The World Community for Christian Meditation

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John Main

John Main OSB (1926-1982)

was born in London on 21 January 1926. His roots were in Co Kerry, Ireland. Educated at Westminster Choir School and by the Jesuits at Stamford Hill, London, he served in the Royal Signals at the end of the war after which he joined the Canons Regular of the Lateran for a short period. He left and studied law at Trinity College Dublin and then joined the British Diplomatic Service and studied Chinese at SOAS in London.

Attached to the Governor General?s office in Malaya during the Emergency his duties took him one day to meet an Indian monk and Justice of the Peace, Swami Satyananda. From him he learned how to meditate and took up the discipline of silence, stillness and simplicity as part of his Christian faith and daily prayer.

When he returned to the West he became professor of International law at Trinity College, continuing to meditate as part of his Christian spiritual life. In 1958 he became a Benedictine monk at Ealing Abbey in London. He was asked to give up this practice of meditation, as it was not deemed then to be a Christian form of prayer.

However, while Headmaster of the school at St Anselm?s Abbey in Washington DC in 1969 John Main was led to a new study of the roots of his own Christian monastic tradition. In the Conferences of John Cassian and the teachings of the Desert fathers he found the Christian

expression of the same way of meditation he had learned in the East. Now recognising the teaching and the urgent need for it in the modern world he began to practice again.

In 1975 he opened the first Christian Meditation Centre at Ealing Abbey in London and began what was to be the culminating mission of his lifelong search for God and service of others. Realising that this way of the prayer of the heart could guide the search of many modern people for deeper spiritual experience, he recommended two regular daily periods of meditation to be integrated with the usual practices of Christian life. In his teaching he emphasised the simplicity and universality of the practice of meditation as well as acknowledging the fact of its being a discipline.

He accepted the invitation of the Archbishop of Montreal to establish a Benedictine Priory committed intentionally to the practice and teaching of Christian meditation. From here and for the last five years of his life he saw the widening extension of his teaching of this tradition. He believed that ?meditation creates community? and the World Community for Christian Meditation that grew from his work continues to express the truth of that insight for our time. Its mission is "to communicate and nurture meditation as passed on through the teaching of John Main in the Christian tradition, in the spirit of serving the unity of all."

"There is no part-time or partial prayer, as if the Spirit were not always alive in our heart. But there are times, our twice-daily meditation, when we make a complete turn of consciousness towards this ever-present reality. There comes a level of awakening when our awareness of this reality is constant, throughout our most diverse activities and concerns." (John Main)

It becomes more evident each year that meditation, as a way of friendship and compassion, builds a bridge of the spirit between peoples of different faiths, between rich and poor, and between those suffering conflict or division. The great social and psychological distresses of modern society call for a change of mind and heart, for a deep contemplative response. John Main believed that each human being, whatever their lifestyle, is called to this spiritual depth and that the foundations of civilisation rest upon the contemplative consciousness.

On December 30th 2007 a Memorial Service with music by Margaret Rizza was celebrated at Westminster cathedral where he had sung as a boy chorister.

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