The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Laurence Freeman OSB, “Dearest Friends,” WCCM International Newsletter, December 2007.

In an age of stress and anxiety like ours the burden of time presses heavily upon us. Without meaning, the intolerable weight of time and, paradoxically, its fleeting disappearance become a crucifixion without a resurrection. The great increase in the incidence of mental illness in modern society could be attributed to this. Meditation transforms our mental construct of past and future by deepening the experience of the present moment—the core meaning of contemplation as the “simple enjoyment of the truth.”

Death, which marvelously concentrates the mind, leads us to a heightened experience of reality. Every precious moment is tasted and shared with wonder and joy. Lovers facing death enjoy every moment together that is left to them but they are not counting the seconds. The present moment cannot be measured. This too is freedom from limits. The waitress who says “enjoy” as you start your meal has got it right. How can we describe the present moment except with reference to time? We can’t, just as we cannot speak of the one Word without using words. But the present moment is not separate from what we imagine as past and future. It contains time. We could say that the present moment is experienced when we stop counting or watching the seconds ticking away. It dawns when we truly see the present moment is literally *every*moment, successive to the degree of being unbroken and without any moment being blinked at, wasted, forgotten or ignored. It is about being fully awake to everything. Here and now.

This is the last paradox. . . .How can time and eternity coexist? Yet meditation. . .shows us that we can live in the eternal now while writing reports about yesterday’s meetings and planning out meetings for tomorrow. Healing can take place as we are dying. One can understand why the Vedic tradition so dramatizes all this when it says that this world is an illusion, just a dream world we will awake from like watching a film on a screen and then turning on the lights and turning the projector off. Fr John and the Christian tradition don’t like to say this because it diminishes the paradox of the Incarnation as well as the experience of human love from day to day and over the years of our life’s pilgrimage. Yet in the light of the present moment so much of our thought and assumption are exposed as illusory, so many

anxieties evaporate, so many crises disappear and so many of our hang-ups seem to be released. Yet Father John does not minimize the purification of the mind that must first take place:

But this we must understand too, I would mislead you seriously if I didn't put before you as clearly as I can: the purification that leads to this purity of heart that leads to the presence within us is a consuming fire. And meditation is entering that fire. The fire that burns away everything that is not real, that burns away everything that is not true, that does not love. We must not be afraid of the fire. We must have absolute confidence in the fire for the fire is the fire of love. The fire is even more—this is the great mystery of our faith—it is the fire *who* is love.

Say your mantra. If we truly say it we can be nowhere else but here and now.

After Meditation, from THE DESERT FATHERS: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks, tr. Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 131.

Lot went to Joseph and said, "Abba, as far as I can, I keep a moderate rule, with a little fasting, and prayer, and meditation and quiet: and as far as I can I try to cleanse my heart of evil thoughts. What else should I do?" Then the hermit stood up and spread out his hands to heaven, and his fingers shone like ten flames of fire, and he said, "Why not be totally changed into fire?"

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