

The Role of the Christian Meditation Group

Summary of talk by Laurence Freeman OSB, Director of the WCCM

The special legacy of the life and teaching of John Main is the remarkable growth of small Christian Meditation groups meeting weekly in various countries of the world. It was John Main's hope that the teaching would be shared in an organic way through small groups of men and women meeting regularly in homes, parishes, schools and workplaces.

He had a profound understanding of the ancient tradition of Christians gathering to pray. Main saw this modern development of contemplation as originating in the communities of faith and the liturgy of the heart of the early Church. These early Christians also gathered in small groups in one another's houses. This coming together in prayer formed the 'koinonia' or the social interaction and communion that was the distinguishing mark and power of the early Church.

John Main had a clear understanding of the need of a community of faith that would solidify one's own commitment to the spiritual discipline of meditation while at the same time making the teaching available to newcomers. Our human experience tells us that meeting with others on a common pilgrimage can give us the support we need to carry on the journey. Experience has also demonstrated that when a group starts in a new geographic area, people who have never meditated before will join the group. New groups introduce new people to meditation.

There are a many good reasons why meditation groups meet once a week. Meeting in a group promotes a spiritual bond amongst the members and a mutual concern between those who have set out on a common pilgrimage. As mentioned, the meditation group is really a community of faith much like the community of early Christians in St Paul's time. In commenting about meditating in a group, Fr. William Johnston SJ, in his book, 'The Inner Eye of Love', says, "...for example we can sit together in silent and wordless meditation. And in such a situation we can feel not only the silence in our hearts but the silence of the whole group. Sometimes such silence will be almost palpable and it can unite people more deeply than any words."

The heart of the meditation group meeting is the sharing of silence together. This is the primary reason why people around the world are spontaneously starting small groups to meditate weekly together. The power and strength of meditating together comes from the words of Jesus, "Where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them" (Mt

18:20). This is the primary reason for getting together once a week. It is as if the meditators instinctively realize that this is a journey that is difficult to make alone. It is a journey that is so much easier if we make it with others. It is true that no one else can meditate for us, that we meditate in solitude every day but at the same time, we realize that we need the support of others if we are to persevere on this journey.

The group setting enables beginners to learn 'how' to meditate. Newcomers can be integrated into a group at any point in time. In addition, the weekly group meeting provides support and encouragement to those who might be discouraged or experiencing difficulties 'on the path'. All of us need from time to time, the encouragement of seeing others who are faithful and committed to the discipline.

We also need to absorb the teaching more deeply and we do so at the weekly meeting by listening to a recorded talk by John Main, Laurence Freeman and other teachers within our community. These talks give instruction, deepen motivation, and so help us to persevere on the path. They give us a spiritual boost each week: part of the food we need for the journey.

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