



THE DEVELOPING ROLE OF REGIONAL CHRISTIAN MEDITATION CO-ORDINATORS

By Paul T. Harris

After spending some time at Antioch Paul departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

(Acts 18:23-28)

One of the more interesting developments in recent years has been the emergence of the role of Christian Meditation Coordinators in various countries of the world. Regional Coordinators are playing a vital role in sharing John Main's teaching. Perhaps it is time to examine this role, to understand its significance and to give it even greater support.

Historically we have only to look at St. Paul, Timothy, Titus, Barnabas and other early New Testament apostles to see how certain individuals were called not only to teach but to offer support and encouragement to neophyte communities of believers. This role is analogous to that of today's Christian Meditation Coordinator whose primary task is to nurture and strengthen existing Christian meditation groups, assist in the start up of new meditation groups in new geographic areas of a country and particularly encourage a sense of community amongst meditators.

If we examine St. Paul, his life, his writings and the environment of the early Church we can gain a perspective that will assist us to better understand the vital role of today's Christian meditation regional coordinators.

The Church in the first century was characterized by "smallness". The early Christians met in ordinary homes to celebrate the Eucharist, homes which could only have held a limited number of believers. These believers developed a spiritual intimacy and out of this closeness arose a sense of community.

Jesus had only a very small band of disciples. His work was not geared to a "mass movement". It depended on close intimate participation and group interaction. No wonder John Main was enamoured of E.F. Schumacher's book and philosophy "Small is Beautiful".

In the Acts of the Apostles we see the early Church developing close

community bonds, sharing material resources and looking after its weakest members. In the Jerusalem Church members even sold their own property in order to help the poor amongst them. Community life is the best environment for learning to take place. This is a valuable reminder that without real community no authentic Christian teaching can readily take root. Where there is no brotherly/sisterly care and mutual help there can be no effective teaching; an important lesson for the Christian meditation community and our understanding of the dynamics of meditation groups.

In St. Paul we learn that personal attention and community encouragement were characteristics of the early apostles; “Like a Father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you... to lead a life worthy of God” (Thess. 2:11). In the same manner Paul instructed members of the early Church to “encourage one another, and build up one another” (Thess. 4:18; 5-11). In Colossians Paul urges the Christian community that they are to teach and advise one another (Col. 3:16). Both Jesus and Paul traveled extensively bringing the “good news” to small hamlets and communities. In the life of Jesus and Paul we clearly see characteristics that apply to those who volunteer to be regional coordinators in nurturing the teaching of silence and stillness in prayer.

The primary role of a coordinator is to promote a sense of community so that the teaching of Christian meditation may effectively take root. They accomplish this through the strengthening of existing meditation groups. Like Jesus and Paul they are teachers and travelers in a similar sense, visiting groups in their geographic area of responsibility, offering support and encouragement to the weak, and challenging the stronger to launch out into the deep and start new groups.

How do they accomplish this task? A job description for regional coordinators encompasses the following responsibilities:

- To visit existing Meditation groups at least once a year (preferable twice or even three times) and offer on-going support to meditation group leaders.
- Encourage the development of new groups and personally assist prospective leaders in the start up of new groups.
- Encourage group leaders and group members to participate in Christian meditation conferences, seminars, retreats, schools, etc. and advise on the yearly speaker and location of the annual John Main seminar.
- Advise group leaders how to communicate the existence of their group by means of Church bulletin announcements, poster, shopping plaza bulletin board announcements, etc.

- Recommending to group leaders the availability of John Main/Laurence Freeman tapes and CD's through tape rental services available in various countries.
- Encourage leaders to make available a library of Christian meditation books and tapes on a loan basis for members (especially new members) of the group and / or encouraging group leaders to make available books on Christian meditation for sale to group meditators.
- Urge members of groups to subscribe to regional, national or International Christian Meditation newsletters.
- Provide hand-outs to group leaders on various aspects of Christian meditation; urge group leaders to acquire "The Pearl of Great Price" by Laurence Freeman on the role of groups and how to start a group and lead a group.
- Distribute information on The World Community for Christian Meditation and encourage donations to its annual financial appeals.
- Encourage groups in a given geographic area to meet together socially and periodically to build up a sense of community, closer fellowship and a bonding between members.
- Encourage the integration of meditation and action in groups through the adoption of meditation groups in India, Africa and other third world countries where the financial cost of tapes/books is prohibitive. (Queries to be directed to susan@wccm.org)
- Offer specific advice to group leaders on how to introduce newcomers to the teaching of Christian meditation and how to integrate newcomers into a group. A new resource sheet now available on "Ten Tips on How to Lead a Group" is attached.
- Build up a mailing list of names, addresses of meditators in their area of responsibility for direct mail use when speakers come to give conferences, retreats, etc.
- It is little wonder that the role of regional Christian meditation coordinator has grown spontaneously to answer a real need. These ordinary, but committed meditators have accepted the challenge of Jesus and St. Paul to pass on the "good news" by offering their individual gifts to the community. They require our support and heartfelt thanks for their hard work, and dedication in taking that extra step to share the teaching.
- Resource material available to regional coordinators is attached. Also see the www.wccm.org Web site link on Christian meditation groups.