

The real meaning of Jesus

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Although we heard both John Main and Laurence Freeman affirm the importance of the historical Jesus, both emphasize too that, however important that aspect is, he is much more than that. Seeing him only from the historical perspective can result in our not seeing his true nature at all – we only see our image of him, coloured by our own cultural, psychological and theological filters. Not only that, but we are convinced only our image is the right one. All that does is cause conflict about who he is, why he has come, what his meaning is, as we can see from present day arguments and from those in the early centuries of Christianity. Every interpretation and account of Jesus' life has an individual bias saying rather more about the one speaking or writing than about the actual person of Jesus.

On the whole we don't really think much about who Jesus truly is. Laurence Freeman in *'Jesus, the Teacher within'* says: *"For many Christians, this is a question they have never really listened to seriously or taken personally"*. The only way that we can discover his true being and meaning is by entering the silence through deep silent prayer: *"Discovering Jesus' identity for us is not achieved through intellectual or historical enquiry. It happens in the opening to our intuitive depths, to deeper and more subtle ways of knowing and seeing than*

we are accustomed to. This is prayer...an entry into an inner space of silence, where we are content to be without answers, judgements and images. ...It is the indefinable silence at the heart of the mystery of Jesus that ultimately communicates his true identity to those who encounter it.” He continues by saying that for Christians who follow the path of deep silent prayer, meditation, this *“will have a profound effect on their self-understanding as well as their sense who he is.”*

For Laurence Freeman and the early Christians the *“understanding that we cannot know anything, let alone God, without knowing ourselves”* was paramount. This is one of the important aspects of meditation we so often ignore: *“By meditation I mean not just the work of pure prayer but the whole life-field of self-knowledge which it drives.”* In the same way that we ignore who Jesus really is, we ignore who we really are. In both cases we feel we know. So why bother to think more about it? For those of you who have read the whole series of *‘Weekly Teaching’* from Year 1 up to now, know that who we think we are, is an illusionary image, the ‘ego’, our surface self, built up out of our own thoughts and images and those of others. We have read the words of John Main: *“Ego is essentially the image we have of ourselves, the image of ourselves that we try to project.”* And as the philosopher Wittgenstein ironically pointed out: *“Nothing is as difficult as not deceiving oneself.”* Not only who Jesus is but also who we truly are can only be discovered in the silence of deep contemplative prayer.

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