually exemplifies the basic orientation underlying the entire Rule, that it is in and through our relationships with one another – in all their dimensions, supportive, challenging, joyful, depressing, caring, hurtful – that we find holiness/wholeness. The way in which we gradually learn to respond – 'listen' – within the communities that we live within enables and supports our development in accord with the divine intention – becoming, in and through our relationships with one another, the persons we were intended to be by our divine Source. *Mutual obedience* is really a version of the gospel teaching – love your neighbour as yourself – applied within the monastic context. Basically, the Benedictine

way is not individual but rather communal, which is challenging for some of us, and counter cultural in our contemporary Western individualistic context.

A more general question, which an issue like obedience suggests, can be put in a challenging form: Given we are not monastics, how is it that an ancient monastic Rule offers something to us today as lay people? Maybe the answer is that, while we are not seeking to follow the Rule as monastics do, certain principles and practices that we discern within the Rule enable us to create a Christian pattern of living through which we can respond to the current secular context in which we live, individualistic, media saturated, materialistic. Prioritizing a regular pattern of recited prayer, valuing silence in our day and other Benedictine principles and practices, like mutual obedience, based on our twice daily meditation, together create an alternative counter cultural lifestyle for us.

What does *mutual obedience* look like? I think this is about how we relate to others in the groups we are part of. It is about seriously attending and responding to what we can discern in and through relating to others. Particular clues may be found in conversation, requests, affirmations that make us uncomfortable, wary, defensive... in this may be the divine Word to me. Thus, we can often learn from the person we have least in common with or find most difficult – even if not a new or different perspective on a topic, then a deeper understanding of our selves. But clues may also be found, by contrast, in what makes us happy, is deeply satisfying, enhances our being... in this may be the divine Word to me. Thus, we can also learn from the person we find most enjoyable, stimulating or in some way inspiring to be around – whom we appreciate enhances our sense of what it is to be human.

There can also be particular issues or areas of my life or my personality I find difficult, that I know are limited or somewhat distorted, which periodically come out in my interactions with others. To take one particular example, I may consider I understand certain topics well - meaning better than others - so my interactions with others in this area, in which I seek to enlighten them, can be insensitive and unhelpful. Maybe then, in shared conversation or discussion, this means an orientation towards deferring to

the other, seeking to be responsive to what is being expressed by others, while remaining open to offering any of my thoughts, primarily as a contribution to the general conversation and well-being, rather than as my particular view. *Mutual obedience* here then is *listening* but also following up by *doing*, actions, based on what we discern.



From our perspective as meditators this is about seeking to gradually realize the *unselfing* that we practice in meditation in our relationships with others. The discipline of our regular meditation is over time fruitful in our relationships within the various communities that make up our lives - with our family, friends, workmates, fellow participants in the groups with whom we spend our leisure time, including the Christian meditation community.

So, we seek to be open to the other, to the Word of the divine Other, in and through the words of the others we live with and encounter.

Here is Your God!, by Anne-Marie Doecke (Australian Oblate)

Psalm 137 verse four reads, 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?' The poet seems to be admitting that he does not know how to sing the gospel in the midst of all that has changed in his circumstances. I understand that, as I too struggle when there is conflict and during times of uncertainty and upheaval. My mind goes to worst-case scenarios so easily. Anxiety can become a constant companion; paralysis can set in and – dare I say – even aggression. However, isn't it wonderful that the psalmist could say it as it is? There is no pretence. Now, I too can admit my fears and my groaning. It opens me up somehow



to be able to respond with the truth: a simple ‘Yes, I know’.

The Benedictine, Esther de Waal writes that the Psalms are “an invitation to prayer, the silent prayer of the heart.” She continues, “The psalm was not regarded as human homage rendered to God, but rather as God’s message to humanity, awakening the response of prayer.” To think of the Psalms as God’s message to us helps us to grasp just that little bit more that God not only understands our human predicament but suffers with us. We are not alone.

A short time ago, I heard an interview with Karoline Lewis, a pastor and professor of Biblical Preaching at Luther Seminary, Minnesota where she defined the gospel as meaning, ‘Your God is here’ based on texts such as Isaiah 40 and Isaiah 52. “Your God is here in front of you,” she said. As a person with a very busy mind, the Psalms invite me to become silent so I can glimpse this truth. As the poet’s words wash over me, I can participate in what is so often a journey from anguish to joy. I have a chance to see and hear in a new way.

The German Lutheran theologian and pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer returned to them often before he was executed by the Nazis. In his sermon in Barcelona on 15th July 1928 he said that we are nervous about quietness or rest. We run away from rest, Bonhoeffer said and chase from one event to another, for we are afraid of facing ourselves alone. Prayer, he said, must be practised, and he suggested for at least ten minutes a day. Although he acknowledged that all beginnings are difficult, the soul is given a chance to awaken and begin to find strength. “The troubles and distresses are silenced, the unrest and hatred, the alarms and the cries, tears and anxieties – all are stilled in the presence of God,” he wrote.

Being able to sit in silence with a group of people in contemplative prayer means a lot to me. Although we are all so easily distracted, it does not matter. Often, we feel uncomfortable in such situations because we are not used to curbing our tongue or being with others in this way. However, being together, and acknowledging our helplessness and inabilities, may be just what is needed as we move into the future together as a church. Coming just as we are into a quiet space as a community may help us to remember Love’s covenant towards us and faithfulness to us,

even in the midst of trying circumstances. Here is a wonderful opportunity for us to begin to let go of our need for security, approval, and control and begin again to ‘sing a new song unto the Lord’, a song of praise (Psalm 149)!

**Discovering God as Beauty
in Meditation,
Maria Zakharova, Albert Zakharov
(Ukrainian NOC’s)**



This year our community has a special challenge, or practice, to reflect on whether we see the beauty that fills all of creation from within. Someone might ask, is this the right time to ask questions like this, when the war rages around us, and maybe it is about to break out in the whole world? There is so much terrible darkness around us... Maybe we should first defeat everything terrible and ugly, and only then, at leisure, look at something beautiful and reflect on this beauty? How to understand the question that fr. Laurence proposed this year to the whole community? We should remember that this question was asked from deep within of contemplative experience. And that is why we can find the answer to this question, but only in the space of our own contemplative practice. Daily meditation teaches us that there is a huge difference between Beauty – and anything what is «nice and pretty».

For our ego, with all its limitations and personal preferences, the world is always divided into two

fundamental parts. As the title of the famous song by The Beatles says, «I, me, mine» – here is the blade we divide the harmony of creation with, starting with the crisis of the Fall of Mankind in the Garden of Eden. Bede Griffiths says that «*such is the drama of paradise - when our true Self falls under the power of passions and desires, losing the true freedom of unity with the Higher Self of the Spirit.*» Some things seem beautiful and pleasant to us, others – quite the opposite. On the one hand, this is how the natural self-defense mechanism works. On the other hand, if we do not keep this sense of our own boundaries in balance, it can turn into an «inner demon» that causes all the conflicts and hostility of the human world. By following our discipline of meditation, we allow the creation to become a Symbolon in us – what the famous French theologian and mystic Olivier Clément called «*the unity between earth and sky, between the visible and the invisible.*» Conversely, through the «*laziness of inattention*» or «*non-listening of disobedience*» as St. Benedict says, we «*fall away from Divine Source*» and turning our reality into a Diabolos, a shattered creation. Our choices and the quality of our attention (its continuity, purity, and depth) open the door to our world for Christ, who unites, or for the Devil, who divides. After years of returning to the meditation mat and faithfully repeating one simple word, we can discover that our Self actually has a wonderful ability to go beyond itself. And then all «good/bad» or «mine/not mine» will be left behind. Everything will begin to shine in our vision with Beauty, which is a visible symbol, sign and mystery of God's Presence.

The capacity to see Beauty in everything, in any things and manifestations of reality is built into us. This is the main gift we received from the God. This is the possibility of seeing through the Divine Eye. This Eye is hidden deep within our heart. We cannot turn on this ability by ourselves, by force, as we turn on a certain function in a technical device. But we can gradually and delicately open ourselves to this grace. There is no particular sense in persuading God to finally «give us this now» – because it was already given to us at the very beginning of our existence. Rather, we need to clear our consciousness of the layers of dust and mud that cause us to eclipse of the heart. Here is a wonderful spiritual exercise we can do in addition to support other forms of our prayer. Ask yourself in

the morning and in the evening – have you noticed the beauty of the simple things around you today? The beauty of fresh grass on the lawn or the beauty of dying roses drying up in your room? The beauty of the neighbor's child's smile or the beauty of the tired face of the cashier in the supermarket? Have you looked up to the sky at least once a day to see how the clouds are slowly moving there or what metamorphoses are taking place with the light of the sun? See the wonder of a crack in a wall or a dust blown by the wind down the road beneath your feet.

Once there was a conversation between two famous and talented people – the Georgian film-producer Otar Ioseliani and the Jewish dissident philosopher Oleksander Pyatigorsky. They discussed the topic of what should be done in the moment before the inevitable death. Both of them are mature people with rich life experience, who opposed the monster of the Soviet-Russian system which was destroying the freedom of person to perceive reality as it is. The producer asked the philosopher what would be most important to him at such a moment. And the philosopher answered: «*In the time of dying, even if my eyes start to close and my body falls to the ground... I would strive not to lose clear attention, pure perception until the very end. It would be wonderful if, until the last moment, I could carefully perceive everything, even a blade of grass growing on the ground, from which I will no longer get up.*»

*With love and gratitude from Ukraine,
Maria & Albert (WCCM.COM.UA)*

Reflections on the Path of an Oblate-Postulant from Siberia Vladimir Kinyaykin, Tomsk

We would like to share the thoughts of Vladimir, our meditator friend living far away in Siberia. Vladimir began attending our russian-speaking meditation group, the meetings of which we began organizing during the Covid time. This group was a ray of hope for us and an instrument of peace and communication between meditators from Ukraine and Russia, vitally needed during the war that has lasted since 2014. Vladimir became a bright sign of the Divine presence for us, and perhaps the fruit of

the community's meditative work in the dark times of the crisis. Vladimir expressed a desire to try out the oblate discipline, and we happily agreed to accompany him on the path of the oblate postulation. At the end of 2021, on the eve of the beginning of the full-scale invasion of the Russian army into Ukraine, we held a humble ceremony of opening his postulation. The beginning of Vladimir's oblate path coincided with the shock of the beginning of the war. But this difficult time became a true time of discernment of oblate calling for our friend. Vladimir became one of those Russian-speaking meditators who supported Ukraine from the very beginning of the war, empathized with the victims of each blow of the aggressor, and resisted toxic propaganda. Altruism, empathy, kindness, and Vladimir's sharp, attentive mind became a revelation for us and a testimony to the fruitfulness of his personal meditative path. In this friendship between the oblate-candidate and the mentors, he taught us much more than we taught him. At our last meeting, Vladimir shared with us words that strikingly echoed what we had come across many times in texts describing the experience of famous mystics - about how a crisis in personal practice becomes a new discovery of God; about how the vision of God can recognize the Presence where there is no duality between the Seeker and the Goal; about how we can understand that God is not an external object that is "located" somewhere, but rather an internal Reality that can manifest itself in the depths of our experience and our relationships with Others. This November, during the visit of Ukrainian meditators to Bonnevaux, we want to open online Vladimir's oblate novitiate. We hope that his inner experience be an example and a model of how contemplation heals us and leads us beyond irreconcilable opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*, in the words of Nicholas of Kuzan) - to peace and communion.

Albert & Maria Zakharovy (Ukrainian NOC's)

At the time of my third year of practicing meditation in the community and exploring the oblate path, I would like to share with you a small reflection on my experience. I learned about the WCCM community from a well-known Lutheran pastor in Siberia, Pavel Levushkan. A little later, I met the coordinators of the Ukrainian community and the Russian-language

online meditation group, Albert and Maria Zakharovy. I am grateful to them, as well as to Josephine von Zitzewitz, who helps lead this group, for teaching me meditation and translating the texts of John Main. In the first year of my practice, I was interested in exploring the state of silence itself and the features of contemplative prayer with a mantra. Now it is difficult for me to remember what difficulties I encountered on this path, they were offset by a new understanding of prayer as peace. Although the degree of tension of terrible war news sometimes did not allow me to meditate at all. But I almost immediately discovered a feeling of hope in meditation, which became a very valuable acquisition for that tense time. This hope helped me cope even with some purely psychological reactions to what was happening. I was very impressed by the idea of the Path as a manifestation of God to us through our open conversation - conversation that unites people who have already accepted the gift of the Path, and between them and those who have only heard about the Path, but have not yet experienced its reality in their own experience.



Reflecting on the Path, I realized that there is a certain problem connected with language. For some people it is easier to talk about the Path as their own experience (even if very awkwardly), and for others it is more difficult. But on the Path we find closeness with others, which allows us to talk even about things that may seem frightening for our ego. And this is a rare opportunity even where you expect to find such closeness - in a religious environment of believers, where, by the way, I did not have much experience

of stable communication. These several years of my practice with the community also brought me one interesting meeting – with a priest who now lives in Siberia and has read the books of John Main. He is an American, a Jesuit, and I would not be surprised if in all of Siberia he is the only priest who is familiar with John Main and his teaching on meditation.

In the second year of my Path, I began to have difficulties with consistency in my meditative practice and with the prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. I began to feel a state of inner emptiness. But, unexpectedly, this became a new opportunity to understand the Path. After all, God reveals himself not only in literal revelation and not only to those who are completely ready for this revelation. It happens (it seems to me personally) that there is not even a place for God in the soul (or words to describe God), and then God can reveal himself in a special mysterious way, but not through many words describing His attributes. Surprisingly, sometimes God reveals himself even through Absence, through Non-Manifestation. It turns out that if from childhood someone is closer to definitions not theological, but natural science, then words to describe faith and the Path will still be found. This is good news! After all, it means that no one will be deprived of hope.

From John Main, Awakening

Perhaps the greatest feature of St Benedict's Rule is that prayer and community are interdependent. Prayer, as I have tried to suggest to you, is in essence learning to pay attention to the Other; and learning to regard the Other not in any self-interested or self-calculating way but simply for the Other's own sake, because in fact the Other is infinitely lovable. In Benedict's vision God and our neighbour are not two entities clamoring for our attention to the detriment of one or the other. God does not demand our love at the expense of our brother or sister. Indeed, love for one another is the deepening of our intrinsic communion with God rather than a dissipation of it. 'The one who dwells in love dwells in God' (1 Jn 4:16). Similarly, the love that we have for one another, properly understood, propels us deeper into the mystery of love itself. To love the God that we cannot see, we must love the brother and

sister we can see. And we can see them as brother and sister precisely because we are convinced that God is our Father.



NEWS

Change of Editor for Via Vitae, by IOC

The International Oblate Council would like to thank Stefan who for the last twenty years has been editor of Via Vitae. He has done an invaluable work and we look forward very much to him continuing to contribute to Via Vitae. We are also very pleased that Andrew McAlister has agreed to become editor of Via Vitae. Via Vitae was started by an Australian, Trish Panton. It is great that one of Trish's compatriots and someone so experienced with WCCM and Oblate life has generously agreed to take this role. Andrew has already done much work with the Oblate community as can be seen from the commentaries on the Rule he has edited from his and others experience of living in community, theruleofbenedict.com



New Editor for Via Vitae 2025, by Andrew McAlister



Hi everyone. My name is Andrew and I'll be the new editor for Via Vitae from next year. Stefan has already mentioned too much about me and what's been happening lately in his editorial, so no need to repeat it here. When the oblate grapevine brought me the news that Stefan was moving on and it was suggested to me that I might be interested in taking over, well I discovered that I was indeed interested. A little prompting in the heart drew me into emailing Stefan. After a Zoom get together with Stefan to talk it all over, I found myself keen to be involved. So here we are.

Thank you so much to Stefan for all you have done for Via Vitae during your time as editor. It has been so enjoyable to read and be a part of the newsletter that you have helped to shape. The oblates in Ireland will indeed be blessed by your renewed attention and Benedictine spirit.

I will be editing from my home city of Bathurst, in regional western New South Wales, Australia. Where I live is also, and was originally, Wiradjuri country - Wiradjuri being the collective name of the First Nations people populating this area, and a good portion of New South Wales.

See you all in 2025.

With much love, Andrew

What is Benedict's Well?, by the Benedict's Well Team



**BENEDICT'S
WELL**

"PREFER NOTHING TO THE LOVE OF CHRIST"
RULE OF BENEDICT 4:21

MONDAYS 9AM BST
ZOOM with LIVE STREAMING
<https://www.youtube.com/@benedictswell6373>

*Let us drink of the wisdom of St. Benedict and
together be the well of love the world can draw from.*

Benedict's Well is an International online meditation and reflection group that meets on Zoom every Monday at 9 a.m. GMT for a total of one hour. The group is hosted by Benedictine Oblates of the World Community for Christian Meditation. It is open to anyone who wants to deepen their meditation practice, has an interest in the monastic tradition and would like the support of a community online for their spiritual journey. Each week, there is a time of silent meditation with a reading to prepare us for meditation and then there is a guest speaker. The group is ecumenical and from all over the world, but united in meditation and the nourishment of shared reflection on their Christian faith journey. A regular speaker is Father Laurence. Over the 3 years that we have been meeting, many speakers have offered their reflections and wisdom. You may wish to offer your own reflections!

Here are some of the wonderful testimonies we gathered from a recent time of sharing at Benedict's Well. They come from those who join together on a regular basis from across the world.

All are Welcome at Benedict's Well!

From New Zealand:

"Inspiration and encouragement from soul friends"

From Asia:

Support of a group is the best guarantee to remain a faithful meditator."

From Europe:

"I enjoy the silent prayer fellowship and the sharing of experience as Christians, and I brush up my English, too!"

"My week feels empty otherwise."

From the UK:

"It keeps me connected to everyone and keeps me anchored."

"Shared wisdom and love with prayer united in spirit with some many kindred spirits from around the world and for peace in the world."

From Australia:

"I like to join because I love the idea of being connected to other meditators all around the world."

"Inspiration and encouragement from soul friends."

From Canada:

"It is such a privilege to meditate together from everywhere. it is a special connection, and like friends."

From Ireland:

"Finding deep resonance with the speakers."

From Spain:

"Being connected worldwide and when I meet some of you in person, I feel I know you already - especially the speakers."

Please feel welcome to come to 'Benedict's Well' by sending an email to wccmbenedictswell@gmail.com. We will then send you the weekly Zoom link. If you would like to watch previous sessions of Benedict's Well, you can find them on our YouTube page. Please note we have a period of silent meditation at the beginning of our time together. To view, click the link below

Benedict's Well

My Final Oblation at the Canadian Christian Meditation Conference in Ottawa, by Beth Smith (Ottawa, Canada)

In June 2022, I made my final oblation at the Canadian Christian Meditation Community's conference held in Ottawa at St. Paul University. Dom Laurence Freeman was in attendance which made it "extra special". What I really wanted to highlight about the conference was that while it was very short and while there was not "enough" quantity for me, there was "quality" in a very unexpected way. The experience of making my final oblation was a very profound thing for me. In fact, it was one of those moments of experiencing viscerally the presence of Christ.

I was not prepared for the emotional impact that taking the vows would have on me. I had read them over several times, and written them out long hand, so I would not stumble over the words I would be saying. However, when the moment came, as I began to read the chart, my throat constricted and my eyes brimmed with tears. I struggled mightily to regain my composure and after a few strangled breaths, and what seemed like an eternity, I was able to speak the words written as they were before me. Rather than embarrassment, I was overwhelmed with a loving, gentle reassurance of my ability by grace to be a faithful, constant servant of Christ.

I have been a meditator for almost 25 years and

apart from a month recovering from brain surgery, I have been faithful to the discipline of the daily meeting with Christ in silence. However, my biggest humility has been the inability to have a long marriage commitment having more than one "failed" marriage in my life. The realization that I have been able to be faithful and stable to vows taken after 25 years of a constant relationship was ironic. Perhaps that is why marriage renewal vows are so important, or at least more meaningful, than the initial vows taken at the altar. At any rate, the taking of my final oblation vows was very healing to me personally and a blessing. "Sustain me O Lord, as you have promised that I may live, and disappoint me not in my hope."

Maranatha

News from the UK, by Angela Gregson on behalf of the UKOC

During a sunny weekend in October, Turvey Abbey welcomed six WCCM Novices on retreat, prior to taking final oblation as Benedictine Oblates of WCCM. Our journey of formation over varying time scale was well supported in wisdom and love by the local and worldwide WCCM Oblate community.

On the Sunday Fr Laurence arrived and each Novice was invited by him to a personal interview. We then had the opportunity to speak briefly to those present on our experience of the oblate formation pathway. Contributions from all of us were varied and emotionally moving. After lunch we moved to the Eucharist during which we were received as full Benedictine Oblates of WCCM. It was to be a very special life-changing day.



Fr Laurence presided at the Mass. Individually we read from our hand-written Charts the promises to live in the spirit of obedience, stability and conversion. We offered ourselves, to the fullest of our ability, to the service of God and humanity with the sustaining help of our Lord.



Final Oblation, by Jude Carpenter, UK Oblate

The Monastery of Christ our Saviour in Turvey will forever hold a very special place in my heart following our recent weekend retreat when together with five others I made my full oblation to WCCM in the service of God. In the previous few weeks many friends had asked me, “What is an oblate?” and “why do you want to be one?” So, I thought a lot about what it meant to me and what I thought I was doing as I tried to answer their questions. But the more I thought the more I realised that this was not about anything I might be doing. It was the love of God that was drawing me, compelling me to come in. I realised that God wanted to bless me, to strengthen and encourage me by bringing me into this loving, mutually supportive community, which has been so graciously shaped over so many years by St Benedict’s Rule and by the love of Jesus which inspired him. To belong to a community that owes its allegiance to Jesus Christ and which is dedicated to letting His light into the darkness of our world through our fellowship and our practice of pure prayer together is just a very great blessing. In our fractured and fragmented world where so many people are isolated and lonely we are so privileged to belong together. To me to enter this community of love feels like a real home-coming. So, I

am inspired and encouraged by all that I have received to go on sharing the love of God in Jesus with renewed determination and joy. Thank you to everyone who made our time together at Turvey so very special and thanks be to God.

With Much Thanks to All, by Belinda M Bentick (UK Oblate)

After two years discerning the Oblate path, I took to the motorways on Friday 13th October for the 2 & a half hour journey to ‘Turvey’. I was hoping to be received as a full Oblate at the annual UK Oblate weekend gathering. The torrential rain made it feel like I was driving blindfolded through a river, and a mist, spray and surface water were my constant companions. I prayed for the 4 hours it eventually took me to get there. Upon arrival I was greeted by the Angels of the Lord, Janet Robbins and Angela Gregson. All thoughts of the stressful journey vanished and I felt a sense of excited anticipation and peace. Prayer, meditation and nurturing love was on the menu throughout the weekend. Janet and Angela modelled pure discipleship. Br. John, the sole monk at the Abbey cooked us a delicious meal on Friday evening. More Oblates and fellow Novices arrived on Saturday, and it was such a pleasure to meet people in person having only met them on Zoom. On Sunday morning all six Novices who were hoping to make their final Oblation, were present, Janet was always on hand to answer any questions we had, to reassure us about the order of service, a little apprehension had crept in as we waited to take this very important commitment. The 6 of us developed a very good connection with each other, and I would say a life-long bond was formed. When Fr. Laurence arrived, he interviewed each of us individually, and everyone came out of his room with a beaming smile. We were ready. The ceremony within the Contemplative Eucharist was beautiful. I do not have the words to express the emotions of joy and love which enveloped me. I feel I got a glimpse of what Psalm 4 means: ‘You have put into my heart a greater joy than they have from abundance of corn and new wine.’ I feel very grateful to have found a place where I feel I belong, my brothers and sisters in Christ accept me as I am and I feel very supported in this Community of Love.

A Small Oblate Renaissance in Ireland, by Stefan Reynolds, Ireland National Oblate Co-ordinator



Final Oblation of Niall Kennedy with Fr Laurence and his mentor Stefan Reynolds at Balally Parish in December 2023

The Irish WCCM Oblate community have grieved two big losses in the last years – Rowena O’Sullivan and Rita O’Connell. However, as the Gospel saying reminds us, “If a grain of wheat dies it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24) – there has, indeed, been a new fruitfulness in the community. This August it will be three years we have had our first Friday of the month online ‘Irish Oblates and Friends Cell Group’. We welcome Oblates and friends from around the world. In December last we had our first Final Oblation for many years, Niall Kennedy was received by Father Laurence at Balally Parish in Dublin. Two postulants recently became novices and we also received two new postulants – so the community is growing! We now have a monthly online Formation Meeting which again is open to all interested – where we are reading and sharing on a chapter of John Main’s Community of Love’ each month. There is a lively participation of Irish meditators in Benedict’s Well each week. So, after some years when little has happened compared to the much bigger UK Oblate community, there is now a little renaissance on the Emerald Isle!

Any meditators from around the world who would like to join the Irish Oblates and Friends Cell Group or Formation Group you are most welcome – just email stefandreynolds@gmail.com and he will put you on the emailing list.

Obituary Rita O’Connell, by Stefan Reynolds



Rita O’Connell, one of the longest standing and most beloved members of the Irish Oblate Community passed away on 11 January 2024, aged 90. She was full of enthusiasm for life to the end. A person of many talents, Rita touched so many people’s lives through her art, her work with the Legion of Mary and the Samaritans and especially through her deep faith and devotion to the practice of Christian Meditation.

Rita made a lifelong commitment to contemplative practice as an Oblate of WCCM and was a driving force for the development and nourishment of our meditation community in Cork city and county. She ran a weekly meditation group at the parish of Douglas in Cork which was well attended. The Cork Oblate Cell used to meet in her house where she was always hospitable with tea, cakes and Barmbrack (first time I had tasted the latter). Rita was very independent minded. In later years she regularly joined our Online Cell Group, managing the technology in her late 80’s. She always amused us by saying quite candidly when she thought aa reading from the Rule of St Benedict bore no relevance to her life! But her wisdom was always treasured. For me she was always a mentor – taking a light hearted but dedicated approach to Oblate life – she set the tone for our online meetings.

Rita’s funeral in Douglas Cork in January was well attended by her former art students, the families of her brother and sister, her neighbours (who were devoted to her) and members of her Meditation Group. Niall Kennedy and myself were happy to attend. One of her nephews read her favourite poem:

Pied Beauty by Gerard Manley Hopkins
(written 1877)

*Glory be to God for dappled things —
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;*

*Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced — fold, fallow,
and plough;
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.*

On being told of her death, Laurence Freeman wrote that he was “very saddened by the news that Rita will not be here to stimulate and challenge us as she has done with humour and passion for so long. She was full of surprises as when I discovered during a silent retreat her great passion for Irish rugby – especially Munster – and her comprehensive knowledge of everything about the game. But there is so much to celebrate and be inspired by especially how faithfully she trod the oblate path. I will offer mass for her and those who grieve for her and may she rest in the Lord’s peace and joy.”

Invitation to Campfire in the Heart, by Judi Taylor

Campfire in the Heart (campfireintheheart.com.au) welcomes enquiries from those who’d like to volunteer, to be part of the small community there, part of the vision for the place, in the ancient and wondrous setting of Australia’s Eastern MacDonnell Ranges, 7km from Alice Springs/Mbantua.

The details are here Applications to volunteer: forms.gle/zgS5Z9f4EKDtXcbp9. This year a particular opportunity exists to volunteer as a meditator-in-residence, staying a minimum of 2 months, up to 6 months: to be a spiritual presence to work with and complement the offerings of the mangers there; to offer daily times of meditation in the WCCM tradition; to embody the Benedictine values of hospitality, generosity and humility for all who visit Campfire. We are calling for expressions of interest among WCCM meditators both internationally and within Australia.

Email: taylor.judi@outlook.com



Campfire
IN THE Heart

POEMS



Where Poems Come From, by Anne-Marie Doecke, Australian Oblate

I don't think one person
writes a poem
I don't think
it's the letting go of thinking
but re-membering
so another's voice arises
it's listening for Your story
in the word another speaks
and the silence in between

Ripples, by Vernon Chandler, Oblate in Germany

Every pebble or stone;
Every word or action;
Creates ripples.
Miniscule waves,
Some small,
Others large,
Expand over the surface.
Hidden in darkness,
Visible in light.

Seen or unseen,
The movements felt
As spiritual karma.
Nothing remains concealed
Within the sacred realm.

Praying in the Zone © KDP, 2023.



The Mustard Seed, by Aileen B Urquhart

Lord, increase my faith, my faithfulness
I do the time twice daily without fail
It's disciplined but freedom none the less
Yet all these thoughts keep company as well.
The mantra is supposed to still my mind,
My posture, that imposter, lets me down.
My breath is just another noise, I find.
I think, Lord, you must take me for a clown.
And then, you tell me not to judge myself.
My loving, like a mustard seed, has grown.
I cannot see it in the dark of prayer
But you convince me that it's truly shown.
My family and friends, like eager birds
Now shelter confidently in my shade.
One sacred word replaces many words
And oh, the difference that this has made.



Divine Image, by Stefan Reynolds, Oblate in Ireland

Take a walk down the mirrored chambers of the mind
Thoughts echo like reflected light from side to side
The rope appears like a snake and the snake as a rope
A kaleidoscope of life; the concave and convex glass
Memories, dreams, objects of fear, phantoms of hope
Billowing from the future and tapering from the past

Then search within, close your eyes to all that is there
As if your sight was empty and your mind was bare
Search for the source from where all thoughts emerge
The thought of 'I' from where all other thoughts come
And realise that You are the light of heaven and earth
Lamp on a stand, city on a hilltop, the light of the sun

When the mind is still then we can open our hearts
And God's love that illumines the sun, moon and stars
Is poured in, the love that makes the universe bright
In love we become that which we delight to gaze upon
If we open up our hearts to the light, we become light

In love all things are shared, lover and beloved are one
Then trace the light to a niche that enshrines a lamp
Within a pearl-white crystal glass of star-like brilliance
A lamp that is lit from the oil of a blessed olive tree
Burning eternally, neither of the East nor of the West
Light upon light, for God gives metaphors and similes
To lead us into the light, and God knows what is best



Our Daily Bread, by Tomassina, Oblate
*(Inspired by a comment re the grain crisis in Ukraine,
"they will eat potatoes and other things"....)*

And she said: "they have no bread"
And Jesus wept.

Holy Mother, hold me close
My broken heart console
I am drowning in sorrow
When I see what my people stole
How my paradise they destroy
Towards extinction their course.

I prayed that they may be one
But they prefer to bathe in blood
Even my Father knows not
What they want.

I may be His only Son
But you are the one
He truly loves,
Beg Him to change their hearts.

Daily potatoes, loaves of corn,
Not my body, not what I chose
From gilded profits the new gods grow.
Each waiting grain records
How the innocents hungry go
Injustice written in the cosmos.

Trespasses, forgiveness,
Temptations that lead us,
Omissions and commissions,
Who can deliver us from our blindness?
Neither bread nor blood could unite us
Yellow grains of light pierce the darkness.



An Immensity, by David Noyce, UK Novice Oblate
(for Sophie, our newly-arrived grand-daughter)

“Fear is a suffering which oppresses us. But look at the immensity of love!” (St. Augustine)

Little one,
I wonder,
How much do you know
Of this love within which you are held?

Can you see its’ vastness
Stretching out beyond the rigid boundaries
Of our clock time?
How it is happy to reside
Outside the stern delimits of reason?

It is so simple,
A child can grasp it,
Without the need for wise words.
Asking nothing
And gifting everything
In a heartbeat.

You can teach me so much
About this love
Which binds us all together
Like the stars in a night sky constellation.

Let me cradle you in my arms
Whilst I try to recall
All that has been forgotten
Of this limitless holding.

Will you teach me
About resting in the warm embrace
Of this love,
So that we can celebrate it,
You and I,
By just being
Here,
Now?

Meditation: Interrupted, by David Noyce, UK
Novice Oblate

Outside my window,
At 7am,
A wood pigeon is calling.
I am rising and shining,
And she is singing

Because that is who she is.

Her song is all rhythm:
A precise, perfect syncopation
To the great heartbeat of our world.
Meaning and purpose are hers.
The pearl of great price
Which costs everything,
And nothing,
Is her birthright.

She always knew why she was alive:
To survive,
To raise a family,
To sing.
And I begin to wonder:
What will need to be changed
In order for me to be able
To sing
Like that?

Where We Are, by David Noyce, UK Novice Oblate

*“Help me find compassion without empathy
overwhelming me.”* Bonnevaux Book of Daily Prayer

It is 6.00pm
And on my television
A man is walking towards the camera,
Slowly picking his way through a sea of rubble,
Carrying a parcel of some sort.
I look down at my carefully prepared vegetarian
meal,
And sort out a forkful of toasted pine nuts and
rocket.
When I raise my gaze,
He has come closer.
I can see that he is shouting,
And weeping,
And with both hands
He is carrying a bundle, wrapped in a white sheet.

All appetite leaves me as I suddenly realise,
With a shock of recognition,
What it is that he is carrying.

I live in a world
Where high-definition images of utter despair
Can be live-streamed into a billion living rooms

Instantaneously,
And a billion fathers can silently give thanks
That they will never have to carry
A bundle like that.

This is where we are.
Three and a half thousand years,
And this is where we are.

As my eyes fill with useless tears
And I push away that plate of food,
The image on my television is changed.
Now we are looking at a flat-bed truck
Upon which are loaded
A dozen white bundles,
Maybe more. Most are large,
Some are small,
One is, conspicuously, tiny.

Someone will have to drive that truck,
A father, a husband, a son;
Someone will have to drive that truck,
And it will not be me.



Stability, by Alison Kerr, New Zealand Oblate

Listen ... not to the news!
Turn it off and
Listen!
listen to the rain, just a drop,
now a few more, and more,
a susurrantion, a whispering,
as I sit quite still and stare
at the drops dancing
on the table in the yard
at the little rivers
running down the windows
drop chasing drop
until they join to run together
to pour down the glass in
abandonment of self
ecstasy of communion,
of self-transcendence.
I can only watch and wonder,
holding my breath in awe
Now breathe!
Breathe in and inhale
the subtle perfume of
precipitation, transpiration,

the greenness of it all.
Watch and see how the
nasturtium leaves
have curled to form tiny tarns
little cups of life-giving water
Watch, and
Wonder



Conversion, by Alison Kerr, New Zealand Oblate

Are you listening?
Good!
Now turn
and turn
and turn again
Look, you've come full circle
Now open your arms ... wide
come home to your body,
come home to your self
listen to the music within you
and dance!
Take up the invitation to cast
aside your dignity, let go of that
lingering solemnity and dance,
dance like a dervish,
dance with the divine,
dance with the whole earth.
Just dance ... and
join in the joyful,
jubilant, universal
dance!



Obedience, by Alison Kerr, New Zealand Oblate

Listen ... put your phone away and listen
Take a photo if you must,
but then put it away and just listen ...
Listen to the gulls shrieking
no holds barred, wings flapping
necks outstretched, scrapping
over some tasty morsel, or scrap of litter
or just scrapping ... greedy,
gullible, guileful gulls
How like us ...
Now soaring, sublime,
wings outstretched, floating ...
feathers on the breath of God

Now earth-bound, almost
human in their strutting, self-righteous
stand-offs, their strident
self-importance ...

Listen, and watch, and know
that we are all, all of us,
yes, every one
made of stardust,
all holy, all blessed,
all home to the One who
gives us life and calls us Beloved.



Beloved, by Alison Kerr, New Zealand Oblate

What does it mean
to be loved
in a way

that brings the being
and the loving
together

in one Word?

What a wonder
to be loved
like that!



BOOK REVIEWS

For The Time Being, by Stephen Bailey, review by Tim Roberts

One of my favourite places is St Anselm's chapel in Chester cathedral. When I worked nearby, I would visit often. As I sat watching the prayer candles pulsing

in the draft, I felt somehow connected to the silence in ways that were both intimate yet impersonal. When I read Stephen Bailey's book, *For The Time Being*, the haiku in it felt reminiscent of the silent space in Saint Anselm's chapel. I realized that a good book connects us with aspects of oneself but a great book connects us with the silence from which that self arises – and in my view this is a great book.

Stephen Bailey, writing under the pen name Hansha Teki, is a Christian contemplative living a life of faith and devotion on the banks of a river in New Zealand. Coincidentally, I live a short drive away. When I first came across his haiku on the web I wondered where in the world he was based. Imagine my surprise when he dropped *For The Time Being* off at my home. Although I have met him only once I was struck by his quality of stillness and I think this flows through his poetry. Anyone who has been in a deep state of meditation will recognize this terrain – perhaps it is the felt-sense of mysticism itself. The haiku in this book are where meditation meets prayer. I have spent an entire day, or more, dwelling on a single poem – and found it rewarding.

Stephen Bailey writes short parallel poems that incorporate some of the features of haiku. Haiku, because of its brevity, simplicity and depth is a favourite practice for meditators, contemplatives and mystics. I was inspired on my own journey into writing haiku by Brother David Steindl-Rast, John Paul Lederach (one of the world's most significant Peace-builders) and Zen teacher and author Natalie Goldberg all practice haiku. It was their haiku focus as contemplative practice that guided me into the Benedictine path, where, for me, haiku is a pivotal practice. To me, the label haiku means short poem, typically uttered in one breath- maybe written in one to four lines, most usually 3 lines and in objective language ...but not always. Well-written haiku can hold a moment in such a way that it is not just communicated but is absorbed by the reader, making it vivid and memorable and ideal for *Lectio Divina*. Haiku is so effective because it has space at its heart. It is designed to be incomplete. Each little poem contains the bare minimum of detail so the reader, often without realising, puts their own meaning into the poem to fill in the gaps. This means haiku is interactive – poet and reader are mutually dependent on each other. To borrow from Thich Nhat Hanh, Haiku is the poetry of interbeing.

Stephen Bailey writes outstanding parallel haiku which he originated. He has developed a unique way of placing these haiku poems together so that they act one each other, as though in creative tension or dialogue. This is why they are what Bailey calls parallel haiku. Throughout the book, these poems extend each other, as though they are in a conversation that is evolving and, in some poems, these parallel energies seem to come from different planes of being or times. I get a strong sense of Stephen Bailey's spiritual life from these pages. In part because he weaves Maori cosmology, the environment and the love found in the gospels. Each page felt vitalizing and I simply wanted more. His turn of phrase conveys reverence for the natural world and a familiarity with the depths of the psyche and the way we carry our vulnerability and fragility into our spiritual life.

I read a great deal of haiku and short poems and I found these poems to be profound. I have shared them with non-haiku reading friends who find the book to be impressive. This is an essential book for those who make lectio a part of their day, and for those who are following a contemplative path. I can think of so many aspects of spiritual life where this book will enthrall, and guide us ...pilgrimages, retreats, reading aloud to meditation groups...and of course to all poetry enthusiasts and poets. Poet Johannes S.H. Berg says, For The Time Being "echoes aspects of Stephen Bailey's own journey towards Silence in which God speaks to our soul." This is a masterful collection of poetry that I can re-read again and again always learning something new and inviting me to go a little deeper than before. It is a wonderful experience.

Endnote:

Tim Roberts was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease at 49 and has found freedom and joy in writing haiku and other Japanese-style short-form poems. He enjoys foraging for experiences and inspiration with his dog and lives a life that, he hopes, makes poetry inevitable. His book *Busted!* (Red Moon Press) is haiku and micro-poetry about his experience as a British police officer. Tim lives in New Zealand, and is in awe of the scenery, wildlife, and southern stars. His favourite Maori phrase is *Kia kaha*, which means stay strong. Access Tim's work at

Tim Roberts, *Busted!* (Red Moon Press, 2023)

Tim Roberts, *Haiku and Parkinson's Disease: A*

Practice, in New Zealand Poetry Society Archives, 2020 poetrysociety.org.nz

The Way of Benedict: Eight Blessings for Lent, by Laurentia Johns OSB, review by Valerie Quinlivan

This book, by a Benedictine nun from Stanbrook Abbey, Yorkshire, is a blessing for all of us. For Oblates it's a treasure of fresh insights into the Rule, which Dame Laurentia clearly loves. Although the subtitle says 'for Lent', the focus is on the joy of the Resurrection, and how that can be lived out in daily life. Both Lent and the Way of Benedict are seen as metaphors for life's journey with God. I was delighted by her chapter headings which led unexpectedly into chapters of the Rule. The first blessing, 'of Beginning' shows us how the Prologue beckons us into new life. For us, the Prologue's invitation to 'pursue peace' with the practical illustrations of prayer and action, could not be more timely.



As we know, Benedict underlines his teaching with constant references to scripture. Sr Laurentia explores and expands these and spends one whole chapter on the Blessing of the Word. As an example of *Lectio Divina*, she uses the Book of Baruch. In this, her monastery follows Benedict's Rule that the monastic should take one book 'to be read straight through and entirely' in Lent (RB 48). It is a practice which is a great way of expanding knowledge of scripture; perhaps as a study exercise, but always with aspects of *Lectio*.

One of my favourite sections was the 'Blessing of Attentiveness'. The RB chapters on humility can be difficult for modern readers. Sr Laurentia suggests that Benedictine spirituality enables us, through the lens of attentiveness in RB 5-7, to detect something of the inner dynamic of prayer – silence, obedience

humility – the heart empty of the clamorous claims of the ego. The other chapter I keep returning to is the Blessing of Welcome. Here Sr Laurentia opens out Benedict’s teaching on hospitality. She points out how the later chapters of the Rule, as well as providing guidelines for welcoming one another, also teach us to welcome, even with gratitude, the unexpected blow, the unwelcome direction life can take. Another journey away from self.

Sr Laurentia writes beautifully and with deep wisdom. There are suggestions for reflections and action at the end of each chapter and a wealth of references. I hope you can share my delight in ‘Eight Blessings’.

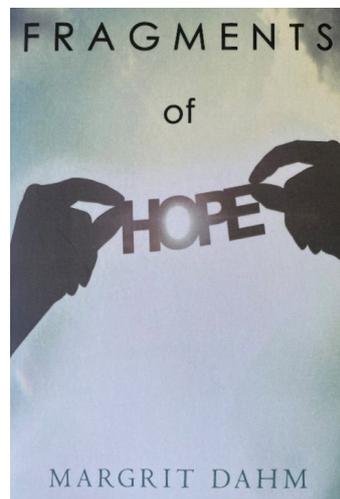
**In the School of Saint Benedict:
Benedictine: Spirituality for Every
Christian, by Xavier Perrin OSB,
(Gracewing), book recommended by
James Pankhurst, Oblate, Germany**

Dom Xavier Perrin, abbot of Quarr, has added his own account of the Rule, and of how it may help laypeople to strengthen their Christian commitment. He begins with a standard summary of St Benedict’s biography, as far as it can be disentangled from the hagiographical tales of St Gregory’s Life. He gives a swift account of the sources of the Rule: he could have made rather more of the warm Augustinian influence which probably directed what Benedict chose to include or to dispense with as he copied from the slightly earlier and much longer text, The Rule of the Master. His detailed commentary on the Rule itself has some excellent writing on the essential figure of the superior, and on authority and obedience, care and teaching (discipline) in a properly functioning community. The emphasis always is on solid, daily practice – his single paragraph on silence could teach anyone a valuable lesson – and how the learning of real humility can be helped by resolute self-understanding and by communal prayer, in particular the routine of the Psalms sung or recited in the Office with wholehearted attention in the fear (awe, not terror) of God.

The middle section of the book has ten brief accounts of monks and nuns who lived at critical historical moments. Bede (the only Englishman, as he is in Dante), Peter the Venerable and Bernard of

Clairvaux are good choices. There follow two intense nuns, two heroes of the nineteenth-century Franco-Belgian monastic revival and two modern monks who cut loose from Benedictine life for the mysticism of the East: Thomas Merton and Henri Le Saux. The Tibhirine monks who died at terrorist hands in Algeria in 1996 give a better example of community dedication. The last third of the book, gentle but demanding (this is very Benedictine), applies the recommendations of the Rule to the daily life of any serious lay Christian: as much liturgy as can be managed; care of the sick, the old, children and strangers; dealing with pride so that it is no longer the motive of anything we do (harder than it sounds, as St Benedict knew); and with prayer hoping for the perseverance and patience to be able to live as far as possible in praise of God in communion with Christ and with others. As Basil Hume wrote: “The Rule of St Benedict makes it possible for ordinary folk to live lives of quite extraordinary value,” outside as well as within the cloister.

**Fragments of Hope (Pegasus Publishing,
Cambridge) by Margit Dahm, UK Oblate,
review by Stefan Reynolds**



This is the third book of poems by Margit Dahm, a WCCM Oblate in the UK. The poems are very much connected to meditation. She writes in the Preface:

“In this collection of poems it is my intention to put into words how a regular practice of meditation gradually changes and penetrates our lives in so many ways: the way we look at and experience nature, the way we learn to relate to others, not only those who are like minded but those we find difficult to be with ; we learn to adopt a non-judgmental attitude, we learn to be more tolerant and to endure any displeasing behaviour with a greater degree of patience. Our relationship with the Divine becomes more intimate and loving, and even when we go through times of hardship, be it physical or mental, we are never completely without hope. Our life becomes more balanced [...] inner and outer come more into

unison which makes us happier, more joyful and more appreciative; we truly become what we were meant to be...”

Each of Margrit’s poems (over 76 pages) are short and profound. Their seemingly simplicity convey a great depth, unpretentiously, the depth of the everyday and the real. Margrit relates the inner world of thoughts and feelings to the outer world of nature and human encounters; the passage of the seasons, the noises of the city, travelling in a bus, an outing to the countryside, the changing life of the tree and garden outside her window, as well as periods of sadness, acceptance, growth and healing. Each poem has a steadiness of observation and an exquisite gentleness to it. Like Haikus, they offer insight with the lightest of brush strokes, adding both colour and shadows to everyday life. Meditation is that brushstroke, as Margrit says, “poetry is the living breath of being whereby the word is released in the interval between one breath and the next” – it is meditation which gives depth. I can highly recommend this book or poems, as I do also Margrit’s previous books – ‘Transforming the Moment’ and ‘Ending and Unending.’ At times Margrit’s poems remind me of Emily Dickinson, at times of Mary Oliver, a bit of both, as she has a great gift of combining the metaphysical and the natural. Of the many beautiful poems in this volume I find it difficult to choose examples – I would include them all if I could but then you wouldn’t buy the book! Here are a few that give the flavour and relevance to us as meditators and as Oblates in community.

Homecoming

the window is ablaze with light,
welcoming light,
light which dispels darkness
and which by its warmth
awakens the feeling
of having arrived,
of coming home at last –

coming home from the cold
coming home from the darkness –

as we enter the room
no words are needed
to express how we feel
for we are expected

and a notion arises in us

a notion that this is the place
for which we’ve searched
and which wanted to be found:

at this moment of
recognition and acceptance
our efforts are laid to rest
and we are at peace
Time to be

the sea of unknowing
is in and around us;
it allows the heart
to glide on its swell

and with a touch lighter
than light, it lets our being

breathe freely in
the breeze that ripples
the surface of the waters

while the deep is filled
with life-giving silence

There is

there is something comforting
in the perennial themes of life –
the heartbeat which keeps
everything alive, is moving forward
at the appropriate speed:

the regularity of the four seasons
invoke in us a sense
of steadiness and constancy,

and we welcome the different
events and celebrations
in connection with them;
they give us the assurance

that we matter
and that people matter,
that we give
as well as receive
by being part of them,

and by not obstructing the
change which is inherent
in all things temporal,
we become more fully aware
of that which always is

Late at night

the shimmer of a waxing moon
has touched the interior
of the room with its soft and
reticent light –

being unobtrusively restful
it is not meant to illuminate
or shine, but to embellish
the darkness of a clear night;

unlike the electric light
which immediately sharpens
the contours inside and out

and unlike the sunlight
which brightens the day
infusing colour into the world
of nature and man,

it does not aim at
penetrating the dark, but
simply at rendering the night
more mysterious with
its glistening stillness
and silent gleams
nearly every time...

the miracle happens
when we call on the Lord:
he approaches us with
infinite gentleness and care,

and if our attention allows,
we sink ever deeper
into the silence of his Being;

there we find rest until we
return to the task of the day,

but the connection remains

The Community

when love begins to grow in us
and joy gets hold of every fibre,
self-love has less room in us,

and we let go of selfish thinking;

instead we pray and work together,
we consider each other's welfare
and keep in mind the need of others

when we return to our daily lives;

for many are those who do not have
the blessing of God's guiding grace
and seek to be enlightened

in the way of godliness;

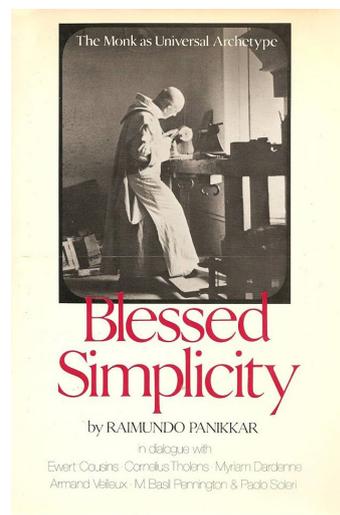
but to those who do not want to
hear our voice, we lend a listening ear,
for many are their grievances

which might contain a question;

so let us be part of the community
and let us welcome every stranger
who seeks our help in many a way,

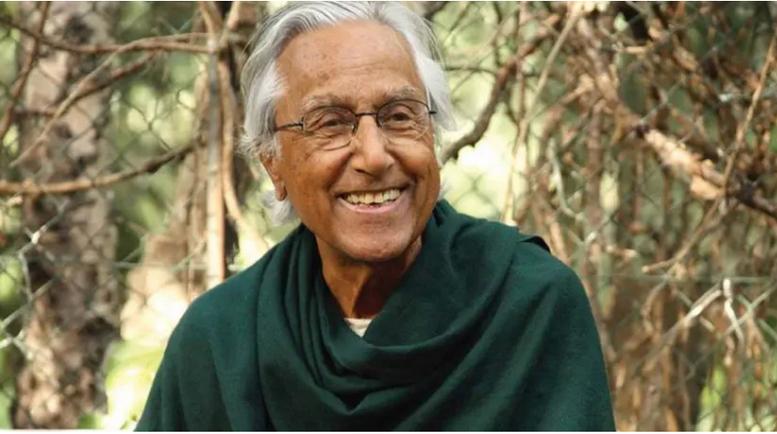
let us be their manger

**Blessed Simplicity: the Challenge
of Being a Monk, by Raimon Panikkar,
(Orbis, 2014, originally published
Seabury Press, 1982), review by John
O'Neill, Australia Oblate, email:
jtduckz9@gmail.com**



Raimon Panikkar was a great intercultural and interreligious philosopher who died in 2010. He was born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1918. He had a Catholic Catalan mother and a Hindu Indian father, so both religions were in his heritage. He was a Catholic priest who lived much of his life in India. For many years he was parish priest at Varanasi. He obtained three Ph. Ds, in chemistry, philosophy and theology. He taught at universities in Madrid, Rome, Harvard and Santa Barbara. He wrote around 50 books and 900 articles. He had astonishing erudition and scholarship, in several languages. As well as living a deeply contemplative life, he was very active, presenting addresses and papers at numerous conferences, symposia and other gatherings around the world, including The Parliament of World Religions and the World Congress of Philosophy. He once famously said "I left Europe (for India)

as a Christian, I discovered that I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist without ever having ceased to be a Christian". Father Laurence, a close friend, visited him at his home in Tavertet, shortly before he died.



Panikkar says that since his youth he saw himself as a monk, although one without a monastery, without walls other than those of the planet and without vestments other than those worn by the human family. The occasion for this book was a conference in 1980 in the US, which he chaired. It was a gathering of eighty people, mostly monks and nuns, from various religious traditions. His thesis was that contemporary spirituality cannot be satisfied with ancient patterns, e.g. that of the monk, but needs a much more radical novelty. He is interested in a full human life for our times, rather than the specific problems of monks. It is a book for everyone, both believers and unbelievers. He has respect for the word "monk" as a translation of monachos, with its ambivalent meanings of alone, silent, solitary, while also meaning "unique", the unified person, the full one, the one who aspires to the ultimate goal of life, the Absolute, fullness of being and to the Whole. He wants to go back to the roots and origins of monks, learning from the monastic traditions, while launching out into the new spaces of contemporary life.

Panikkar does not describe the monk as archetype - that is, the monk as a paradigm of human life - but explores the archetype of the monk - that is, monkhood as a possible human archetype. The monk as archetype may be taken to mean that there is such a thing as an ideal monk and that monks have incarnated this ideal to different degrees. To speak of the archetype of the monk, on the other hand, assumes that there is a human archetype which traditional monks may have re-enacted in their own ways, which all of us may be called upon to realize in different ways, which

expresses the growth and newness of human potential and fullness.

The monk, then, is only one way of realizing a universal archetype. Yet it is through this monastic way that we may gain access to the universal archetype - of which the monk is only one manifestation. This archetype is a constitutive dimension of human life, unique to each person, which both needs and shuns institutionalization. Being a monk is a highly personal adventure.

Panikkar uses the term the humanum to mean the core of humanness which can be realized in as many different ways as there are human beings. It has different aspects that show the whole richness and complexity of human nature. The poet, the intellectual, the trades person, the parent all express different aspects of it. The human person tries to find a harmonious conjugation between several of these qualities. His hypothesis is that the archetype of which the monk is an expression corresponds to one dimension of this humanum, so that every human has potentially the possibility of realizing this dimension. Monkhood is a dimension that has to be integrated with all other dimensions of human life in order to fulfill the humanum. He admits that institutions are necessary, e.g. marriage and monasticism. However, sometimes they can become rigid and go too far. He thinks that one can be a Buddhist, a Hindu or a Christian monk, as the monastic precedes the fact of belonging to a particular religion. It is not the monopoly of a few but potentially open to everyone, as every human has this dimension, which can be realized in different ways. The monastic dimension is prior to and different to the way in which one may live it out, although one must still do so, according to a particular tradition, like speaking a language, rather than language.

Panikkar writes that the Canon of the Disciple does not intend to replace the Rule of the Master. The canon is only a "cane", a walking stick, a measure, something used for comparison so as to have some kind of standard. It does not offer a model or provide answers. These have to be elaborated through praxis and discovered personally in a unique and existential way. He hopes that this Canon expresses the aspirations of contemporary humans as they are confronted by the manifold characters of their being and the surrounding reality. In the following 9 sutras, the heart and core of the book, Panikkar provides both a traditional gloss

as well as a contemporary commentary on these key monastic values and practices.

Sutra 1. The Breakthrough of the Primordial Aspiration.

Here Panikkar writes of the necessity for initiation, new birth,

metanoia, conversion, to become the person one truly is. His commentary links this with the shaping of the world and its social values and causes, as well.

Sutra 2. The Primacy of Being over Doing.

For a monk, what is essential is just to be (grounded in reality). The new monk would like to be active in the world, as well, as an outcome of their own being.

Sutra 3. Silence over the Word.

Silence is very important for a monk. It can include prayer, both individual and collective, eg meditating, chanting, reciting. The new monk also wants to listen to the world, including through news and social media. She also is conscious of having a mission, which may include allowing one's thoughts and words to penetrate and influence her surroundings. This can be a troubling and real dilemma.

Sutra 4. Mother Earth prior to the Fellowship of Human Beings

The monk stands between heaven and earth, with the danger of forgetting the intermediate world of her fellow human, which she almost bypasses as transitory, provisional and rather irrelevant. She cultivates the earth and lives in harmony with the cosmos. The earth is also important for contemporary monks, e.g. with examples like gardening, wine and honey, although she also wants to live in solidarity with her fellow humans as well, as a contribution to the co- redemption of the cosmos.

Sutra 5. Overcoming Spatiotemporal Parameters.

The monk bears witness to the beyond, to the overcoming of worldly, temporal, transitory cares and tasks. The contemporary monk shares many insights of sacred secularity, of valuing this world, time and life. She has a lived experience of tempiternity, of eternity within this existence of time and space, rather than beyond or after it.

Sutra 6. Transhistorical Consciousness above Historical Consciousness.

The monk bears witness to something besides history, a consciousness that is not exhausted by the multiplicity of history. The Canon of the Disciple emphasizes a transhistorical awareness of reality. This discovers a hidden dimension, the experience of

tempiternity, in which time and eternity are integrated in everyday life. The monk bears witness that we can reach the peace and joy of our fullness even in a slum.

Sutra 7. The Fullness of the Person rather than the Individual.

An individual is a manageable entity with clear-cut boundaries. A person on the other hand, encompasses the whole complex web of the relationships of a human being. The person is the community, even if it is only a solitary monk. The monastery, the sangha, is the full person, embracing the whole of the human being. The new monk shares much of this. However, she does not want to be set apart, to be self-sufficient under obedience, dedicated completely to the Absolute, but to be integrated as well into the life of the broader community.

Sutra 8. The Primacy of the Holy.

The monk strives for an unqualified absolute holiness, separated from everything else. The new monk also emphasizes the holiness of the secular, towards which she tends. She discovers holiness in the material structures of reality, of space and time, and in the yearnings and striving of humanity.

Sutra 9. The Memory of the Ultimate and of its Constant Presence.

This speaks of the psychological calling to mind of the ontological fact of the reality of the Ultimate, which has many names: God, the Absolute, Brahman, nirvāna, etc. This includes an awareness of the importance of death. The new monk is also very aware of this, which is not only her own personal death, or the possible human death associated with our global metacrisis. She wants to help everyone to perform this most momentous act. The sociological pattern of monasticism was turned towards eternal life. The winds of secularity are blowing in favour of mortal life. Panikkar considers that one can be both a monk and secular.

Synthesis.

Panikkar brings his considerations together in his final chapter of the book. He expounds his understanding of the centre of reality, immanent and transcendent, at the core of the three constitutive dimensions of reality, each of which is present and unfolding of everything that is real, the Cosmos (or matter and energy), Man (or consciousness and will, and the Theos (or freedom and absolute love) - which together make up his cosmotheandric vision of reality. He sees monkhood as representing the quest

for the centre. The traditional monastic tradition aims to reach that centre by simplification, implying that the centre is simple. The modern monk would like to get at it by integration, implying that the centre is complex. This still means that in order to embark on a proper integration, one has to purify one's being and simplify one's life. The monk can exist in different cultures, ideologies and worldviews. This quest for the centre depends greatly on the different conditions and implied beliefs about where that centre lies, or what constitutes it.

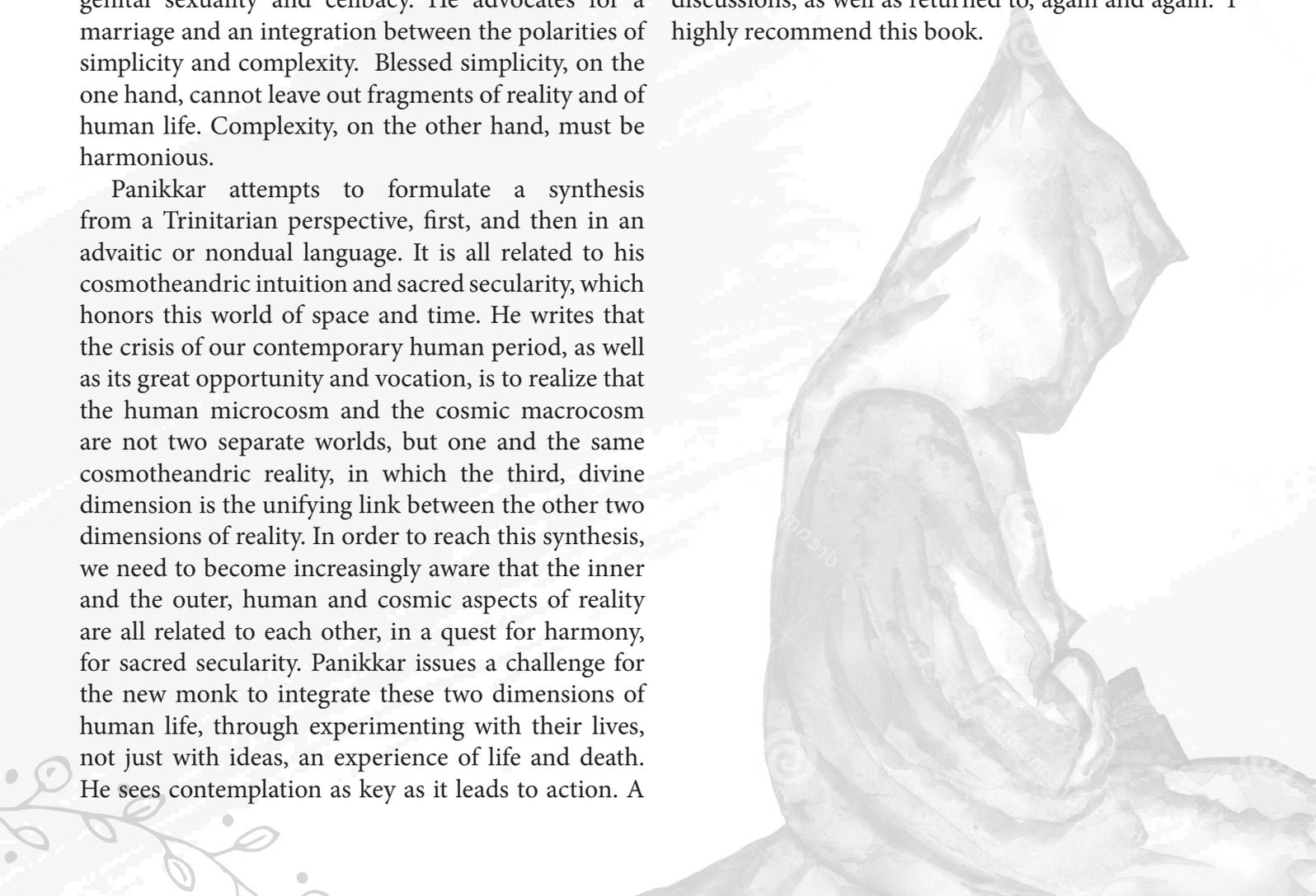
Panikkar sees that the monk needs also to be concerned with the factors which have "decentred" the universe of our experience, which have resulted in hatred, hunger, injustice, wars and inequalities. This involves a search for God in the direction of politics, society, economics, science and culture, not in perpetuating an apolitical institution unconcerned with these affairs. He mentions, without much elaboration, four types of issues with regard to monastic lifestyles: poverty, marriage, involvement in the world, and sexuality. The latter topic for him includes the body, holistic sexuality, friendship, genital sexuality and celibacy. He advocates for a marriage and an integration between the polarities of simplicity and complexity. Blessed simplicity, on the one hand, cannot leave out fragments of reality and of human life. Complexity, on the other hand, must be harmonious.

Panikkar attempts to formulate a synthesis from a Trinitarian perspective, first, and then in an advaitic or nondual language. It is all related to his cosmotheandric intuition and sacred secularity, which honors this world of space and time. He writes that the crisis of our contemporary human period, as well as its great opportunity and vocation, is to realize that the human microcosm and the cosmic macrocosm are not two separate worlds, but one and the same cosmotheandric reality, in which the third, divine dimension is the unifying link between the other two dimensions of reality. In order to reach this synthesis, we need to become increasingly aware that the inner and the outer, human and cosmic aspects of reality are all related to each other, in a quest for harmony, for sacred secularity. Panikkar issues a challenge for the new monk to integrate these two dimensions of human life, through experimenting with their lives, not just with ideas, an experience of life and death. He sees contemplation as key as it leads to action. A

new awareness is called for, coming out of an integral praxis, plunging into the depths of the human psyche, as well as soaring into the heights of cosmic space and sensing the Divine.

Conclusion.

Panikkar, in this beautiful and profound little book, has provided a very refreshing and challenging update of the traditional monastic rules of several religions and cultures, while retaining their traditional wisdom and practical advice. He provides a very modern, contemporary understanding of the continuing relevance of the monastic way and path. I think it has the capacity to speak deeply to our Oblate monastic community within the broader Christian Meditation community. It is clear to me that this community is already doing much that he suggests, eg valuing our complex engagements in the world on issues to do with the environment, climate change, the war in Ukraine, politics, poverty etc, while retaining our commitment and fidelity to stillness, silence, simplicity and contemplative, meditative prayer. It could very fruitfully be read, in small sections, as lectio divina practices, solitary reading and group discussions, as well as returned to, again and again. I highly recommend this book.



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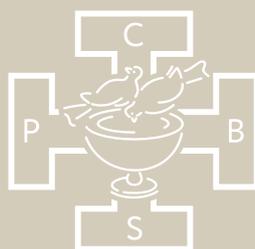
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NATIONAL OBLATE COORDINATORS CONTACT DETAILS 2024

Country	Name	Email
Argentina	Marina Muller	marinarmuller@gmail.com
Australia	Gloria Duffy	ausoblwccm@gmail.com
Belgium	Henriette Hollaar	henriettehollaar@gmail.com
Brazil	Tayna Malaspina	taynawccm@gmail.com
Canada	Dorothy Wood	oblates@wccm-canada.ca
Chile	Marina Muller	marinarmuller@gmail.com
China	Augustine Xiao	87982037@qq.com
Colombia	Elba Rodriguez	Elba@wccm.org
Denmark	Lene Boisen	lene.bobo@gmail.com
Ecuador	Marina Muller	marinarmuller@gmail.com
Germany	Susanna Melzer	susanna.melzer@web.de
Italy	Giovanni Foffano	foffanog@gmail.com
Ireland	Stefan Reynolds	stefandreynolds@gmail.com
Mexico	Josefa Vivas de Vegas	josefavivas@hotmail.com
Netherlands	Henriette Hollaar	henriettehollaar@gmail.com
New Zealand	Jo Ward	oblatesnz@gmail.com
Paraguay	Mary Meyer	memseso@gmail.com
Philippines	Argel Tuason	argel.tuason@gmail.com
Poland	Anna Studenska	astud@poczta.fm
Russia	Maria & Albert Zakharovy	info@wccm.com.ua
Trinidad	Sr. Ruth Montrichard	ruthsjc41@gmail.com
Ukraine	Maria & Albert Zakharovy	info@wccm.com.ua
UK (contact)	Angela Gregson	fapghillview@yahoo.co.uk
US	Mary Robison	maryrobison@me.com
Venezuela	Josefa Vivas de Vegas	josefavivas@hotmail.com



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Editor: Stefan Reynolds
Glencairn, Co. Waterford, Ireland
stefandreynolds@gmail.com

Graphic Design:
Albert & Maria Zakharovy, Ukraine,
info@wccm.com.ua