

Kopua Associates On-Line 2023 Online Book Study

Silence and Honey Cakes: Part One

Introduction, Preface and Chapter 1 'Life , Death and Neighbours' pp8-40

Introduction by Laurence Freeman of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) pp8-14

- Before we begin, you might like to think about what you hope to find in this book.

As this book is based on talks given at the 2001 John Main Seminar, an annual event from WCCM, it is fitting for Laurence Freeman, its Director, to provide the introduction.

“These monastic oddballs [the desert fathers and mothers] of an unimaginable different and ancient world may indeed hold a secret for our modern world that no economist, sociologist, politician or religious leader can match. The desert wisdom teaches rather than preaches. Its authority is experiential not theoretical.” p8

1 What do you think this ‘secret’ might be, and what is the significance of experience vs theory?

Preface pp16-20

This is mainly an explanation of how the book came to be, and the sources used, however I'll pick up on two points for your comment.

“To speak in Australia about the desert tradition ... has a special resonance: this is a country with the desert at its heart, a desert that it has only begun to explore spiritually.” p17

2 Whether we are in Australia or not, in what way does our physical context influence how we interpret the desert tradition, or, what is the desert at the heart of our country yet to be explored spiritually?

“This little book is meant as a modest contribution to the discovery of a church renewed in contemplation across the cultural frontiers of our world.” p17

3 How do you imagine this church ‘renewed in contemplation’ might look?

Life, Death and Neighbours pp22-40

The premise of this chapter is the quote from Antony the Great “Our life and our death is with our neighbour. If we win our brother, we win God. If we cause our brother to stumble, we have sinned against Christ.” p22&23

“Everything begins with this vision and hope of putting the neighbour in touch with God in Christ. On this the rest of our Christian life depends, and it entails facing the death of a particular kind of picture of myself. If I fail to put someone in touch with God, I face another sort of death, the death of my relation with Christ, because failing

to win the neighbour is to stand in the way of Christ, to block Christ's urgent will to communicate with all. The desert monastics are keenly interested in diagnosing what sort of things get in the way here, what things counts as blocking someone else's relation with Christ." p25

4 What sorts of things do you think count as 'blocking someone else's relation with Christ'? What experience have you had where your relation with Christ has been blocked by another?

"The fundamental need as far as the counsellor is concerned is first of all to put themselves on the level of the one who has sinned, to heal by solidarity not condemnation." pp28-9

"But the plain acknowledgement of your solidarity in need and failure opens a door: it shows that it is possible to live in the truth and to go forward in hope. It is in such a moment that God gives himself through you, and you become by God's gift a means of connecting another with God. You have done the job you were created to do." p31

"We love with God when and only when we are the conduit for God's reconciling presence with the person next to us. It is as we connect the other with the source of life, that we come to stand in the place of life, the place cleared and occupied for us by Christ." p40

5 Thinking of experience you may have had of being healed by 'solidarity not condemnation', how has that influenced, or might it influence, your ability to 'do the job you were created to do' by being 'a conduit for God's reconciling presence' for another? What is your experience of standing in the 'place of life'?

Please feel free to comment on any, or all, of these questions, or anything else from pp8-40. You may also respond to any of the comments made by others.