

A Pearl of Great Price

JOHN MAIN

One of the most influential spiritual teachers of prayer of our time was the Irish Benedictine monk, John Main. He was born in England in 1926 and died in Canada fifty-six years later. For Fr. Bede Griffiths, writing soon after John Main's death, he was the 'most important spiritual guide in the church today'.

As a young Catholic diplomat in the Far East, John Main was introduced to meditation by a gentle Hindu monk, Swami Satyananda. Never swaying from his own Christian faith, John Main immediately recognized the value of this practice that deepened and enriched the other forms of Christian prayer. It was not until years later that he fully realized how deeply this silent prayer of the heart was rooted in his own Christian tradition. He saw with fresh eyes the teachings of Jesus on prayer. And he read anew John Cassian's vivid descriptions of the early Christian monks, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who practiced and taught by their own humble example the simple discipline of the 'prayer of one word'. He saw how powerfully this discipline deals with the distractions that inevitably fill the mind, most obviously at the time of prayer but at other times as well.

In the mantra he saw the way to that stillness ('hesychia' as the eastern Christians call it) or 'pure prayer' that is 'worship in spirit and truth'. He saw how the discipline of the mantra purifies the heart of contradictory desires and unifies us. The place of unity is the heart where we find the deepest and most natural orientation towards God as our personal source and goal. He understood too how the mantra brings us to poverty of spirit, or the non-possessiveness, that Jesus set as the first beatitude, the primary condition of human happiness.

John Main soon learned through his own practice of meditation that the morning and evening discipline of meditation balances the whole day, every day of one's life, in an ever-deepening peace and joy. And more and more, he saw the connection between this experience of inner peace and joy with the Gospel and Christian faith. Prayer for him now appeared as much more than speaking to or thinking about God. It is being with God.

A DISCIPLINE OF FAITH MADE EASIER

John Main also saw the quality of our relationships as the true measure of progress in meditation. He knew that progress was in the end an accomplishment of grace. But again, we must do our part. We must respond to the call of grace not with a mere technique, but with a discipline of faith. For John Main, as for the centuries-old Christian tradition he spoke from, a freely chosen discipline is the path to freedom not bondage. Spiritual discipline is a valuable necessity in the work of being free from the tyranny of egotism, compulsiveness, delusion and self-centeredness.

He was therefore always very clear that meditation is a way of faith and very practical about how and when it must be practiced. The minimal commitment to individual meditation twice a day and group meditation once a week is only the external aspect of the discipline John Main taught. He knew that most people begin the discipline of meditation half-heartedly or with a tremendous zeal that inevitably, like infatuation, dissipates. We begin, then stop and then begin again, often many times. It takes time, maybe years, for some people to incorporate the basic discipline of meditation in their daily lives.

That is just why a meditation group is so valuable. Not many people are so good at self-discipline entirely on their own. It takes time and continual encouragement to build a good habit. Through the support and example of others, we strengthen our insight that meditation is simple, but not easy; life-giving, not life-denying; and most of all, a way of love. For all these reasons John Main encouraged people who wanted to learn to meditate and to keep on meditating to cultivate the gifts of community that grow among those who share the journey of prayer. Hence the formation and persistence of more than a thousand groups of three or six or 20, meeting weekly in homes, offices, hospitals, hospices, prisons, colleges, schools, shopping malls, and even the United Nations Building.

SHARING THE GIFT

At a certain point in your own practice of meditation it dawns on you that you have indeed received a pearl of great price. Your Martha has stopped complaining about Mary. You see that being comes before doing and gives all doing the character of love. Still you may feel uncertain and cautious about taking the next step. After all, you will say, 'I'm not a guru. I don't know much about it anyway. And on top of that I'm not very good at it. I can't teach anyone else'. These thoughts are a good sign that you probably are ready to share the gift. But how to begin?

The very first step is most likely becoming comfortable to bearing witness to the reality of your own practice. This hardly means taking on any kind of in-your-face evangelical fervour. Sometimes you meet someone who shares him or herself with you more deeply than usual and you think 'maybe they would be interested in meditation'. So mention it. Or someone asks you why you seem a little easier to get on with than before. Tell them. Or you're staying with friends and you need to get away for half an hour to meditate before the evening socializing. Explain where you're going. All this is a matter of discretion, of course. Fortunately meditation cultivates discretion and good judgment.

Starting a group is a step further. Again you may feel hesitation. 'I'm just a beginner,' you will say. John Main says we are all always beginners. 'But I'm not a teacher,' you will say. Yes but Jesus is. You have only to worry about being a disciple. Seeing yourself as student, a disciple of Christ who teaches you by meditating in you, with you and for you, is all the qualification you need to go ahead. Jesus encouraged his disciples to teach 'in my name', which means in his presence and with his spirit. You need to be humble, but never afraid. Furthermore you have a community and a tradition to support and help you.

FIRST STEPS: FIRST OBSTACLES

So you begin where you are and as you are. If you belong to a parish or worshipping community, start there. Speak to the priest or pastor or parish council or fellow parishioners. Explain what this gift has come to mean to you. But be prepared for surprise, uneasiness, even suspicion. Remember that when many people hear about meditation for the first time they are likely to think you are describing something new and strange at best or, at worst, something quite alien or threatening. Stay calm and don't be put off! It does help, however, to be familiar with the most common misperceptions about meditation.

Here are a few of the most common:

- **Meditation is not Christian.** It is imported from Buddhism or Hinduism. Explain as best you can that meditation is a universal spiritual discipline, existing in most other religions, especially those older than Christianity. But the way of silent prayer is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, historically, theologically, and scripturally. Your understanding of the tradition John Main handed on, especially as he describes it in *Word Into Silence* and *The Gethsemani Talks*, is invaluable here. Sharing these powerfully clear little books is an excellent way to build relationships of trust and help others grow in understanding and confidence that meditation is a way of prayer and faith. Two other effective resources that help others situate meditation firmly on Christian ground are the pocket-sized *Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice* and the video, *Coming Home*, which also tells the story of the World Community through the voices of individual meditators from around the world.
- **The mantra is not Christian.** Another aspect of the fear that meditation is not Christian is discomfort with the mantra, both as a term and as the 'work' the tradition teaches us to do. Again there is strong and consistent teaching. There is John Cassian's pivotal disclosure of the key to desert wisdom in his magnificent 9th and 10th Conferences on Prayer: poverty of spirit, the humble recitation of a few sacred words, what he calls in Latin the 'formula, that helps us keep our attention on the Lord instead of ourselves'. The 14th Century classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, calls it the 'one little word' that helps us turn from

distraction toward the silent mystery of God. John Main had the insight to call the sacred word a ‘mantra’ thus linking the specifically Christian tradition to the universal wisdom. ‘Mantra’ is, of course now an English word, too, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, despite its too-often use to describe the promises of politicians. Originally a Sanskrit word (the root tongue of most European languages) mantra refers to ‘that which clears the mind,’ a short scripture verse or sacred word used in a repetitive way to help deepen attention. The rosary, the words of the mass, blessings, and familiar, repeated prayers of all kinds are mantras in this sense. And finally, there is the authority of Jesus who tells us not ‘to babble on,’ but to go to your secret chamber and there pray not with your lips, but in silence to, as John Cassian describes it, ‘the searcher not of words, but of hearts’.

- **Meditation is dangerous.** This most often comes from fundamentalists whose aversion to mystery and need for literal and absolute certainty often conceal a high degree of fear and repression of fear. They react angrily when they are affronted or frightened by anyone daring to question the certainty they hold as the very essence of true faith. They will say ‘when you open yourselves up or blank your mind the devil will come in’. More likely, however, the devil will get a chance to come out! Negative feelings and shadowy thoughts may get released when repression is lifted. This is quite natural but it can be bumpy for a while.

The literature of Christian contemplation offers many descriptions of this process and advice on dealing with it. Meditation practiced moderately and in faith is not dangerous. It is more dangerous not to meditate. Meditation is not about blanking your mind but about being poor in spirit, open to the indwelling presence. Christians who believe in the resurrection and the presence of Christ within them should above all approach meditation with confidence and hope.

- **Meditation is selfish.** That’s what Martha thought too. But Jesus said that Mary had chosen the ‘better part’. His own example of life shows him balancing his periods of active ministry with times of withdrawal and quiet. Navel-gazing is selfish. Meditation is the purest work of selflessness we can do because it takes the attention off the ego’s agenda. Gradually it becomes a habit, a way of life. And gradually we see that our prayer is not an alternative to action, but its very ground. We discover the inextricable relationship between being and doing, and the simple fact that our life is as good as our prayer. If the latter is only about us, so then will be the former. If meditation did not show its fruits in greater love and compassion – that would be the great objection, and a valid one. But as stressed before, the only true measure of the efficacy of meditation is ‘am I growing in love?’
- **Meditation is just a relaxation technique.** We hear more in the popular media about meditation as a way to lower blood pressure, raise body temperature, and increase beta waves. This should not be a surprise in a medical and scientific world that claims the primacy of chemical and biological determinants of human behavior and identity. There is of course documented evidence that meditation is an exceptionally effective way to relax and experience the physical and psychological benefits of reduced stress and anxiety. But these outcomes are merely lovely secondary benefits of what is first and foremost a way of prayer. We might say that modern science has finally caught up with ancient wisdom.

Whatever objections people may raise when you start speaking about starting a group, listen to them. Try to see where they are coming from. Don’t be defensive or argumentative. And remember that most priests, for example, never had an introduction to contemplative prayer in their training. They were formed to think of themselves as administrators rather than spiritual teachers and so, humanly enough, they may indeed feel threatened or put off by a lay person talking about contemplation. And remember that you are not saying—and the tradition does not teach—that meditation is the only way to pray. Try to share your own experience of how meditation is not a substitute, but a support for, all other individual and collective prayer. It feeds Christian life in all its dimensions, bringing us back to the living truth of the Gospel with heightened appreciation or to it, with fresh wonder, for the very first time.

If you get a negative response to your suggestion about starting a group, respond to the rejection

contemplatively. It will strengthen you. Consider whether you should wait and try again or reflect on other avenues, other places or communities you might explore. But you may well be lucky, too. You may find a strong openness, indeed gratitude, that you suggested it and eagerness to help you. Then what?

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Publicity means not hiding your light under a bushel. It doesn't mean you have to sell meditation as a product. John Main said it was caught rather than taught. Perhaps the very best way to begin is to organize and offer an introduction to Christian Meditation, featuring a brief talk and perhaps showing of the Coming Home video, to be followed by group meditation. You may do the introduction yourself, especially if you have had the opportunity to attend a School for Teachers session in your area, or you may also be able to invite a leader from an existing group nearby or another volunteer in your area who would be happy to team up with you. Many regions have individuals so designated to help with new group formation. The introduction may be repeated at various intervals along the way, and can be organized to suit any circumstance: church, home, school, or business.

Making use of examples available through the School for Teachers, as well as descriptions in the Community's many other fliers and brochures, prepare a simple one-page description of the essential facts: what, why, when (and how long), where, and who. Describe the key points honestly and briefly. Remember that the combination of the words, 'Christian' and 'meditation' and 'group', speak pretty strongly for themselves. This 'one-pager' can serve as a communications resource in itself, a simple flier to distribute or even mail to selected others. It will also help you keep your facts together for other kinds of communications: phone calls, e-mails, faxes, brief notice in the appropriate in-house publications, like the parish bulletin and/or newsletter. You can also consider a poster in a key location or a notice in the local community newspaper. And remember, wherever you set your introductory session, be sure to let your friends who are interested know. Encourage them to join you and to pass the word along. Finally, if your diocese has a spirituality commission, make contact with its leadership. Whether or not your introduction or group will be held in a church setting, members of the spirituality group may very well give you critical moral support, as well as offer helpful suggestions.

WHERE?

It is important to find a place where you can meet regularly each week. It should be as quiet as possible and be a suitable size. Moving from place to place each week can be disruptive. Having a choir practicing or a TV playing next door can be excellent tests of discipline now and then, but if it's every week, it's far less fun. Use your negotiating skills to ensure stability of place. It would be ideal if you can get a room or space allocated permanently for contemplative use alone, but that is rarely possible and not necessary. What you can do is create a space each week that is special. All that is required to transform an ordinary place into a sacred one is, in most cases, a single candle, a little music, and the group leader arriving just a few minutes early to prepare the room.

I meditated once in a crypt of a church in the business district of a big city. A steady core group of people working nearby met once a week during their lunch break. The leader of the group arrived before the others to put out the chairs in a circle around a simple candle. He also brought a small portable tape player. People arrived quietly as music played softly. They started punctually, listened to a brief taped teaching, meditated, shared a few words and went back to work.

The candle was blown out, chairs were put away and in a moment there was no sign – except the energy of peace – that there had just been a group of meditators sitting together in stillness and silence.

Groups now meet in homes, apartments, schools, churches, rectories, religious communities, community centers, Christian Meditation Centres, chapels, universities, prisons, government office buildings, a department store, senior citizens' homes and factories.

WHEN?

Most groups meet in the late afternoon or evening when people are on their way home from work or after they have eaten and then come out again. For working people this is often the best time apart from lunchtime groups near their workplace. But for retired people, homemakers, mothers with young children or the sick, a morning or afternoon time can be best. Different times of the day or week will attract different types of people. In some communities, there are meditation groups meeting several times a week or every day at different times to respond to people's different situations.

Choose a time best suited to your schedule, as your regular presence is essential. It is very important for you as the group leader to be as faithful as you possibly can, especially in the first months as well as during the summer when numbers often drop off. If you cannot be there, arrange for someone else to take your place. This not only ensures continuity, but can help others in the group realise their own potential for leadership. Be sure to stay with the announced times for beginning and ending; the time together builds confidence and stability. A group can easily be completed in an hour or less.

HOW MANY?

Don't measure the group's success by the number of participants. The size of the group is really not important. Two or three faithful meditators make a good meditation group. As C. S. Lewis once said to a clergy conference he was addressing, 'the Lord said feed my sheep don't count them'. Nonetheless the tendency to judge success by numbers is deeply engrained in us. Just catch yourself when you start doing it. Normally a group experiences a reduction in numbers after an initial influx of enthusiasm. Expect this and focus on those remaining. This is the vital point where a community of faith begins to form. Some of those who drifted away may have been greatly enriched by their brief encounter with the group. Some may be meditating on their own. Others may come back when, in a year or two, they see that the group is still meeting and its example of steady fidelity inspires them to start again.

The discovery we make in meditation is that the repetition is not mechanical but creative. Just as the practice itself, starting and leading a group is a creative work. So don't judge it materialistically. The kind of growth that concerns us in meditation groups is spiritual not numerical. With growth in depth there follows in time an expansion in numbers, if not in your particular group, then in the creation of other groups meeting at different times and places. A small meditation group in each parish, for example, would be a quantitative goal worth pursuing. From time to time, of course, you can cast the net on the waters again and publicize a new introductory series of groups or revamp the standing notice you have on a poster or in a bulletin. But, remember, even if the group stays small it will find strength from belonging to the wider national and global community.

WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE GET THERE?

Keep it simple. Keep words to a minimum. Let it be what it is – a meditation group, not a discussion group or a therapy group or a prayer group of another sort. The most important part of the group is the period of meditation. Always keep the silence central and the rest will fall into place. Here are a few practical hints for how to ensure a contemplative environment and the most meaningful experience for all.

The Preparation. As people arrive let them feel welcomed but also make it gently clear that they are entering a sacred place and time. Ten minutes before the start time put on some quiet music, light a candle, and gently ask people to stop talking. People generally need to be encouraged in this, because many feel they might be unsociable by not chatting with others. At the start time turn off the music and welcome people, especially newcomers.

The Teaching. An ideal way to give the teaching is to play one of the many taped talks of John Main. These extraordinary teachings were originally given to meditation groups very like the one you are now sitting in. The talk is not a sermon or a lecture but a spiritual preparation for a time of contemplation. Listening to the talk involves not just the mind but also the heart. It works by placing you in the optimum frame of mind and attention for the time and work of meditation. In this way the tapes never become repetitious, however many times you may listen to them. But as there are about 200 of them, you have plenty of time to do the rounds.

There are some talks that are specifically introductory (such as side A of the five twenty-talk *Communitas* series) and some are for more experienced meditators (such as side B of that series). *The Essential Teaching*, another set of John Main tapes, is comprised of three introductory tapes, published in book form as *Word into Silence*. The third of these tapes *Twelve Talks for Meditators* has proved very popular for groups. *In the Beginning* is a series of introductory talks while *Being on the Way* is for more experienced meditators. *Door into Silence* and *Word Made Flesh* are also sets of both introductory and ongoing talks. There are regularly published new series of short talks that can be used as well, now available on CDs as well as tapes. If you need further advice on what tapes or CDs to choose, you can consult your regional or national coordinator or Medio Media.

In fact, any of these talks will nourish and inspire. There are also useful taped talks by other teachers in the same tradition. For more established groups you might adapt some of the longer retreat or seminar sets that have been published, playing a different part of a talk for a number of weeks. The leader of the group should choose the tape beforehand and spend a moment or two introducing its theme to the group before playing it. Of course the group leader or other member could also give a talk from time to time if they feel confident in doing so. And teachings can be read aloud by the group leaders or another group member, either from the texts themselves or from the weekly reading posted on www.wccm.org, which also contains a brief reading underscoring the main teaching to be read following the meditation.

The Meditation. After the teaching there should be a moment of silence while lights are turned down. The meditation period itself can be introduced by a couple of minutes of suitable music, such as Margaret Rizza's or a quiet classical piece. The meditation period is normally 25 or 30 minutes. If the group is new to meditation you could begin with 20 minutes and gradually build up from there. The leader or other member of the group is responsible for timing the meditation, and can signal the beginning and end of meditation with a soft ring of a chime or prayer bowl. There are other ways to signal the end of meditation without making everyone jump out of their skin when the alarm or buzzer goes off at the end. You could use a quiet alarm or a pre-recorded tape of silence with a short piece of music at the beginning and end. Preparing for the meditation period as a time of deep stillness and quiet is an important part of the job of the group's leader but it involves everyone.

After Meditation. There may be a brief reading following the period of silence, preferably repeating a key point in the previous teaching or echoing with a brief passage from another source. The final part of the group is the sharing or discussion session. It doesn't matter if on some weeks people don't feel like talking. Then the group should be concluded quietly and people take their leave. Often though, after a few minutes of sitting in silence, people like to share a reflection or a question. The group leader can often steer the discussion gently by referring to a key point or scripture reference made in the talk or sharing some other related reflection. This should not be a time of debate or controversy, nor should it be a time for analysis of personal problems and other life issues. There are other venues better suited for this.

If there are questions the group leader shouldn't feel obliged to have the answer. Others in the group may have a good response, and, of course, all questions need not be answered immediately after they are asked. Group leaders can get back to members, either privately or at the next session, after further reflection or after consulting Paul Harris' book, *Frequently Asked Questions*. If a question seems unanswerable, it probably is; don't try to answer it. Allow space for the mystery, too. In general, a brief time for sharing reflections helps grow a sense of solidarity and appreciation for the many different gifts and perspectives that help make a group a community.

KNOW THE ESSENTIAL TEACHING

While the regular teaching component of the weekly meeting is critical, in the end the group teaches what can only truly be learned from experience, in silence. But just as it is important to begin each session with a teaching, it is also important for the group leader to feel comfortable in articulating the essential teaching in his or her own words and style. There are of course many ways to convey the same truth, as long as the essential simplicity of meditation is emphasized.

Meditation is as natural to the spirit as breathing is to the body. Deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, it is an ancient spiritual discipline, a simple way into union with the Spirit of Christ. The tradition does not say that meditation is the only or even the best way to pray. It simply conveys the wisdom, at once practical and holy, of daily silent prayer. It transmits the essential teaching of contemplative prayer, first articulated in the early church through the teachings of the Desert Fathers and passed on with special clarity and depth in our time by John Main. This tradition advises the following simple practice:

- Choose a quiet place.
- Sit down comfortably, with your back straight.
- Close your eyes lightly.
- Sit as still as possible.
- Breathe deeply, staying both relaxed and alert.
- Slowly and interiorly, begin to say your mantra.
- Continue repeating it gently and faithfully for the whole time of the meditation.
- Return to it as soon as you realize you have stopped saying it.
- Stay with the same word during the meditation and from day to day.

And remember that the root of all distractions is self-consciousness. In meditation we are, in a real and ongoing way, ‘leaving self behind’. The mantra we recommend is maranatha, an ancient Christian prayer from the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic, meaning ‘Come Lord’. Repeat the word in four equal syllables, ma-ra-na-tha. Listen to the word as you say it and give it your full attention, but don’t think about its meaning. Distractions will come but don’t try to repress or fight them. Simply let them pass. When you do find that one has hooked your attention, simply return in faith to saying the mantra. This is the ‘work of the word’. Meditate twice a day, ideally in the early morning and early evening. The optimal length of time for meditation is thirty minutes, but might begin with twenty and gradually increase to twenty-five or the full half hour.

Once you have begun this simple daily practice, there are a few guidelines concerning your attitude to the experience that will help you and others go deeper. First, don’t assess your progress. The feeling of failure – or success – may be the biggest distraction of all. Do not expect or look for ‘experiences’ in meditation. You don’t have to feel either that anything should be happening. This may seem odd at first, because the experience of silence is so unfamiliar to most of us personally and so alien to our culture. And we are not used to being simple. The silence, stillness, and simplicity, however, do have a purpose. In one of the parables of the Kingdom, Jesus compares the Kingdom to a seed that someone plants in the ground. The person then goes off to live an ordinary life while the seed grows silently in the earth, ‘how he does not know’. The same thing happens to us, as the word is rooted evermore deeply in our hearts. And, as in the parable, there will in time be signs of growth. You will not always find them in your meditation itself, but in your life. You will begin to harvest the fruits of the spirit; you will find that you are growing in love. And if you ever stop the practice of meditation, whether for a day or a month or a year, simply return to it again with confidence in the infinite generosity of the Spirit that dwells in and among us all.

OTHER FORMS OF PRAYER

Meditation – often-called ‘pure prayer’ – does not replace other forms of prayer. What these are in the lives of different people will depend on their temperament and vocation and the kind of Christian tradition they are

formed in. The reading of Scripture, communal prayer and worship and the prayer that expresses itself in physical acts of compassion and works of charity are all irreplaceable elements of a life lived in the way of the gospel. But the forms they take will vary. The practice of meditation is a living foundation for these — not a substitute for them.

OTHER FAITHS

The attitude of Christians to other faiths is, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, undergoing a historical shift today. Christians no longer arrogantly reject other faiths but are able to revere what is good and holy in them. Dialogue with these faiths impels us to seek new ways of expressing Christian experience alongside traditional theology. The contemplative experience is essential if inter-religious dialogue is to mature. The Christian Meditation group is instinctively ecumenical in this broader sense. Each of its meetings is open to any genuine seeker and it will respond hospitably and gently to others. Although it is not an interfaith group as such it will welcome people of other faiths, or those seeking for faith if they are content to meditate with Christians – whose own faith in Christ as their teacher inspires them to imitate his truth and openness.

If the group concurs it can be a rewarding practice to make contact with other religious groups locally and sometimes to have an interfaith meditation evening together.

AM I THE ONE TO DO IT?

Starting a new Christian Meditation group is a step of a faith, but it will be an enriching responsibility. Whatever you give you will receive back manifold. Always remember that you are not expected to be an expert or a model meditator. Just a humbly committed one. The teacher is within. His name is ‘above all names’. A group becomes a channel of his presence not only to its own members but to all those whose lives they interact with during the week. Like everything else in the life of the gospel, the meditation group does not exist for itself alone. If you can see this you will not be nervous about sharing the gift and you will not be concerned about numbers. You will know that this little community of contemplative faith – in communion with many others around the world – is nurturing the spiritual journey of its members. But also in a world that is becoming too noisy to listen, it is acting as a window of silence to the divine mystery in our midst.

RESOURCES

THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

John Main saw that meditation creates community. Over the past 25 years this insight has taken shape in the growth of a worldwide contemplative network extending to over a hundred countries. There are Christian Meditation Centres in many of these. These Centres serve as focal points for the teaching and life of the community locally and nationally. An annual John Main Seminar is held in which a leading thinker or teacher enriches the Community’s contemplative vision of the modern world and its challenges. A Guiding Board in the spirit of the Constitution of The World Community is drawn from different countries and gives direction and assistance to the growth of the Community. A quarterly Newsletter gives spiritual teaching and local and international news of the Community.

SCHOOL FOR TEACHERS

The School for Teachers has been started to help people better understand and accept the gift of meditation in their own lives so as better to share it with others. It would be very enriching to participate in one of the regular Schools that are held in many countries every year. A School weekend experience would help you discern

whether to start a group and give you more clarity about how to do it. Later you can participate in a School with members of your group. All that is required to attend a school is personal commitment to the way of Christian meditation, a year or two of sustained personal practice, and a call to share the gift with others.

The School is an experience of encouragement and empowerment. The International Coordinator in London works with National coordinators in other countries. The School consists of three phases: a weekend workshop on the 'Essential Teaching' and offering help with presentation skills; a series of wider-ranging workshops applying the contemplative insight to issues of modern concern; an extended retreat experience in which a guided reflection on one's own spiritual journey may help one to be a better spiritual friend to others. You may contact your national coordinator or the School Coordinator at the International Office in London.

THE WEBPAGES:

A growing number of people every day are led to meditation by means of the Internet. Many are led to meditation groups near to their homes through this connection as well as finding a further sense of community in the frequently updated news and discussion of The World Community web page. When you start a group let the web page community know. If you have any special events, pass it on. You will also find news of upcoming retreats and workshops in the web page international calendar. There are reports and photos of recent events and often talks or teachings on meditation are posted. There is also a weekly posting of short readings, described below.

MEDIO MEDIA:

Medio Media is the publishing arm of The World Community. A wide range of products, books, audio tapes and videos by John Main and many others may be ordered over the web direct. You can also ask to receive the catalogue by mail and regular email notification of new titles.

Medio Media Publishing
627 North 6th Avenue
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Toll-free: 1-800-324-8305 1-800-324-8305
Fax: 1 520 882 0311
Website: www.mediomedia.org

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY

The International Centre of The World Community is based in London. It serves as a central point of communication and communion for meditators and other Christian Meditation Centres worldwide. It coordinates many aspects of the life of the Community such as the quarterly Newsletter, the annual John Main Seminar, visits, retreats and other special events. The team at the Centre is also there to help you personally with any queries you may have and will happily put you in touch with the local community nearest to you. International Centre

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St Mark's, Myddleton Square
London EC1R 1XX
Tel: + 44 20 7278 2070 + 44 20 7278 2070
Fax: + 44 20 7713 6346
Email: mail@wccm.org

COCKFOSTERS

The Benedictine Monastery of Christ the King, Cockfosters, is a community in the city that welcomes meditators from around the world for retreats and visits to share in the prayer life of its monastic and parish communities. The Guestmaster, Monastery of Christ the King, Bramley Road, London N14 4HE, UK
(Tel: +44 20 8440 7769)

FRIENDS IN MEDITATION

We are a group of people who have been deeply touched by the gift of Christian Meditation. We are seekers whose lives have been transformed. We come from all over the world and from all walks of life. We also provide financial support to The World Community for Christian Meditation towards its work of sharing the gift of Christian Meditation worldwide. In particular, a Friend supports the work of the Community in developing, nurturing and assisting emerging ChristianMeditation communities in locations where there may be no regional or national contacts or coordinators.

MEDITATION WITH CHILDREN

“Children are born contemplatives and so contemplation is not only the goal of the Christian life but in a sense its starting point too,” Fr Laurence Freeman, a Benedictine monk and the Director of The World Community for Christian Meditation, has written in a foreword to the Like A Child series of books - a program for teaching Christian meditation to children in primary schools.

Children are saying that they do not want merely to learn about Jesus and God in their religion lessons: they wanted to experience God in their heart. Christian meditation provides your child with an opportunity to start a journey of silence and stillness where he will experience the presence of Jesus within. Visit the webpage: www.meditationwithchildren.com

TAPES AND CDs FOR MEDITATION GROUPS

A good series to begin with is **Communitas**. There are five sets in this series each set having ten tapes. These are inspiring and moving talks given to meditation groups and ideal for leading your group into a period of meditation. Side A is a talk for beginners and at some point repeats the essential ‘how to’ of meditation. Side B is for ongoing meditators. A second set of tapes or CDs invaluable to the beginner is A Simple Way, Fr Laurence’s teaching of how to meditate, including 20 minute timed meditation silence. A set of six tapes called In The Beginning is composed only of talks for beginners. Another set called Being on The Way is just talks for more experienced meditators. These and other sets of tapes by John Main and Laurence Freeman can be found in the Medio Media catalogue or ordered directly from the web page (www.mediomedia.org)

BOOKS FOR MEDITATION GROUPS

John Main’s Word into Silence is an excellent short introduction to the Christian context of meditation. His Christian Meditation: The Gethsemani Talks tells concisely how he came to meditation himself. After that Moment of Christ and The Way of Unknowing would be helpful.

Laurence Freeman’s Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice is a good short practical summary and his Light Within is also a good introduction. His book Jesus: The Teacher Within explores the contemporary meaning of Christian identity in the light of the experience of meditation. A Simple Way, published in 2004, is a short practical booklet with Fr Laurence’s teachings on how to meditate.

MUSIC FOR MEDITATION GROUPS

An ideal and beautiful music for leading into and out of meditation is that of Margaret Rizza, an English meditator. Her acclaimed CDs include River of Peace and Fountain of Life and are available from Medio Media (www.mediomedia.org)

WEEKLY READINGS FOR MEDITATION GROUPS

There are readings for meditation posted each week in English on the following websites: www.wccm.org, www.mediomedia.org and www.friendsinmeditation.com In Spanish on www.meditacioncristiana.com and www.meditacioncristiana.cl The readings usually contain a teaching from John Main or Laurence Freeman, with a brief complementary after-meditation reading from other sources, including Scripture, poetry, and sacred texts from other traditions. The readings can be printed out and used in the group itself or given out to members as a support for their daily practice.

Each week, hundreds of people around the world receive the readings directly by e-mail; if you would like to receive them, just follow the instructions under the “Weekly Readings” section of these websites.