



Meditatio
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Relationship with *Jesus*



You call me Lord and Master, and rightly so, for that is what I am. [But] I call you friends. I call you servants no longer. I call you my friends because I have shared with you everything I have learned from my Father. Jn 13:13; 15:15

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At a certain moment in your Christian life, you become aware that Jesus is aware of you. And that is a moment of deepening conversion. That's when our relationship with Jesus really becomes a relationship.

1

What are you looking for?

I'd like to begin with a story from the Gospel of John where Jesus makes his first appearance in the gospel, with John the Baptist standing with two of his disciples when Jesus passes by. John points to Jesus and says, 'There is the Lamb of God.' And the two disciples follow Jesus. Then Jesus turns and sees them following him and he asks them, 'What are you looking for?' They reply, 'Where are you staying?' And he says, 'Come and see.' So we're told they go and see where he is staying and they spend the rest of the day with him. Then St John ends: 'It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.'

The very first words of Jesus in the Gospel of John are that question: 'What are you looking for?' And it will be the question I hope that leads us into a deeper understanding of Jesus as our teacher, as the teacher within.

The story is very simple and yet, like everything we find in the Gospel of John especially, it's full of significance, full of deep meaning, every detail of it, just as every detail of our lives, the most ordinary day, is filled with wonder, filled with significance and meaning, if we can see it. Very often we finish a day and we say, 'oh that was a lousy day' or 'that was a bad day' in some way, and we don't see the meaning of our experience. But everything that happens to us is charged with the meaning of God. So this very simple story has a lot of meaning for us.

We've all had John the Baptists in our lives. Think of the people who pointed out Jesus to you in the way that John the Baptist points to Jesus for his disciples: 'There is the Lamb of God.' Who were the people in your life who pointed you in the direction of Jesus? We may not know fully what Lamb of God means. It's one of the titles by which Jesus is called, and he's called by many different titles in the gospels. We may not know fully what that means or the theology of

it and so on, but something attracts us, something hooks us, and we start to follow.

That following of Jesus may go on for many years, until a very decisive moment happens. That's the moment when we are aware that Jesus is aware of us, that he has turned towards us and he sees us following him. That's when our relationship with Jesus really becomes a relationship. We're not just following behind him like a little poodle. We are actually in relationship with him. And any human relationship – think of your meaningful human relationships, personal relationships – there has to be a two-way mutual recognition if it is really to be called a relationship.

What are you looking for?

So at a certain moment in your Christian life, you become aware that Jesus is aware of you. There is a relationship. And that is a deepening; that's a moment of deepening conversion. And I think it's a moment where our prayer also begins to dip into a deeper level. This is a moment where we begin to discover the contemplative dimension of prayer. This doesn't happen maybe just overnight. It may be a process that takes several years to mature.

Then Jesus asks his question: 'What are you looking for?' What are you looking for? A very simple question. Very straightforward. It's the kind of question that isn't so easy for us to answer. But it's a question that concentrates us – that makes you reflect, that makes you question yourself, your values, your way of life; how you spend your time or your money or your relationships. What are the real values, the real priorities of your life? So this question of Jesus is not a question that you answer once and for all. It's a question that we need to listen to every day.

Where are you staying?

Now the disciples, we're told, don't give him a straight answer to that question. They reply with another question. They say: 'Where are you staying?' That's as if perhaps they know that if they knew

where he was staying, then they would know what they were looking for. They ask a disciple's question, a student's question. The word *staying* here is a very rich word in the Gospel of John. It doesn't just mean, what's your address, or give me your e-mail address and I'll get in touch with you sometime. 'Where are you staying?' means 'Where are you dwelling?' Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks about the Father dwelling in him and he dwelling in the Father and both of them coming to dwell, to stay in us, the disciple. So this word *staying* means not just where are you living, but 'Where are you in me? Where am I in relation to you?'

Come and see

And how does Jesus respond to this question? He doesn't just give information. He gives an invitation, a personal invitation, a very direct simple open invitation: 'Come and see.' In other words, experience the answer to your question for yourself. And it's into experience to enter meditation. We are not just coming up with theoretical answers to these questions but we are entering into the experience, the life-changing experience that these questions invite us to get into. Come and see for yourself not because of what somebody else has said to you, not because of what you've read, not because of what you've heard people give talks about, but what you yourself have felt and seen and experienced. That's the invitation of Jesus to a personal experience.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon

And we are told the disciples accept the invitation. They go and they see where he is staying. So they do enter into this experience of his presence. And then they spend the rest of the day with him, the rest of their life with him. That's the end of the story apart from one little detail.

Remember St John said it was about four o'clock in the afternoon. For an Englishman, four o'clock in the afternoon has a very strong meaning; it means it's the time when we stop and have a cup

of tea. Our encounter with Jesus and the unfolding of our relationship with him throughout our life is something that occurs in real time, not just in the head, but in real life day by day, morning, afternoon, evening.

But there's another meaning to it too, I think. Four o'clock in the afternoon was a traditional time of prayer for the early Christians. The early Christian communities divided the day into times of prayer – morning, midday, early afternoon and night-time. And, either alone or as a group, they would stop and pray at those times. So that means that the whole of our encounter with Jesus from our infancy, as we mature, as our prayer goes deeper, all of this takes place in the context of prayer.

I hope that today we can come to a deeper experience of what we are looking for. And probably what we are all looking for is a deeper experience of God, a closer relationship with Jesus. Meditation brings us to a deeper personal relationship with Jesus,



2

Following Jesus

What do we mean by meditation, as Christians? For the Christian, above all it is about following Jesus as those two disciples did in that story from the Gospel of John. That means we're also following his teaching. Let's just look at some of the key points of his teaching and see how meditation makes sense as a way of following that teaching, putting it into practice.

Meditation as the way of leaving self behind

What does he say first of all? He says, 'Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must leave self behind.' (Matt 6:24) What does that mean, leaving self behind? It's very important how we understand that teaching of Jesus, because it's a very central part of his gospel. What does it mean to leave self behind? Does it mean I have to repress myself? Does it mean I have to deny myself any pleasure in life? Does it mean I have to punish myself, to inflict as much suffering on myself as possible? That isn't really in the spirit of the gospel. The gospel of Jesus is about finding peace and joy. These were the characteristics of the early Christian church – peace and joy. You're not going to be very peaceful if you have a negative, repressive, self-denying attitude to yourself. So, leaving self behind is not a negative statement, not a negative spirituality.

Sometimes we have slipped as Christians into a negative spirituality. We've become obsessed with guilt, with sin, with punishment, with the fear of hell. But none of that is true to the gospel of Jesus. Jesus does not want anyone to feel guilty about anything. He wants us to repent, which means to say, 'Yes I did wrong. Yes I'm sorry. Yes I'll do better,' but not to feel guilty. There's nothing in the gospel of Jesus, when you read it in its essence, that presents us with a God who will punish us. God does not punish.

God cannot punish. It's not in the nature of God to punish us. Why are we so fixated on an image of God who will punish us? We can't love a God who would punish us. We can't. If you think someone is going to punish you, you can't love them.

So, leaving self behind is nothing to do with all of that negative spirituality. It is not about repression or guilt, but it is about liberation. To leave self behind means to be liberated from all egocentric obsession, from the ego-bound world, from the prison of selfishness, of self-centredness, from the prison of desire or compulsion or addiction or fear or insecurity. This is what leaving self behind means – leaving the ego behind and moving out of the prison of the ego into the great open space of the spirit, into the freedom of the children of God. And this again is precisely what meditation is about.

What happens in meditation is that you unhook yourself from your ego and you reconnect with your true self. You move out of self-fixation, self-consciousness, self-obsession into the freedom of your spirit. A self-fixated person can't love. A selfish person can't be happy. There's a beautiful Buddhist text that sums the whole of Mahayana Buddhism: 'All the unhappiness in the world comes from people who are trying to find happiness for themselves. All the happiness in the world comes from people who are trying to make other people happy.' That's very true to the gospel. That's what leaving self behind means – finding happiness by freeing ourselves from our ego.

How do you do that in meditation? In a very simple way, we stop thinking about ourselves. I said simple, not easy. It isn't easy to stop thinking about ourselves, because we are so caught up in ourselves. But in meditation, we reverse that process. We try something different. We stop thinking about ourselves and we place our attention in God. I don't say we are even thinking about God either. In meditation we are not thinking about God, but we are paying attention to God. It's a very important distinction, because meditation is not about thinking.

I was once giving a retreat in the States and trying to describe meditation to the audience, and then I noticed somebody sitting in

the front row who had a tee shirt with a thing printed on it. The slogan on the tee shirt summed up the whole of my talk. I didn't need to say anything else. It said: 'Meditation is not what you think.' That's one of the most difficult things to get across about meditation. It isn't what you think. It's not about thinking.

Meditation as the way of detachment

The second essential teaching of Jesus is to renounce all your possessions: 'No one can be a follower of mine unless they renounce all their possessions.' (Lk 14:33) So what does that mean? If it meant that we all had to give up our wallets and credit cards and cars and houses and clothes, we might as well go home now. I'm very attached to my watch here. So what does it mean renouncing your possessions? Does it mean we all have to become like St Francis? Give away all our possessions to the poor? Maybe for a few people that is what is meant and we benefit from the great example of poverty that they make. But I don't think it is what is meant for everyone. We're not all meant to become beggars or *sanyasis*. What I think it means is that we have to become non-possessive. We have to stop trying to possess people or possess the things that we have in a selfish way.

To be non-possessive means to practise detachment. That means if, and I hope you don't, you come up to me and you say 'I've lost my watch and I really need one, can I have yours?' I ought to be able to say, 'Sure, have it' – to practise detachment. And the only way we can practise detachment, while living in the real world, is again to get back to the root problem in our possessiveness, which is our ego. If we can let go of our ego then we have let go of all our possessions. If we can leave our self behind then we have renounced all our possessions.

Meditation as the way of love

The third central teaching of Jesus of course, as he says, sums up the whole of the Law: 'Love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole heart and your whole strength, and your neighbour as

yourself.' To love God and to love one another, equally important and inseparable commands of Jesus. What does that mean? What does it mean to love your neighbour? If you pay attention to someone, then you are loving them.

Just think, at some point in your life where you had a lot of trouble, you had a problem you wanted to talk over. You go to see a friend. You talk it through with them. They listen. What you really want them to do is to listen, to pay attention to you. You are not really so concerned about getting an answer or solution. If that person paid attention to you, really listened to you, then you will leave that interview feeling better, lighter. Maybe you haven't got the solution to your problem, but you're able to deal with it much better. Why? Because you have been loved. Not romantic love, but it's love. In a marriage you can live with the same person, go through the routines of life with them, but as the years go by you may find that you've stopped paying attention to them. Then you suddenly realise that the love has disappeared in the marriage or the friendship.

To pay attention, to really listen, is what love is about – loving God, and loving your neighbour, and loving yourself. And meditation is about paying attention.



3

Jesus as Teacher

Jesus is called teacher in the gospels more often than by any other title – *rabbi, rabboni*, teacher. His contemporaries saw him as a spiritual teacher, and one of his characteristics as a teacher is that he taught very frequently by asking questions. A good teacher, when you think about it, does use questions. You can get information out of a book, but to really understand a subject, to really open your mind to it, you need to be stimulated by the right questions and to understand the questions.

When I was a little boy at school, I was very bad at maths, and this was a long time before I became honest and truthful. I discovered with some of my friends that the teacher had a book with the answers at the back, and we reckoned that this probably was not the only copy of the book in existence. So we went down to a bookshop in London one Saturday and we got the textbook with the answers – teacher’s edition. All our problems were over; we never had to worry again about sitting for hours at night doing algebra and geometry; all the answers were there. So our marks shot up overnight. But it didn’t do me any good because I had the answers, but I still couldn’t even understand the questions. Very often we’re much more concerned about getting the answers to our problems than really listening to the important questions.

We all have questions; we’d like to know about the afterlife, about reincarnation, about purgatory, about what happens next and so on. Why is it that the great teachers, the great spiritual teachers of humanity, didn’t just write down the answers to all these questions once and for all. Maybe because these are not the important questions. So what are the questions that Jesus asks?

He asked (I counted once for my book but I’ve forgotten how many) something like 163 questions. ‘What are you looking for?’ is

one. Another one he asked one day when he was with some of his friends; he was praying with his disciples. When he finished praying, he turned to them and said, ‘Who do people say I am?’ (Mk 8:27) In the various gospels you get slightly different responses. In one version, they say, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah come back to life,... some say one of the prophets.’ (Mk 8:28) And then he says, ‘But who do *you* say I am?’ At that point Peter jumps in and says, ‘You are the Christ, the son of God.’ (Mk 8:29) What does he say to Peter? He doesn’t say ‘Peter, you’re right; you get a hundred percent; you can become the first Pope’. What he says is ‘be quiet’. He gave them strict instructions not to tell anyone this. This was the answer, but he was more interested in the question: ‘Who do *you* say I am?’ And immediately then he goes on to give his teaching on leaving self behind. He told them that he himself would be going to Jerusalem, he would be dying in Jerusalem, and that they too, if they were to find their true self, would have to lose themselves. ‘What does it profit you if you gain the whole world at the cost of your true self?’ (Matt 16:26)

Just take this one question of Jesus: Who do you say I am? And instead of trying to come up with the right answer, the catechism answer, just stay with the question. That question will lead us on a journey, a journey of relationship and a journey of discovery; a journey of relationship with Jesus who asks us the question and a journey of self-discovery. This is the first level of our relationship with Jesus – as a teacher.

I once asked the Dalai Lama, ‘Who do you think Jesus is?’ And immediately, without hesitation, he said, ‘A Bodhisattva, a fully realised human being.’ A Buddhist could not say any more than that. And I’ve never met anyone who has not recognised Jesus as a teacher. I’ve met many people who have left the Church, but I haven’t met anyone who has left the Church because they have rejected the teaching of Jesus. So Jesus is universally recognised as one of the great spiritual teachers of the human family. That is the first level. This is the beginning, this is the first level. This is where we are caught by his teaching and by his authority. And the early people who listened to Jesus in the gospel, we hear that they listened

to him with great attention because he spoke to them with authority.

Take that question again: 'Who do you say I am?' If I had started this morning with that question to you, 'Who do you say I am?' you might not have said anything but you might have thought, 'Who the hell does he think he is?' This question 'Who do you say I am?' might suggest a very, inflated ego, a megalomaniac, as some people thought Jesus was. But for others, what they heard in his question was humility, not pride. All real authority is based on humility, and it is this humility of Jesus that is the secret of his identity.

What do we mean by humility? Humility doesn't mean putting yourself down all the time and saying: I'm a sinner, I'm no good at anything, I'm hopeless. That can be a subtle form of pride too. Humility means knowing yourself. Actually the word *humility* comes from the word *humus* which means *earth*. 'Humility' describes somebody who is grounded, who knows themselves, is in touch with themselves. Jesus could ask this question in all humility because he knew who he was. He wasn't asking this question in order to find out who he was. He was asking it because he *knew* who he was. He knew who he was in relationship to God, which is the deepest form of self-knowledge: Knowing ourselves in God. That's where we come from; that's our origin.

To really know yourself then, you've got to know where you've come from, where you're springing from. Later in the Gospel of John Jesus actually says, 'I know where I have come from, and I know where I am going.' (Jn 8:14) This is his humility and his authority. And this is why we can relate to Jesus as a teacher, because he has authority. His authority shines through in every one of his words and teachings, and also in his life, the story of his life. He was true to his teaching. He embodied his teaching. He didn't preach one thing and do another. He lived his teaching. He was his teaching. So we can relate to Jesus as a teacher because of his authority. Just think of the teachers you had in your life who have really helped you to get where you are. They may be teachers at school, or friends, or people in your family, or mentors. If you can call them to mind, the teachers who you really value in your life, you're really grateful to, you'll begin to get a sense of what it means to say that Jesus is our teacher.

The first thing about any teacher is that they have to know more than we do. It has to be a useful knowledge, a knowledge that is useful to us. The Buddha was once asked after his enlightenment, when he was giving a public talk and a man stood up in the audience and said, 'If you're enlightened and you know everything, tell me my name and tell me where I've come from.' The Buddha said: 'It's true. I do know everything, but I only know what is necessary to know.' So a teacher is somebody who knows what is necessary for us, and a spiritual teacher is therefore somebody who knows who they are, who has self-knowledge. And if you want to grow in self-knowledge, then it's a very good idea to get close to people who know themselves better than you know yourself. People of self-knowledge, these are the people we call wise, they stimulate you to grow in self-knowledge yourself. And we believe that it is possible for us to come into the presence of Jesus, *now*.

The second characteristic of a teacher is that they want to transmit what they know. They're not hanging onto their knowledge as if it were a valuable commodity. If I know something that you don't, and I let you know that I know it but you don't know it, then I've got power over you. So, knowledge can become power. We pay for knowledge today. But a teacher doesn't hoard knowledge, doesn't hang on to it. A teacher just wants to transmit it, let it go, communicate it. We see that in Jesus when he said to his disciples just before the Last Supper, 'You call me Lord and Master, and rightly so, for that is what I am. [But] I call you friends. I call you servants no longer. I call you my friends because I have shared with you everything I have learned from my Father.' (Jn 13:13, 15:15) Everything.

So Jesus is a teacher of some remarkable knowledge, and he wants to transmit that knowledge to us, not in a dominating way but through friendship. He's a teacher who we can also say is a friend. And a friend is somebody who is truthful with you. A friend is somebody who only wishes you well. 'I call you friends because I have shared with you everything I have learned from my Father.' What he is describing here is the transmission of his Spirit.

A teacher also wants to train his students and then to

commission them to go out and teach what they have learnt. That is exactly what Jesus has done. He empowers his disciples, his students. 'You will do even greater things than I have done,' he says, 'because I'm going to the Father.' (Jn 14:12)

Then, a teacher also withdraws, gets out of the way, disappears, because you can become very dependent on a teacher. Because you recognise how much they have taught you, how great they are, you can very easily just get dependent on them and never stand on your own feet. So a good teacher also knows when to withdraw and let you stand on your own. This is what Jesus did. He said, 'It is good for you that I am going away, because then I will send the Spirit.' (Jn 16:7) His death and his ascension are the signs of his withdrawing from us, but not his deserting us. 'I will come back to you', he says. But he comes back to us in the Spirit.

So this is our first level, our first contact with Jesus, as a teacher, and maybe that is as far as we go. Many people, many non-Christians, have deep respect and deep love for Jesus, and deep reverence for the gospel, but they don't go any further into a personal relationship with him.



4

Jesus as Saviour and Healer

For some people, those whom he calls to be his disciples, the experience of his teaching, of his living Word, enters into us and we move to another level of relationship with him. This is where you might say we begin to experience Jesus as saviour. The word *saviour* means *healer*. The early Christians spoke of Jesus very often as the Divine Physician.

He healed us of the wounds of sin, of the wounds of our suffering, the wounds of humanity. No one gets very far in life without being wounded, without being hurt, without having their self-esteem damaged, or their hope disappointed, or their love rejected, or without the experience of betrayal, being let down. No one gets very far without being hurt. And those hurts, those wounds that life gives us – just for example take the experience of being betrayed, being let down – those can run very deep into our psyche, into our self. And then to deal with those wounds, we often build walls to protect ourselves: 'This isn't going to happen to me again. I'm not going to put myself in that position again.' So we start to get hardened hearts; we start to build up resistance to love, resistance to other people. We become more isolated, less trusting. Then we wonder why we're sad. This is where we need healing.

For some people, who we could call the disciples of Jesus, the experience of his teaching, of his living Word, enters into us and begins to heal us of those wounds. It may be through any number of ways, maybe through scripture, maybe through friends, maybe through an inspired spiritual teacher, maybe through the sacraments. Different ways, different people. He gets in in all sorts of different ways. He'll find a way under the door, even if we've locked the door.

When we begin to sense that we are feeling better as a result of this relationship with Jesus as healer, we begin to feel more self-acceptance and wholeness. We begin to see how we can relate to

other people better, more lovingly. We're capable of forgiving the hurts that people have put upon us, of letting them go. We're capable of more compassion. We're capable of being more patient with ourselves even though we've got lots of problems and lots of sins and lots of faults, but we don't beat ourselves up all the time. These are the ways in which we begin to experience the saving work, the healing work of Jesus.

It's gradual. There may be dramatic moments, but it's gradual and it is irreversible. It's not like the pills you take when you've got a toothache, a temporary relief of pain. It's a curing, it's a healing. In the gospels, Jesus is often shown as a healer, a miraculous healer, but again, he didn't want his disciples advertising him as 'Jesus the miraculous healer'. He told them not to promote him like that. In many of those healing stories, he heals by touching; and he still heals us by touching us. There is an interior touch, a spiritual touch which heals when his power comes into us.

As we begin to recognise Jesus in this way, as our saviour, as one who heals in our life, our relationship with him has moved to a much deeper and more personal and intimate one. He's no longer just a great spiritual teacher of humanity but we now have a personal, mysterious, experience of him, and it will be expressed in different ways by different people. It's very difficult to speak about your love for someone else. It's a very intimate, personal, private experience. It can't be shared, it's difficult to express.



5

Jesus as Lord, the Cosmic Christ

There's a third level of relationship. This you might say is where we come to see Jesus as Lord, or the cosmic Christ. We begin to see that this Jesus, through whom we have experienced healing, is also at work everywhere.

First of all we see it in other people, at first perhaps in our Christian friends and Christian community. That's the importance of the Church. We reflect Jesus to each other; we share with each other what we've experienced of Jesus, what our faith means to us. So we begin to build up a picture that this isn't just my little Jesus who I've got in my pocket, but that this personal relationship with Jesus is a community relationship too. This might be a little bit of a challenge to us because we tend to be possessive about love. We want to be loved exclusively. We think that if anyone loves us, then they shouldn't love anyone else. And if they love me and somebody else, that means they're not giving me *all* their love. So we get jealous and possessive. But if we grow up, if we learn what love means, then we realise that that isn't what love is about at all. The nature of love is that it is completely personal. We can be loved completely and uniquely, but not exclusively.

So we begin to see that this love we have with Jesus is also a cosmic thing, and it isn't restricted to the church either. We can't be possessive about Jesus and say that Jesus only works in the Church. He works in different ways in different places, but we recognise now that the Holy Spirit doesn't work just in the Church or among Christians.

In other words, our minds begin to expand. We begin to grow; our hearts and our minds begin to grow. Usually the heart grows first and the mind has to stretch afterwards. This is what we're facing today, a great challenge to the Church as we enter into dialogue with other religions. This is a new, historical moment

because Christians have never been in this kind of relationship with other religions before.

Most of us here, all of us I think, could remember the days when we used to think, or we were told anyway, that if you weren't Christian you were damned, more or less. Maybe that never did make total sense to people, but it was the mind-set of the time. That is no longer the teaching of the Church. The Church, according to the 2nd Vatican Council, rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions. The present Pope has urged Christians to enter into dialogue, and deep spiritual dialogue, with other faiths. But then that poses lots of questions. What is the uniqueness of Jesus? Is Jesus the only way to salvation? These are the questions that we will now have to listen to. We have to work out new theological language, new ways of thinking. Our encounter with the religions of the East don't threaten our Christian faith, but it challenges us to grow and to find new ways of expressing the mystery of Christ. This is the great new era we're moving into. This is where the cosmic Christ begins to emerge.

But this cosmic Christ, in the past, we thought was like an emperor sitting on his throne, and had reduced everybody else, put everybody else down. But that isn't the meaning of the cosmic Christ. It's not an imperialist Christ. But very often Christianity became an imperialist religion, not very true to the teaching of Jesus or the humility of Jesus. But the cosmic Christ doesn't mean an emperor. The cosmic Christ means this, as St Paul says, 'The secret is this: Christ within you, the hope of your glory to come.' (Col 1:27)

The cosmic Christ is the inner Christ, recognised as being present in everyone else as well as yourself. When I see the Christ in me, in you, then I'm beginning to see the cosmic Christ. In the *Upanishads*, there's a beautiful description of the heart, the symbol of the inner temple. And it says:

At the centre of the castle of Brahman, the human body, is the heart; and in the deepest place of the heart, there is a flame, the size of a thumb; and in that tiny space, are all the worlds, the whole universe, everything that is.

So the Christ who dwells in us, in the deepest part of our own being, is our way into communion with everything that is, with everyone and everything.

These are three stages, if you like, of relationship. And any human relationship takes time to unfold; you don't expect to get to know somebody fully the first time you meet them. The relationship unfolds. Maybe there are mistakes, maybe there are misunderstandings at times, but a relationship unfolds through fidelity, through friendship over time. And self-knowledge is vital to any friendship or any relationship. When two people are in relationship with each other, the quality of their relationship will depend upon their self-knowledge. If I'm in relationship with you, my self-knowledge and your self-knowledge need to be growing, otherwise our relationship isn't growing. That's why a lot of relationships run into trouble.

So if we want our relationship with Jesus to grow, if we want to be able to understand who he is, then we must be growing in self-knowledge ourselves. And that is the work of prayer. That's why our meditation takes us into a deeper, more personal relationship with Jesus. At the beginning, our relationship with him is rather immature. We may think of Jesus as somebody outside of us, somebody who just gives us favours. But, gradually, if we grow and deepen in our spiritual life, in our self-knowledge, we'll begin to understand the mystery of our being *in* Christ and Christ being *in* us. It is a sharing, a merging, a union of lives. That's the mystery that Jesus is to us.



6

The New Holiness

Our meditation, our contemplative prayer, is I think vital for this deepening and maturing of Christian faith. Nothing is more important for the Church today everywhere in the world than for the disciples of Jesus to get to know him better. That means for them to grow in self-knowledge through the deepening of their prayer. That is the hope for the church. The Church is going to have lots of challenges in this millennium. We will meet those challenges if we have grown in depth. And that seems to be one of the great works of the Spirit at the moment – leading people into contemplative practice.

This means a very practical thing, a change in the way you pray. It doesn't mean giving up other forms of prayer, but it means putting into your life of prayer a commitment to these times of stillness, morning and evening. That will almost inevitably lead into some experience of a contemplative community, joining a meditation group for example, because all of us grow in community and we need the support and love and inspiration of a community to keep up the discipline. But I can't do it for you, and you can't do it for me, but we can do it together.

I also think this is of great importance for the world we're living in at the moment. The world will never be the same again after the 11th of September attack in New York. It certainly has been a significant historical landmark.

New meaning of holiness

I think that what we are beginning to discover is a new meaning of holiness, and the importance of holiness for the world. The new holiness is characterised by a sense of the global unity of humanity, by a universality of outlook. Holiness is holiness, that's true; holy

people are good people. But holiness in the past tended to be constricted by the feeling: 'well maybe Christians are more holy than Buddhists; or we're more holy than them; or God loves us more than others.' But I think we're coming into a vision of God that is much closer to the teaching of Jesus and what Jesus embodies for us in a unique way. What does he embody? God. And what does he say about God? He says: 'God sends his rain on the just and the unjust. He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.' (Matt 5:45) God's love is universal and unconditional; God has no favourites – the words of Jesus, which he embodied in his life and teaching, the way he lived, the way he died, and the way he moves among us now through the Spirit. We are slowly evolving as Christians and as human beings into a full realisation and full understanding of those words.

For the first time in history, human beings have been able to see the planet earth from outer space. We have seen the earth rising over the horizon of the moon; we've seen this little small round blue and green and white planet moving in the blackness of space. We've seen how small we are, how interconnected we are. And we saw, about ten years ago, the leaders of the world religions invited by the Pope to Assisi praying together for the first time. We've a long way to go, but we have come a long way. Perhaps, one of the meanings of 9/11 is the universality of the response it evoked. I was in the States at the time when that happened. There were some voices raised saying, 'Let's nuke them; let's bomb them to hell.' But I was struck by how few were those voices. The very first response to the tragedy in New York from all around the world was compassion. The politics came later; the first response was compassion. That is the universal truth. That is the love of God, coming through as the compassion we have for each other.

So our growth in our relationship to Jesus has many mysteries yet to unfold as we discover the full meaning of who Jesus is. But the starting point and, in a sense, the finishing point is in our own heart.



7

Christian and Non-Christian Meditation

There is a difference between Christian and non-Christian meditation. The difference is the faith that we bring to our meditation as Christians, which is our faith experience of Jesus as Teacher, Saviour, and Lord – as Jesus living, through the Resurrection, in us. So we would see our meditation as prayer, as a very pure and simple kind of prayer. As with all prayer from a Christian point of view, it leads us into the prayer of Christ, into union with the humanity of Christ, and then joining him in his journey to the Father in the Spirit. So there is this Trinitarian Father-Son-Spirit dynamic that underlies our understanding and experience of meditation as Christians.

There are also a lot of similarities and parallels between meditation in different traditions. Basically, all meditation is about stillness, bringing the mind to stillness, going beyond mental activity (that means talking and thinking and imagining), moving beyond that to a deeper level of silence and pure attention.

The Buddhist would describe that one way; we would describe it another. I would describe this pure attention as worship. It is worship 'in spirit and in truth' (Jn 4:23) as Jesus said.

In one sense the experience of meditation is the same. If you or I sit down to meditate with Buddhists or any other religion, we will share with them the same challenge – the difficulty of sitting still, the difficulty of dealing with distractions, and falling asleep, and the difficulty of meditating every day. The challenge is the same, humanly speaking.

The fruits of meditation will be the same experientially. St Paul speaks about the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22) And there is a description in the *Dhammapada*, a Buddhist text, which is almost exactly the same as that. The Dalai Lama said that the purpose of any religion is to make nice people, and the test of any religion is: Does it produce good people, people of good heart, people who are forgiving, compassionate, tolerant, wise, kind and so on? So, experientially, meditation is the same.

Our understanding of that experience is going to be different. The way we describe it, the meaning that we give to it will be different. The basic difference for the Christian meditator is the centrality of the relationship with Christ; and the way we come into the meditation practice will be different. The most natural and best way really to come into your meditation practice is through a spiritual tradition.

I don't think there is any realistic or desirable point where we would say all religions will become one, because God seems to be working through all these religions in different ways. So it isn't that we are trying to create one universal religion, because there is a meaning in each of these. And certainly, to be pragmatic, there is not going to be one universal religion, by the time many of us die anyway.

So we have to accept and rejoice in the diversity of religious expression. As Christians, that forces us to go much deeper into the meaning of our Christian faith. We are not just Christians because our parents were Christians or because we have a certain cultural identity, but because of a unique sense of being called.

Although we won't have a universal religion, we can speak about a universal spirituality. There's a lot of talk today about a universal ethic. Are there certain moral principles that we can share between all cultures? Maybe. And maybe there is also a universal spirituality to be found, I think, in the experience of meditation. Because with all the differences that exist between religions – you'll never erase those differences – there is a common ground. And the common ground is in the silence, the stillness, and the simplicity of meditation. And if we go into that common ground together, if we meditate together, then we learn to look at each other very differently. The

differences are no longer divisions. We can look at a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Muslim, we can look at that person as a brother or sister; and there is a new perception, a new way of relating.

Dialogue is certainly a very, important part of it, learning to dialogue. We don't know how to dialogue very well yet. Dialogue doesn't mean you are trying to convert the other person without their knowing it. If we approach dialogue through the experience of meditation together, then I think we'll discover what this universal spirituality means.

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Fr Laurence proposes meditation as a work of deep prayer which progressively deepens our relationship with Jesus. As the way of the mantra moves us out of self-fixation and focuses our attention on the presence of Jesus within us, we be-come aware of Jesus paying attention to us personally. In this mutual recognition relationship begins. We see Jesus first as our teacher, then as our personal saviour, and as our hearts and minds expand, we see him as the cosmic Christ present everywhere. We then experience the mystery of Christ being in us and we in Christ. It is a union of lives.



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