

Why Meditation Groups Matter Today

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In any active project we usually need a team to support us with the varied talents of its individual members; so, in the work of contemplation, we need community to help us get started and to persevere. Meditation, as John Main knew, creates community because it reveals how we are all connected and how interdependently we develop. The meditation group illustrates this truth. There is nothing new about Christians coming together to pray. It is forever renewing. It was said of the small Jerusalem church that formed after the death and resurrection of Jesus that ‘the whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; they joined in continuous prayer’..

We can see this in meditation groups today. In the last few decades there has been a spiritual transformation of the religious landscape, a silent revolution, a revolution in silence. It has been led not by a cloistered few but by ordinary men and women living in the world, making ends meet and working and raising families. So this has not been an academic discovery. The practice of meditation in the lives of so many people has awakened an awareness that the contemplative dimension of prayer is open to each of us and it is necessary for us all, religious and non-religious alike. Access is not restricted. It is a privilege of grace given by the Spirit to all. But like all gifts of the Spirit, we must do our

part. Contemplation is a gift and like all gifts it has to be accepted. If we are to live our particular vocation in daily life with depth and meaning, we must actively receive the gift of our potential for contemplation, tending it with humble devotion and daily fidelity.

It is no news that Christianity is in a turbulent transition from a medieval to a modern mentality. If we listened only to the media and the sociologists we might even conclude that it is in terminal decline. Certainly its structures and attitudes are going through a death process, but within the Christian view of death there is a certain hope of resurrection. The Christian meditation group is one of those positive and hopeful signs of renewed life, an authoritatively silent sign, that the spirit prevails over chaos and breakdown and brings about new harmony and order.

Meditation is a universal practice that leads beyond words, images and thoughts into that faith-filled and presence-filled emptiness, the poverty of spirit, that we call the silence of God. What is particularly Christian about it is the awareness that by faith it takes us directly into the prayer of Jesus himself. This means it leads us into a transformative discovery of his indwelling presence ('Christ in you'). When we share in the human consciousness of Jesus, who is simultaneously open to each of us and to God, we begin to be more truly open to one another. We can create and experience the evolving union of persons that we call community. As the fruits of the spirit appear – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control – so also does the grace of recognizing Jesus in our deeper selves and in one another.

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Image taken in Bonnevaux, summer 2021