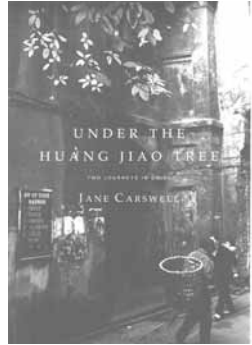


BOOK REVIEW



Under the Huang Jiao Tree – “Two journeys in China”
by Jane Carswell
Transit Lounge Publishing 2009
Whitcoulls Travel Book of the Year

It comes as no surprise early on in this book to learn that Jane Carswell is a classically trained musician. There is a musicality in the way she writes; each word fits the phrasing with perfect ease and as with any finely crafted score the whole is immeasurably greater than the sum of its parts. Time and again I found myself re-reading sentences and paragraphs. The style is compelling and we are taken on a journey that is a rich blend of the familiar and the totally alien. And what a journey it is too – not that we embark on it without warning as we read on page one:

“There are always two journeys, the outer and the inner ... Of course, outer and inner journeys are inseparable, skin and bone of the same life together. Always they lie together.”

At an age when most people are taking up bridge or filling in time in a charity shop, this introverted Cantabrian who survived rural life by staying remote from her surroundings and finding refuge in music, seeks out a job as an English language teacher in Chongqing in southwest China.

Conditions are primitive. The climate is dominated by six months of continuous fog, the air conditioning doesn't work, the squat toilet doubles as a shower and with no curtains on the windows Jane seeks privacy in a corner of the room.

Yes, this is a survival story of the classic kind. The heroine embarks on a journey into the unknown, is marooned in a strange land, is pursued by dragons, is assisted by friendly natives, survives where lesser mortals would have succumbed and experiences resurrection. Many of the dragons are self-made and with the expert eye of the observer they are named, shamed and slain.

But in a land of 1.3 billion people Jane does not travel alone. The Language School is a community all of its own. There are 1200 students and 120 teachers, one of whom, Boris from Russia, is the only other foreigner. Everyone lives on campus and driven as they are for education, the students are soon regular visitors to her tiny flat.

Jane observes herself observing life around her. She observes the students and teachers' observing her but there is nothing forensic in this activity. It is done with honesty and humour. Then suddenly, like Jane, we find ourselves falling in love with these hard working stoics who are the first generation of Chinese in centuries to awaken to a world beyond their borders.

What goes unsaid is more potent than what is said. Her students' parents are survivors of Mao's Great Leap Forward and have a longing for education that their children willingly embrace. Jane meets people who survived famines that killed millions. Expectations are high and she thrives by creating her own teaching resources, working longer hours than expected and earns the admiration of teachers and students alike.

Adventures abound. In the classroom, shopping, fighting officialdom at the bank, meeting other ESOL teachers, attending official functions where she may, or may not, be asked to speak or perform. Students take her home to meet their parents. Fellow teachers assist with shopping and when laid low with flu one friend accompanies her on a fascinating consultation with a traditional Chinese herbalist.

Jane has that gift of making every encounter remarkable. What the person says, their choice of clothes, their body shape, body language, the way they laugh, love or leer; she captures all this not as a writer would but as a musician.

While she lives apart she is never alone and is somewhat mystified to discover that when everyone leaves campus for a holiday, the isolation she craved in rural Canterbury becomes a burden in teeming China.

China, that land of dragons, has slain the most troublesome of Jane's dragons.

The memory of an elderly man, eyes closed, standing still and seemingly meditating under a huang jiao tree is her most precious souvenir. Back in Christchurch life goes on, yet while the first journey is over the second, interior journey, is gathering speed.

They say that when the student is ready the teacher arrives and an invitation to listen to Laurence Freeman OSB talk in the city's Catholic cathedral is, ironically, a seminal encounter in this story about China.

I like to think of Under the Huang Jiao Tree – Two journeys in China as a gift of thanks from a New Zealander to the people of China. This finely crafted and oh so readable book is no mere journalistic jaunt or report on experience. Rather, it is classic in a genre that in recent decades has been debased by the bizarre and the weird.

Congratulations to Whitcoulls for giving Under the Huang Jiao Tree the travel book of the year award. It is richly deserved.

Vincent Maire

NZCCM CHARITABLE TRUST

The Council is able to report that the 'New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation Trust' has now been registered with the Charities Commission. It can be seen on the Charities Commission website with this number against it: CC41943

The link to that page is: <http://www.register.charities.govt.nz/CharitiesRegister/Search.aspx>

Smile Corner

During a recent PASSWORD AUDIT at the Bank of Ireland it was found that Paddy O'Toole was using the following password: MickeyMinniePlutoHueyLouieDeweyDonaldGoofyDublin When Paddy was asked why he had such a long password: he replied "My God man are yez stupid? Shore Oi was told me password had to be at least 8 characters long and include one capital" *Don't ever think you can outwit the Irish!*

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The New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation

NEWS LETTER

July 2010

National News

The National Council held its Annual General Meeting at the Home of Compassion, Island Bay at Queen's Birthday Weekend this year. Our long serving National Coordinator, Fr Peter Murphy retired from that position and Jane Hole was nominated unopposed to take it over. Fr Peter will continue to be a member of the Council and will have responsibility for training and Essential Teaching Workshop courses.

Vincent Maire, Hugh McLaughlin, Neil Keating and Peter Butler (as Newsletter Editor) were all reappointed as well.

Congratulations Jane and many thanks to Fr Peter for all his efforts.

NZCCM LIBRARY

The library comprises a collection of books, CDs, tapes, videos and DVDs. There are over 90 titles of which half are books.

The collection is held by Vincent Maire. Books are lent only to current financial members of NZCCM.

The list can be downloaded from the website www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz and it is on the Bookshop page as a PDF file.

It costs \$5 to hire a book, CD, DVD, video or set of tapes. This can be sent when returning the item. Funds will be used to pay for postage and help build the collection.

Before the book is dispatched Vincent will check to see if the borrower is a current financial member of NZCCM. If not, borrowers will have to become a financial member. The loan period is one month.

While it is our intention to expand the library with current titles on meditation and spirituality this costs money. Please feel free to donate books or other media that you believe would be useful additions to the collection.

We are especially seeking the following titles for the NZCCM Library:

By John Main:

The Present Christ, The Way of Unknowing, Door to Silence, Word into Silence, The Heart of Creation.

By Laurence Freeman:

Jesus The Teacher Within, The Pearl of Great Price, The Good Heart.
Any titles by or about Thomas Merton, Meister Eckhart, Richard Rohr, Thomas Keating, Joan Chittister, Evelyn Underhill, The Dalai Lama, Henri Nouwen, Anthony de Mello, Bede Griffiths, Archbishop Rowan Williams, Simone Weil, Henri Le Saux, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, John of the Cross, Hildegard of Bingen, Jean Vanier, Julian of Norwich, John Cassian, St Benedict, The Cloud of Unknowing, Practice of the Presence of God, writings of the Desert Fathers & Mothers.

Book reviews would also be appreciated. These can be included on the list and also published in the NZCCM newsletter.

For further information please contact Vincent on Maire.Family@clear.net.nz or call (09) 424-2293 evenings.



Keating new year 2010 family gathering at Waiwera

Neil & Jenny Keating are the co-ordinators of the Northern Region.

Jenny is a mum (x4) and grandmother (x7). She enjoys family involvement, not always easy since some live in Christchurch. Belongs to Church of the Good Shepherd (Anglican) in Massey, with informal pastoral involvement there. She's enjoying getting to know NZCCM members, making the most of opportunities as they arise. Her other interests include ESOL and literacy teaching, reading, gardening and walking. She's looking forward to her next overseas mission trip -- the last one was to Cambodia -- although she's not yet sure when or where.

Neil tries to balance work (4 days/week, farming business reporting/editing) with family, house painting(!), etc. He also belongs to Church of the Good Shepherd. Spare-time interests include house painting (!), firewood cutting, sailing and reading. Also looking forward to mission trip

John Main: "Straying from the Mantra"

To learn to meditate we have to learn to be humble. . . . What does it mean to be humble? It means to begin to acknowledge that there is a reality outside of ourselves, that is greater than ourselves and that contains us.

Humility is simply learning to find our place within that greater reality and . . . learn to live in our place. The first thing to understand is that you are your own place. To come to terms with all reality, we must first come to terms with our own reality. It is in the stillness of meditation, the stillness of body and spirit which reveals the unity of body and spirit, that we enter the experience of knowing really that we are.

We come to know this with absolute clarity and absolute certainty. Only then are we ready to go to the next step which is to go beyond ourselves, to rise beyond ourselves. The tragedy of the egoist is that the egoist does not know his or her place. The egoist thinks that he is at the center of the everything and sees everything. . . only in relation to himself.

Meditation and the constant return to it, every day of your life, is like cutting a pathway through to reality. Once we know our place, we begin to see everything in a new light because we have become who we really are. And becoming who we are, we can now see everything as it is and so begin to see everyone else as they are.

The truest wonder of meditation is that we even begin to see God as God is. Meditation is therefore a way to stability. We learn through the practice and from the experience how to be rooted in our essential being. We learn that to be rooted in our essential being is to be rooted in God, the author and principle of all reality. And it is no small thing to enter reality, to become real, to become who we are, because in that experience we are freed from all the images that so constantly plague us. We do not have to be anyone's image of ourselves, but simply the real person we are.

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. . . .

Meditation is demanding. We must learn to meditate whether we feel like it or not, whether it is raining or snowing, or the sun is shining or whatever is on television or whatever kind of day we have had. In the Christian vision of meditation. . . we find the reality of the great paradox Jesus teaches: If we want to find our lives we have to be prepared to lose them. In meditating, that is exactly what we do. We find ourselves because we are prepared to let go of ourselves, to launch ourselves out into the depths - which soon appear to be the depths of God.

John Main OSB, THE HEART OF CREATION (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 9-10.

WELLINGTON NEWS

Christian/muslim meditation : On Saturday 19th June a group of Muslims and Christians met to meditate together. The theme was Compassion and Jasim Adam gave a short presentation from the Muslim point of view. He based his theme on the phrase repeated often during the day by devout Muslims : " Bismillah hir rahmaan nir Raheem " which loosely translates to "In the name of God, the most Compassionate. the most Merciful " These two attributes of God, compassion and mercy can be adopted into the daily life of all devout people. Elspeth Preddy took the parable of the Good Samaritan as her theme of Compassion and concluded how a neighbour was one who showed mercy . There was a lively discussion followed by meditation and then afternoon tea. a guided visit of the Mosque in Kilbirnie will be held on Saturday 24th July, starting at 10.30am.

The weekend retreat from Friday 30th July to Sunday 1st August at the Home of Compassion is now booked out.

Our final day of recollection for this year will be held on Saturday 30th October at the Home of Compassion, Island Bay from 10am to 3pm

SOUTH ISLAND NEWS

(Sincere apologies from the disorganised Regional Co-ordinator that the following two happy and rewarding events were not reported in previous issues of the newsletter.)

NELSON

On Saturday 7 November 2009, Sally and Jane met with meditators from the Nelson Community in the hall of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Richmond. In the morning, after Jane had spoken briefly about the WCCM retreat that she had attended earlier in the year near Rome, the discussion turned to how we teach children to meditate in schools – a subject in which there was considerable interest. Sjef gave a short introduction on how to meditate before our meditation session. After a shared lunch, some people left, while others were able to stay for a second meditation and a more intimate and very fruitful discussion about our personal meditation practices.

DUNEDIN

On 23 January 2010, Sally and Jane met with members of the Dunedin Meditation community at Green Island. After meditating together, we discussed community matters over a delicious afternoon tea. Jane suggested we might have a South Island weekend retreat in the coming year, in Christchurch, on the model of the very successful retreat at Warrington in 2007 organised by the Dunedin Meditators. September - when the weather should be reasonable for travelling - was proposed as a suitable month. The Dunedin community generously offered to share all the records of the Warrington retreat as a basis for planning this year's one.

CHRISTCHURCH

Around 30 people, at least half of them new to Christian Meditation, met on 18th April 2010 at the retreat house of the Community of the Sacred Name; to meditate; to

enjoy Sr Hilary Swanson's engaging presentation, in words and music, of aspects of the life and poetry of St John of the Cross; and to watch the DVD made by young Sydney meditators 'Silence in the City'. Discussion over afternoon tea was intense, and the enjoyment of each other's company obvious. It's always a delight to see how quickly the shared silence of meditation and the spirit of honest open enquiry creates a sense of community.

The Easter issue of 'Inform', the newsletter of the Catholic Bishop of Christchurch, carried a short article (and photo) about Christian Meditation at Christ the King School, where Jane has taught our simple discipline of prayer to all classes over the last two years. Part of the article read: "How do I fit prayer into my busy life? Room 7 at Christ the King School, Burnside, with teacher Jared Hopkins, meditates for a few minutes at the beginning of their busy day. Principal Mike Bonisch, Director of Religious Studies Jacque Culling, and staff have fostered Christchurch Meditation in the John Main tradition at the school for two years. Children are natural contemplatives, and they welcome this gentle form of prayer. Teachers report that classes often seem more settled and peaceful after meditation. In their leaflet "Prayer in the Busyness of Life", our Bishops identified many different forms of prayer, among which they noted: "...It is this contemplative prayer form that we would especially like to see developed. While its simplicity masks the effort required, it is one of the best responses to the spiritual vacuum in our modern society. Knowing how to go into your "inner room" and meet Jesus, is thus the first stage in a personal relationship with God through Jesus and the doorway . . . to ongoing renewal."...

FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

Weekend South Island Silent Retreat at the Community of the Sacred Name Retreat House, Barbadoes St, Christchurch

This retreat for South Island meditators will be held from Friday evening 10th September to after lunch on Sunday 12th September.

A registration form will be circulated a little nearer the time, but indications of interest at this stage would be appreciated from those who haven't already been in touch with Jane. For further details please email holejane66@hotmail.com or phone 03 359 9036.

School Retreat October 29th - November 5 2010. St Joseph's Convent, Jerusalem, Whanganui River. Note change of venue. This retreat is for those who have completed the Essential Teaching Workshop (formerly called Meditation School). Enquiries Peter Murphy Ph. 09-2985-134 petermurphy54@hotmail.com

National Retreat: with Fr Laurence Freeman. Waikato University Student village, Jan 30 , 5.00pm - Feb. 3 2011.00am.

The People



Peter is the newsletter editor. He began meditating in 2005 in Plimmerton with a group that meets at his sister's house. He now attends regularly with a small group at Papamoa. He is semi-retired and lists tennis, cycling and vintage cars as his main outside interests.



Hugh has been meditating for the last fourteen years. He is on the National Council as the Central Region Co-ordinator and also Oblate co-ordinator. Hugh is a retired schoolteacher whose main interest is promoting meditation in schools.



Vincent discovered meditation in the Christian tradition in 2003 and has been on the journey ever since. He has the great fortune to be a member of the Hibiscus Coast Catholic parish where there are three groups that meet weekly to meditate together. He has attended the meditation teaching school, is the organisation's webmaster, manages the NZCCM library and has written articles on Christian meditation for the religious press. Vincent is fundraising manager at Hibiscus Hospice and along with his wife Liz enjoys tramping and the great outdoors.

I also have to resend you an article on the library as well as a book review. I may well put out a call for more 'Why I Meditate' articles.



JANE HOLE was born in England and received all her schooling at St Margaret's College, in Christchurch where she has lived for 43 of her 68 years. Other homes were in Dunedin, Perugia (where she studied Italian) Waikari, Leeston and Chongqing (where she taught English). She is married

to Colin, a retired stock buyer, and has a son in Melbourne and a daughter in Christchurch; four small grand-children would also expect to be mentioned as close friends. After a career teaching music, and working in various capacities with publishers, booksellers, lawyers, accountants, historians, real estate agents and artists, she wrote a book 'Under the Huang Jiao Tree: Two Journeys in China' which was published in Melbourne in October 2009. The book's 'inner journey' tells, in essence, of the last stage in her journey toward Christian Meditation and becoming a Benedictine

Orewa night out

THE three Orewa (Auckland) meditation groups got together last Monday evening (June 28), welcoming new members and visitors. Present were (standing, from left) Dean Taylor, Vincent Maire, Elizabeth Harper, Neil Keating, Maureen Nancarrowe, Bertha Casas, Jacqui Driscoll; (seated, from left) Yvonne Bain, Jenny Keating, Helen Mackereth, Jacki Straka. The Keatings were visiting in their role as Auckland area coordinators.

