



**From L to R Rod Page, Pauline Peters, Rev Dr Sarah Bachelard, Laurence Freeman, Susan Page and Bishop Pat Power**

A few weeks before Christmas Fr Laurence came to speak and meditate with the community from Canberra and far and wide – at *Silence in the City*. Meditators and newcomers to meditation (260 on Sunday, and 170 on Monday) came to the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (an ecumenical centre close to central Canberra) where Laurence was welcomed by Bishop Pat Power and Rev Dr Sarah Bachelard.

In his talks, meditations, and Q&A sessions, Fr Laurence emphasized community in meditation: the oneness, linkage, common purpose, learning, mutual support, respect, trust, confidence in the future, and a move to greater self-knowledge – the human expressions, recognition and awareness of God within us and others. Later, at “Sunday Dusk” service in the adjacent St Mark’s chapel, Fr Laurence reflected on the environment as it was at the opening days of the Copenhagen Climate summit.

Many insights shared by Fr Laurence over the two days,

- There is a diversity of prayer in our tradition and there is no competition within this diversity. Jesus said of prayer/ contemplation – “Go into your inner room ...” – go into that place of solitude where you can find acceptance and recognition of your uniqueness;
- We learn to meditate by doing it(!) by practising, connecting up with others who are trying to walk the same path, not evaluating our practice;
- Because we tend to pray in the way that we have been taught to pray – for some there is a tension at the heart of the Christian experience between the contemplative and active ways of prayer. In the past and up until recent times, the contemplative experience was seen as a rare gift – the realm of prayer experts such as Trappist monks. Recovering, remembering the contemplative dimension is a deep movement that is currently occurring within Christianity;
- When we first start meditating we have been drawn to the experience we have been attracted to it, but we may also be mystified and confused, worried if we are doing it right;
- The cult of perfectionism – in secular society this is associated with outward expressions and signs of success – success is an end in itself and is deeply competitive;
- Perfectionism can also be present in religion – it is like a virus – it associates religion with rules, obedience to these rules and subsequent reward. Meditation leads

one away from a relationship with a punitive God towards a relationship with a loving God;

- Instead of struggle towards perfection, we need to see ourselves in terms of struggling to become the person God wants us to be – the saints are people who are not perfect but rather people who have become more themselves;
- Contemplation is a process of healing, a work of unblocking that leads us to freedom. Karl Rahner: “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all.”
- Contemplative tradition can enable us to deal with crisis as growth, because meditation is a crisis itself, but one that we choose. Meditation involves a voluntary renunciation of control – we are attempting to stop trying to control our external reality and/or God;
- Fundamentalism is unique to modern times – a reaction to radical paradigm change – of its nature it will not dialogue with others and has a high component of fear. Contemplation can be thought of as an antidote to fundamentalism;
- Grace is received through self-acceptance – meditation teaches us this – we can never meditate perfectly – we will always be imperfect meditators. Accepting yourself as you are is opening yourself to grace and this experience can be transforming.

In the weeks following Fr Laurence’s visit to Canberra, two new Christian meditation groups formed: one meets at Kambah 8pm Monday, and the other in St Barnabas, Charnwood 10.30am Saturday. Helen Dean from the latter group writes: “*Hospitality of Silence* is the name that had been used by our small group from St Barnabas who had been meeting in contemplative prayer since early 2009. Our name was chosen to be inclusive of all who might join us for meditation, regardless of their faith background or experience. We were prompted by Laurence Freeman’s *Silence in the City* workshop to seek to become a part of the Australian Christian Meditation Community (ACT). This has provided a wonderful opportunity for us. It is a privilege to be a part of the wider Christian meditation community.”

*Introductory Christian Meditation* groups were run as part of two parish Lenten programs. Sue Hanna reports that All Saints’ Ainslie began a Thursday evening initiative for office workers who can’t make the weekly morning meditation to provide grounding and practicalities in the practice. For most, the discipline of Christian Meditation was a new experience. However, our time together provided an opportunity to develop our understanding of Christian Meditation and reflect on our experiences (i.e. – just keeping saying the mantra, never mind that pesky fly or the temptation to troubleshoot) with each other. The meditation group at Waramanga (Leigh Greenhalgh and Alma Armstrong) also ran a Lenten program on Mondays at 5pm for those who have not meditated before. The regular group who meet on Wednesdays at 4.30pm were a great support for these new Monday meditators.

A number of priests from different denominations also took part in *Silence in the City* and it is being proposed that this group might form the core of another new meditation group in Canberra. The ACT meditation community remains most grateful for this blessed time shared by Fr Laurence with so many good people. In gratitude for the tradition – stillness, silence, simplicity.