

# **Meditation and The New Creation in Christ**

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## **1**

### **The Human Search for God**

I like to begin the conference with a short chant in Sanskrit. In India, we always begin with a set chant because it links us with the past of humanity. Sanskrit is perhaps the most ancient language in the world today, which is still in use. It's a sacred language, a language of the gods. It opens us up to the past of humanity with which we are all linked. We all belong to the past of humanity, which is growing through history, growing with us here. It means roughly: Let us enjoy together, let us share together, let us strive together, let us shine together. Let there be no quarreling among us.

St Benedict describes the monastic life as a 'search for God'. This search has gone on from the beginning of human history, and it was perhaps never more intense than it is today. People everywhere are seeking for an ultimate meaning and purpose in life in a world where meaning and purpose often seem to have been lost. What answer can St Benedict and the tradition, which comes from him, give to this problem? How can we find God in the world today? St Benedict, of course, comes from within the Christian tradition, but what answer can Christianity give? It is itself divided, and many have lost faith in it and are seeking God in other ways.

Is there within the Christian tradition a path to the Supreme, not by way of doctrine or ritual but of direct experience of God? That is what people are looking for today — not words or thoughts, but direct experience. Is there a way to the direct experience of God, of truth, and reality in the Christian tradition?

I believe that there is, and Father John Main was one of those who opened the way to this experience for people today. He found it in the Benedictine tradition stemming from the Fathers of the Desert. And we come here today to reflect on the message he has left us as a way to discover for ourselves the tradition of this wisdom, which is the knowledge of God through love. Father John was a man of great wisdom and above all of great love. Let us listen to what he has to say and find for ourselves the way to this experience of God so that we can share it with the world, which is waiting to hear this message and to find its way back to God. In this talk, I will be drawing especially on a talk of John Main on the witness to the world of monastic prayer, and I invite you all to share his vision and translate it into your lives.

Father John begins by saying that the call of the monk, and hence of humanity as a whole — in so far as there is an archetype of the monk in every human being — is 'to be open to one's eternal potential in God, in the new creation whose centre is Christ'. There is a monastic archetype in all of humanity. Behind all the diversities of human nature there is a common ground, and in that common ground every human being is in search of God, of ultimate meaning and of ultimate truth. It is a solitary search, in a way. It is something that touches the depth of our being and which no one else can give us. We have to open up that depth and then we touch God, we touch reality. That is the monk in us, in every human being. As John Main puts it we have 'to be open to our eternal potential in God in the new creation whose centre is Christ'. Every human

being has a capacity for God, a capacity to be drawn by God into the depths of our being and to experience the presence of God, of the infinite, eternal reality which sustains the world as the ground and source of one's own being.

Here we come across the problem that for many people the word 'God' has lost its meaning. They do not like to use it and in fact sometimes find it embarrassing to use because it gives the wrong image to people. It is helpful to get over the word and to open ourselves to its deeper meaning. Here there is the particular problem for the Christian — that our concept and our image of God derived from the Gospel, from Jesus, is primarily of the 'Father in heaven'. Whereas when we come to the traditions of the East we find they have a different and almost opposite view. For them God is much more the ground, the source, the Being behind the world. I like to tell a story about Father Jules Monchanin, the founder of our ashram in India. For many years he was a parish priest in Tannirpalli in South India. One day he went up to a group of school children and asked them, "Where is God?" Some of the children were Hindus and some were Christians. All the Christians pointed up to the sky (God is in heaven). And all the Hindu children pointed to the heart (God is in the heart). These are two different ways of understanding God and they are complementary. You can think of God above, the Father, the Creator sending down his grace, becoming incarnate in Jesus. And you can think of God as the Spirit within, the ground of our being, the Source of everything. They are opposite and complementary. And one of the things I am learning today, and perhaps we all are, is how to reconcile opposites. So often we think it must be one thing *or* the other. Nearly always it's both — *and*. The Chinese had the beautiful perception of the *yin* and the *yang*. Everything is interrelated. Don't put things down as this or that but learn to see how opposites come together. So when we think of God we both images: we need the Father in heaven and we need the Holy Spirit within.

This direct experience of God is not something that requires any specific learning ability. It is something that exists at the very centre of our being which gives meaning and purpose to our existence and which alone can answer the deepest need of human life. At our little ashram in India we have people coming from all over the world, from all five continents, and it is almost uncanny to that they are all in sear of the same thing. They are all trying to find a deeper meaning in life, a deeper self, a deeper relation to God and to humanity —to 'realize God', we often say in India.

For most people this capacity for depth has been almost lost. It has been so obscured that they are no longer aware of it. Particularly in the materialistic civilization in the West, people have lost this dimension in their lives. They are so occupied with the world around them and so absorbed in its problems, pleasures and pains that they do not have the power to get beyond. They have lost the sense of being open to God, to the transcendent. This sense for God has been obscured or lost, and that is what we are trying to recover. All the meditation groups throughout the world are composed of people who are searching for this deeper meaning, this reality of God in their own lives.

Father John refers to this movement to recover our capacity for God as the 'new creation'. This capacity, innate in every human being, has been obscured through sin that is through alienation from one's own true being. Sin is alienation. It is failing to know oneself as one really is through alienation from one's true being, from reality, from God. The new creation is the renewal of our being which takes place when we awake to who we are. In India they often ask the question: "Who am I? Am I this body sitting here? Am I this personality relating to other people? Or is there something deeper within, beyond my body and my mind? Is there a deeper reality in me, and in the world around us?" The new creation arises when we awake to who we are, to the reality behind all the superficial appearances of our lives.

As Father John says,

*...the new creation is a passing beyond all the illusions and images which we project of ourselves and the world around us and discovering our true being, our inner self, which has been hidden behind all these illusory appearances.*

All of us, the whole human family, tends to get lost in this world of appearances, which is eventually an illusion, and to lose sight of the reality behind it all.

Father John sees the monastic life, that is the life of the monk hidden within everyone, as a way of

transcendence. Karl Rahner, a great theologian and a mystic who had a deep insight into the mystery of God, described a human being as being 'constituted by the capacity for self-transcendence' — being able to go beyond oneself. We have fallen into a separated self, shut out from others and from the ground and source of our own being. We have to transcend this separated self, this ego which hides our true being, and we have to open ourselves to God and the world, to the light and the truth, which are everywhere, and in every person. This separated self is the source of all evil. The ego is not evil in itself. We have to have an ego, a separate self. A child has to grow and become aware of itself. It has to separate from the mother and become a person. But we get shut up in the ego, and this shuts us out from others and from God and imprisons us. To some degree we are all imprisoned in the separate self. The grace of God received in prayer and meditation is the way to go beyond the ego.

The way of transcendence, of course, is the way of love. As Father John says, love is 'to turn beyond self to another'. That is why he speaks of an 'infinite expansion of spirit'. To love is to expand oneself, to open oneself to the infinity of being, which is in us and around us, and this infinity of being in love is what we mean by God. This in turn leads to a 'creative development of our whole being, a deepening of the integral harmony of heart and mind.

We begin to see now what is the meaning of a 'new creation'. It is to transcend the separated self with its illusory images and desires and to encounter reality, the reality of our own being and of the world in which we live. It may sound very easy to encounter reality, but in fact we are prevented by the images and illusions that we project. Scientists today tell us that the entire three-dimensional world is all a projection. The world is a field of energies vibrating at different frequencies, and within that field there are various structures or forms which we interpret as a three-dimensional universe. But this three-dimensional universe is a projection, and so an illusion, an appearance. The reality is behind the appearance.

Prayer, meditation, is the way to get beyond the appearances and to touch reality. The reality is God himself who is always revealing himself behind all the appearances.

## 2

### **Prayer Beyond Words or Thought**

The method of prayer, which Father John discovered, was that of Cassian and the Fathers of the Desert of the fourth century.

Cassian was a monk who came from what is now Yugoslavia and travelled to visit the monks of the desert in Egypt. In the fourth century Egypt was full of Christian monks who had left the world of the Roman Empire to search for God in the solitude of the desert. Cassian interviewed these monks and wrote his Conferences describing their way of life and particularly their way of prayer. The two Conferences of Abbot Isaac on Prayer are a classical teaching on the whole subject of meditation. The Rule of St Benedict derives its teaching on prayer from Cassian and the Desert Fathers. That is what Father John discovered in his monastery in Ealing. This prayer, which they called 'pure prayer', without words or thought, is the secret of prayer, which Father John discovered.

For many people this is quite a problem, because when we think of prayer we think of words and thoughts — we say the 'Our Father', we think about God. All that is necessary as a beginning, but prayer has to lead beyond words and beyond thoughts. And meditation is going beyond words and thought, which Evagrius, one of the great monks of the desert, called 'pure prayer'. St Benedict mentions purity of heart as the quality of prayer and it is this, which we are all seeking - pure prayer. Fr John recovered this for us.

I myself lived in a Benedictine monastery for twenty years and never discovered it! We used to meditate for half an hour after Vespers but we were given no instruction or guidance in it. This is what people are looking for today.

I should mention that wonderful little book *The Way of a Pilgrim* about the Russian pilgrim who went all over Russia saying the Jesus Prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me a sinner'. He had read in the New Testament to 'pray without ceasing' so he went to all the monasteries asking, 'How can I pray without ceasing?' One starets, an elder, taught him the Jesus Prayer to be said thousands of times. So he

went all over Russia saying the prayer night and day and his whole life was transformed. He radiated Christ. It is interesting that as the old Communist system is breaking up in Russia today people there are once again rediscovering their soul. In the nineteenth century, Russia was 'holy Russia'; people were wandering all over the monasteries and cathedrals searching for God and revealing God. Today it's coming back again. And this is what people are looking for today all over the world.

We are more accustomed to pray with words and concepts and, of course, these are necessary to begin with. A traditional way of monastic prayer is *lectio divina*, the meditative reading of the Bible. This is an excellent practice but it hardly goes beyond discursive prayer. We're going from thought to thought. It's helpful, it's leading us but it doesn't take us to the end. It's not yet properly contemplative prayer.

Contemplative prayer begins when all discursive thought ceases, when the mind rests in silence in the presence of God. Contemplation is the practice of the presence of God. Fr John discovered the mantra, the repetition of a sacred word, as the way to contemplative prayer. The mantra is the way to get into that silence into the presence of God.

We need to think of ourselves always as an integrated whole of body and soul and spirit. Unfortunately, we have become used to thinking of the human being as body- soul, rational animal. This is all right as far as it goes, but it leaves out the deeper dimension of our being. St Paul and the early Church always thought of the human being as body, soul and spirit. When we pray, when we meditate, we are not doing it only in the mind. It is a danger, particularly in the West because we educate our mind so much, that all our religion is in the head. Meditation should be a way of bringing it down from the head into the heart. The Fathers used to say, 'Lead the thoughts from the head into the heart and keep them there.' The heart is the centre where the head joins the rest of the body. Meditation takes us from the head into the heart and into our whole bodily being.

We have to meditate with our whole being. That is the deepening of the integral harmony of heart and mind, of soul and body.

### 3

## The Mantra in the Christian Tradition

The heart of Father John's method of meditation was the use of a mantra. *Mantra* is a Sanskrit word and derives from a long tradition of prayer and meditation in India. It was the genius of Father John, which discovered the same tradition in the Fathers of the Desert and saw it as a sacred tradition, which had come to St Benedict from the Fathers and had been preserved, though almost lost, in the Benedictine Order today. The mantra was really his discovery and he was the first to bring it to light and make it known as a valid method of prayer in the Church.

The art of the mantra consists in the repetition of a sacred word or a verse from the Bible, which has the effect of 'centring' the person, unifying all the faculties and focusing them on the indwelling presence of God. The same discovery was made in Spencer Abbey under the influence of the Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation and led to the concept of 'centring prayer'. It is a method of centring oneself, of finding the inner centre of one's being and bringing all the faculties of sense and reason to unite in this centre and so open the depths of the human person to the indwelling presence of God.

Father John chose as his mantra the Aramaic word *maranatha*, which can be translated as either 'Come Lord' or 'Our Lord comes', and is from St Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. The Aramaic word *mar* simply means 'Lord'. The suffix *-an* means 'our' so *maran* really means 'Our Lord'. It can be translated *Maran-atha*, 'Our Lord' comes. Or it can be *Marana-tha*, 'Come our Lord'. Probably the first is the more correct.

It is one of the very few Aramaic words — the language of Jesus himself — which have survived in the New Testament. There are six words. When Jesus raised a little girl, he said, *Talitha cumi*, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise' (Mark 5:41). And on the cross, he said, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken as (Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46). Apart from these words, everything that Jesus said is translated into Greek. This is very important, you know. Jesus spoke Aramaic; I don't think everybody realizes this. Our Gospels are written in Greek, and *Maranatha*, which occurs in the first letter of Paul to the

Corinthians, was used by the early Church, one of the relics of Aramaic, Jesus' own speech. That is why it is a very sacred word, *Maranatha*. Our Lord comes. When we use that word, it takes us back to the time of Jesus himself. It takes us back beyond the New Testament itself, which was written in Greek.

We must always remind ourselves that the New Testament came over a period of about fifty years after Jesus, translated into Greek. It takes us back beyond the New Testament itself, which was written in Greek, to the earliest tradition in the church before it had emerged from its Jewish matrix. The whole history of early Christianity is that it grew up in this Jewish world — Jesus and his disciples speaking Aramaic, worshipping in the temple and going to the synagogue and so on. Then, in the course of the century, it began to move to the Gentiles, the people outside, and Paul himself was the chief influence who carried this message to the Gentiles. Paul was a Greek-speaking Jew in Tarsus and he carried the message in Greek. The letters of Paul and the others were written in Greek. We must remind ourselves that *Jesus Christ* itself is a Greek translation from the Hebrew or Aramaic *Joshua Meshia*.

So the whole message of Jesus was transmitted through the Greek into the Greco-Roman world and into another culture. This is important. It was a meeting of two cultures. It grew out of a purely Jewish culture. Jesus wholly belonged to that Jewish world. He came into the world not simply in any culture but in a particular Jewish culture, which had been prepared by God over the centuries. The gospel grew out of that culture and in the course of the centuries it grew out of it into the Greco-Roman world. Then it moved to Europe as a whole, then to America. We belong to this evolutionary circle coming out of this Jewish matrix and gradually growing through contact with different cultures. Today this Jewish, Greco-Roman, European, American religion is really coming in contact with Asia, India and China and Japan. It is a great moment in the growth of Christianity. That's where we are today.

No doubt there is a special quality in such a word like *Maranatha*, which attunes us to the earliest tradition of Christianity and takes us back to the roots of our religion.

Fr John took this tradition of prayer, which comes down from the Fathers of the Desert, and eventually from the New Testament. One of the great insights in New Testament scholarship is that Jesus' whole life is centred round his 'Abba experience'. Jesus referred to God as *Abba*, 'Father', but it's very intimate, more like 'daddy' — like a child calls 'mamma', 'abba'. Jesus had an intimate relation with God as Father, whereas the Jews of the Old Testament had the opposite. Yahweh was the God of heaven, and their reverence was so great that they did not even like to name him. Adonai or Lord was substituted for Yahweh because it was forbidden to name God. He was so far above the human that there was the fear of judgment and a sense that the Law had to be kept at all costs. Jesus went right beyond that to an intimate awareness of his total oneness with Abba, his Father.

I think you could say that *Abba* was Jesus' mantra. He simply lived in that intimacy with the Father as Abba. On that word and all that it implied his whole life centred. And so from him we gain the tradition of the mantra.

## 4

### The Function of the Mantra

It is important to remember that prayer and meditation occupy the whole person. We pray with the body and the soul as well as with the spirit.

We are using our bodies in praise, even when we pronounce words, still more when we chant and sing. In strictly contemplative prayer, the action of the body is reduced to the minimum, but even there is the movement of the breath.

All the Eastern traditions emphasize so much the importance of the breath. The Zen meditation focuses on the breathing in the abdomen, breathing in and out. This is called the *hara*. It is a very important centre. We should not neglect it. It is an emotional centre, but it is the real centre of the psyche, and many people find it helpful to focus on the *hara*. Others prefer to focus on the heart, and that is perhaps more central. You can also focus on the *andha chakra*, which is called the 'third eye'. In India, we put a crimson mark here. The two eyes are the eyes of duality with which you see the outer world, the outer self. The third eye is the

inner eye, which sees the inner light. For many people, the attuning of the mantra to the breathing is of great importance as it helps us to bring the body into the heart of the prayer. But, of course, in strict meditation, the body is brought as far as possible to stillness so as not to distract the mind. Some insist on an upright position and complete stillness. That is very strong in the Indian tradition, in yoga — the perfectly upright spine and the complete stillness. The great need in meditation is relaxation. Body and mind have to be totally relaxed so that the spirit can be totally open and receptive to the Spirit of God. They say in Yoga that the position should be easy and firm, relaxed and firm. It should be firm to keep you steady, but it should be relaxed at the same time.

We must remember that sounds vibrate through the whole body and have a profound effect on the psyche. It is impossible to conceive the effects of the sounds of a modern city with its endless distractions on the psyche. We are bombarded daily and hourly with these sounds and the images of television. Our times of silence are therefore so important to enable us to let go of all these distractions. It is the function of the mantra to recollect the soul, to bring it back to its centre and unite the whole person — body, soul and spirit — with the Spirit of God.

I am not sure that I have made that clear, this very important distinction of body, soul and spirit. We have the body, the physical organism which unites us with all the physical organisms of the universe. We have the soul, the psyche which is the psychological organism with senses, feelings, imagination, reason and will. The centre of the psyche is the ego, that which in Sanskrit is called the *ahamkara*, the 'I- maker'. The psyche is very limited. But beyond it is the spirit, the *Atman*, which is the point of self-transcendence. At that point body and soul go beyond their human limitations and open to the infinite, the eternal, the divine. Meditation is passing beyond your body and soul into that point of the spirit.

The aim must steadily be kept in mind of centring the body and soul in the depth of the spirit, where the human spirit meets the Spirit of God. As St Paul says, 'The Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God'. At this point of the spirit, the ego is transcended and we open up to the Holy Spirit. It is a meeting point between our spirit and the Spirit of God. Meditation should be that meeting point where the human spirit touches and opens itself to the Holy Spirit of God. It is interesting how in the New Testament the word 'spirit' is sometimes used for the human and sometimes for the divine — because it is the meeting point. The spirit is what St Francis de Sales called the 'fine point of soul'. It is the point of self-transcendence where we go beyond ourselves and receive the divine Spirit into our hearts, that is, into the 'centre of our being. The repetition of the mantra is simply a way of keeping all the faculties of the soul and body centred in this point of the spirit.

It is a process of unifying all the faculties of the soul at the point of the Spirit where they are penetrated by the light of truth. This light is essentially a light of love. It is the love of the Holy Spirit poured into the heart, which brings us face to face with God. In the Oriental tradition all methods of meditation are ways of coming to that inner centre. But what happens there depends upon your particular faith and tradition. For the Christian the point of the spirit is the point where the love of God is poured into the heart through the Holy Spirit. It is the love of the Holy Spirit poured into the heart, which brings us face to face with God.

This raises the problem of distractions. When we begin to meditate, the mind begins to wander. For most people the activity of the mind never ceases. For people today particularly, and especially for those in the West whose lives are so full of distractions and for whom television with its constant stream of images is a constant source of distraction, the problem of controlling the mind is very acute. We are thinking, thinking, thinking all the time. It seems that most people cannot stop the continual flow of thoughts, but what they can do is not to attend to it, to let it flow and quietly observe it like clouds in the sky while the deeper mind, the spirit within, remains quietly resting in the presence of God. To struggle against distractions can do more harm than good. Then the ego comes in. You try to stop yourself and then it makes matters worse. The mantra goes on quietly and the thoughts keep coming and going but you needn't attend to them. Let them come, let them go, but keep the mantra quietly going on beneath them all.

## 5

### Unity Beyond Duality

Our meditation exposes us to the deep wounds in our nature and compels us to face the suffering of humanity from the beginning of time. It breeds compassion. This in turn must be expressed by compassion in our lives.

We have to overcome the duality of the conscious mind, which separates us from God and from one another, and realize that in Christ this duality has been overcome. Original sin is a fall into duality. The original human being was created to be unified in body, soul and spirit, and so to be open to God. The fall of humanity is the fall from the spirit into the psyche, which means into the ego, the separated self. Instead of opening continuously toward God in the spirit, we fall into our ego, and we shut up in fear and fight to preserve ourselves. Christ came to set us free from this duality. Once you fall into the psyche, everything becomes dual - good and evil, right and wrong, black and white, conscious and unconscious, mind and matter, subject and object, truth and error, right and wrong. The rational mind dualizes everything. It sees everything in terms of opposites.

But always beyond the dualism of the mind is the unifying spirit. Meditation takes us beyond the dualities to the unified spirit. Jesus broke through the division in our nature. St Paul says he 'broke down the dividing wall' and reconciled us in one body on the cross. In the Temple in Jerusalem there was a wall, which no Gentile could pass over. If he did he would be killed. It was for the Jews, the chosen people. These people were outside. Jesus broke down that dividing wall, opening up the Temple to all humanity. But we have built all these walls again and divided the world.

Jesus 'broke down the dividing wall' and reconciled us in one body on the cross. We need today to take seriously the view that humanity is one body, one organic whole. The Fathers had the very strong sense of the Adam who is in all humanity. St Thomas Aquinas, in a beautiful phrase, said, *Omnes homines, unus homo*, 'All men are one man' — one organic whole. We are all members of that one Man who fell and become divided in conflict and confusion. And Jesus restored *humanity*, not only Jews or Christians or any particular group but humanity, to that oneness — the new Adam, the human race conscious of its fundamental unity and of its unity with the cosmos. That is what we are recovering today. We are beginning to rediscover our common humanity. Television bringing events from all around the world so close to people is helping us to realize that things happening in Iraq and elsewhere are part of our own problem. We see humanity as part of the cosmic whole. We are all part of this planet, united by it and growing and living from it. We are all parts of each other, growing through contact with one another as one organic whole. We are recovering that unity beyond duality, which is our birthright.

In our Hebrew tradition, duality is very strong. Humanity had to go through dualism, to learn the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error. You have to go through that stage of separating and dividing, but then you have to transcend it. The Old Testament generally reflects this duality: it was always the Israelites who were the holy people, and outside were the gentiles who were to be rejected. The good were to be separated and the evil condemned. This dualism runs all through the Jewish tradition.

Jesus came from that Jewish tradition and often uses its language of rejection and condemnation, yet he was going beyond it all the time and taking us to the point where we transcend all dualities. There is a marvelous expression of it in the Gospel of St John: 'That they may all be one: as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, so also may they be one in us.' Jesus is totally one with the Father and yet he is not the Father. It is a non-dual relationship. It is not one and it is not two. It's a mystery of love. When two people unite in love they become one and yet keep their distinctiveness. Jesus and the Father had this total communion in love, and he asks us to become one as he is one with the Father — total oneness in the non-dual being of the Father. It is the Christian calling, to recover this unity.

In India, the idea of duality *advaita*, non-duality is fundamental. The Indian tradition has this sense of going beyond the dualities. Christians today can learn from the Indian tradition many things and particularly this understanding of *advaita*, non-duality. Christianity grew out of Israel a tradition of moral

dualism. It went through the Greco-Roman culture, which was based on a metaphysical dualism. But today we are meeting the religions of Asia, and we are beginning to discover the principle of non-duality. The rational mind demands that everything be one or two, while non-duality, which is beyond the rational, affirms a relationship, which is not one and not two. It is only through meditation that we get beyond this duality. We are being called to recover the unity beyond duality which is our birthright, and which can alone answer the deepest need of humanity today.

I am planning a book on the Scriptures of the world, to be read by Christians and others in which I try to show that every religion — Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity — they all have a dualistic element from which they begin they all move into this non-dualism. Judaism and Islam are particularly dualistic and in their scriptures they tend to be always dualistic and can be full of terrible denunciations of unbelievers and descriptions of their doom and punishment. This is a stage in religion which people have to go through. The Sufis of the eighth and ninth centuries in Islam went right beyond it into non-dualism, like the Jews in the Kabbala and Meister Eckhart in our Christian tradition. Every religion goes beyond dualism through its mystical tradition to the non-dual. That is our calling — to get beyond dualism.

Meditation is the only way to go beyond dualism. When you stop your mind, you discover the unifying principle behind everything. That is really our hope and our calling. This is important and I think that in the meditation movement God is leading us and humanity through us. It is a call that has gone all over the world. Everywhere people are meeting together, discovering this need and responding to it in the different ways of meditation.

We are all being called to open our hearts to the non-dual mystery, which is the Holy Trinity. It is not a solitary person. It is a communion of love. That is the non-dual Reality. So that is our calling.

## 6

### **The Common Goal of Religions**

Meditation groups are introducing a new way of life into the Church and for humanity as a whole. Father John Main, by introducing meditation with a mantra, renewed an ancient tradition of contemplative prayer in the Benedictine order. He then extended this way of meditation and contemplative life to lay people. This tradition of meditation derives from the Fathers of the Desert and was passed on by Cassian to St Benedict. It has now spread throughout the world. It has its roots in the tradition of ancient India and has become a typical method of prayer in Eastern tradition. It is found not only in Hinduism and Buddhism, but also among the Sufis in Islam and the Hasidic movement in Judaism.

What is the future of contemplative life based on this tradition in the Church and in the world? In the first place, I think that we must recognize that the Christian tradition cannot stand alone. We are being challenged today to see our religion in the context of other religions of the world. In particular, this way of meditation is found in all the great religions and contemplative life must be seen as a calling for humanity. We are moving out of a materialistic civilization centred on science and technology into a new age in which people all over the world are consciously turning to a spiritual path, seeking to integrate their lives by bringing everything into the inner centre of the heart and finding the meaning of life, not in the external world, but in the inner reality of which the external world is a reflection. It is in the context of this new world that we have to see the place of contemplative life in the Church and the place of oblate communities in fostering this way of life.

I keep coming back to the view that the external world is a reflection, as in a mirror, of an interior world. That is the view of modern physics — that when we go beneath outward appearances, first of external bodies, then of atoms, protons and electrons, we eventually come to a field of energies. We have to recognize that we ourselves are a field of energy functioning within the vast field of energies in the universe. We project this three-dimensional world around us through our senses and our minds. That three-dimensional world is transitory. It is an expression of the vast mystery of energy, which we create and in which we live and which we have to transcend. We are always mistaking outer phenomena, appearances, the world in space and time, for the Reality, but we are slowly learning that all this is passing

away.

These are the great insights of India. The Buddha, I think, had the most profound insight into the nature of the universe any human being. He saw through the world of appearances, of the senses. He saw it as all passing away. 'All is passing. All is sorrow [in the sense of 'unsatisfactory', giving no final satisfaction]. 'All is unreal', without substance, without any real base to it. The whole world in which we live, the sense world, is a world of phenomena, of appearances. But these appearances reflect the eternal reality. So we are living in a world of passing phenomena and everything is changing all the time and all is in flux and conflict as in a mirror or in a lake of water it's reflecting the divine reality. At the moment of death, we pass beyond the flux of the phenomena and the body as we know it, and enter into the reality. It is a little like watching a TV screen. We see the events going on and, if we didn't know better, we might think that they are happening there. But they are not happening on the screen. They are somewhere beyond and what we are seeing is a re-presentation. So the whole physical world is a re-presentation, a manifestation of an unseen reality.

Every religious tradition has a word for this unseen reality. In India we have Brahman. That is what is behind all phenomena, the one everlasting Brahman. And behind the human body, there is Atman, the one Self. The Buddha called it *nirvana*. When all phenomena pass away, there is a 'blowing out' of all appearances, all change and becoming, and you enter the Eternal Reality. In the later Buddhist tradition, the Reality is called *sunyata*, the void. When everything is emptied you have the void, which is the fullness.

In China there is the *Tao*. Confucius and his followers had their rituals and their organized social and political life, but Lao Tsu saw behind all this the Tao, the rhythm of the universe, the marvelous order which is behind everything but which cannot be seen. He always uses this beautiful illustration of emptiness: 'We make spokes and a wheel in order to drive a chariot, but it is the empty space in the hub that enables the wheel to go round. We make pots of clay, but it is the empty space in the pot that makes it useful. We build houses of brick and mortar and wood, but it is the empty spaces in the doors and windows that make the house habitable.' So the emptiness is just as important as the fullness.

in the Muslim tradition, the Sufi Ibn Al Arabi showed that behind the God of the Koran is Al Haqq — the Reality. In Judaism, in the Kabbala, they spoke of *Ein Sof*, the Infinite. Behind Yahweh, the Law, the Prophets, and everything, is *Ein Sof*, the Infinite.

We are all discovering that behind the projections of the physical world, the psychological world, and even of religion, is *the Reality* that we are seeking. Karl Rahner called it 'the holy mystery', the mystery beyond everything. That is the goal of our religious search. We need a physical world and we need the symbols of religion, but we have to go beyond them to *the Reality*. That is our calling.

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