

Meditators' Blog 11/6/2012



THE FUTURE OF THE CHRISTIAN MEDITATION GROUP *by Paul Harris*

Recently I have been re-reading a book by Robert Wuthnow entitled "Sharing the Journey," (Macmillan Inc) ; it's an outstanding 460 page study of the world wide growth of the small group support movement, showing how groups are dramatically changing our relationship to our community, and to the sacred.

It could be read productively by leaders of Christian Meditation groups.

Wuthnow, a professor of Social Sciences at Princeton University in the USA, documents the growing popularity of a wide range of support groups that create friendship, identity, community, and spiritual energy. Drawing on research and interviews, Wuthnow states that that the phenomenon of small groups is redefining spirituality in the 21st century, as the Church may be most alive these days in the humble homes (and other locations) of believers meeting in small groups.

The author persuasively argues that this quiet revolution gives people a new commitment to their faith and a renewed sense of community. The author also confirms through research that small groups have emerged in response to the impersonalization of society and the weakening of family and community ties.

Of course long before Wuthnow, John Main had a deep insight and prophetic vision that the teaching on silence and stillness in prayer would be handed down primarily in small groups. In addition over 35 years ago he pointed out that in the group setting "meditation creates community". John Main also had a profound understanding of the ancient tradition of Christians gathering together in small groups to enter into the experience of prayer. Today this truth is obvious to us as we understand that the essential teaching of Christian Meditation, and the role of groups in passing on the teaching, are both sides of the same coin. The weekly group meeting is the primary delivery system of the teaching.

How many times in his talks does John Main indicate that it is not sufficient to listen to talks or read books on the teaching, but rather that one must enter into the experience of this way of prayer. As we so often repeat, "Christian Meditation is caught, not taught". The meditation

group has in fact become the primary spiritual focus where-by newcomers can not only hear the teaching on a weekly basis but more importantly can enter into the discipline and practice. The group practice is where the teaching is ?caught?.

Meditators instinctively recognize that this is a journey that is often difficult (but not impossible) 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 must meditate by ourselves each day. But at the same time we realize that we need the support of others if we are to persevere on this journey. In addition 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. The meditation group is really a community of faith, much as the early Christians experienced community in St Paul's time.

The prayer that leads from the head to the heart, from fragmentation to unity, from isolation to caring, grows in the fertile ground of the weekly group meeting. Let us, each in our own way, get on with the challenge John Main has left us, the challenge of supporting existing groups and the start up of new groups.

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Source URL: http://www.wccm.org/fb_cb/196810127004328/content/meditators-blog-1162012