

The essential human condition

As it is a human quality to be able to switch into different modes of being, many of the things I have said apply not only to meditation in the Christian tradition but also to the form of silent, attentive prayer as found in other main religious traditions. Let's therefore take a moment to remind ourselves what makes our meditation Christian.

In his teaching Jesus is concerned to help us become again aware of the Kingdom, the Presence of God, and he recommends silent, interior prayer. We find the essence of meditation/contemplative prayer – silence, solitude and interiority – in his words in the Sermon on the Mount: *'But when you pray, go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your father, who is there in the secret place; and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you. (Mat 6,6)*. Cassian explains this as follows: *'We pray in our room when we withdraw our hearts completely from the clatter of every thought and concern and disclose our prayers to the Lord in secret, as it were intimately. We pray with the door shut when, with closed lips and in total silence, we pray to the searcher not of voices but of hearts.'*

Blaise Pascal, a 17th century French scientist, writer, philosopher and Catholic theologian was of the opinion that all our miseries stemmed from a single cause: our inability to remain sitting alone silently in a room and he felt that this would ultimately lead to our ruin. Unless we, as John Main said, take the searchlight of consciousness off the ego, and enter interior silence, we cannot glimpse the light of our true Self nor become aware of our link with Ultimate Reality and *'have life in all its fullness'*. Laurence Freeman in discussing meditation in *'Jesus, the Teacher Within'* highlights this needed shift: *"prayer must be rooted in the sincerity of the true Self rather than in the ego's self-consciousness."* This he bases on Jesus' saying: *'Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men; if you do, no reward awaits you in your Father's house in heaven.'* (Matt 6,1) Laurence Freeman continues: *Whenever we find security or take pleasure in the approval of others the authenticity of prayer is compromised.* Jesus extends this detachment of the needs and desires of the ego to ordinary life: *'I bid you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive and clothes to cover your body.'* (Matt 6, 25)

The use of a short word or phrase is also emphasized in the teaching of this Sermon: *'In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard.'* (Matt 6:7-8) Later in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer, Jesus recommends the tax-payer's way of prayer, who just constantly repeats the phrase: *'O God, have mercy on me, sinner that I am.'* (Luke 18: 10-14).

Our meditation is therefore Christian, as it is based on our faith and belief in Jesus' teaching.

