

Father Bede Griffiths explains the significance to the Church of John Main's work in meditation*

(Father Bede Griffiths is a Roman Catholic monk, who for the last 30 years has lived in an ashram in India. He is probably the best known modern religious interpreter of Eastern religions to the West. His ashram is a Christian community which seeks to become a prayer centre, where people of different religious traditions can meet together in an atmosphere of prayer and grow together towards that unity in Truth which is the goal of all religion.)

In my experience John Main is the best spiritual guide in the Church today. In the world in which we are now living, for a great many people the Christian faith has lost its meaning. John Main was acutely aware that there was "something missing" in the life of the ordinary Christian and that the Church was not answering the need of the majority of people, especially the young of our time. John Main saw the root of the problem to be that people had lost touch with reality, with the reality of themselves and of the world around them. The problem was how to recover this lost dimension, how to recover the sense of an ultimate meaning in life, how to escape from the illusion created both by religion and by the world, and to realize the truth of the self and the world.

John Main was led to his discovery of the deeper meaning of life by his contact with a Hindu Swami years before he became a Benedictine monk. It was in Malaya that as a young man he met Swami Satyananda and learned from him the way of the "mantra", which became for him the means of access to the reality behind the illusion of this world. A recovery of the depths of the Christian faith can only come when we encounter the profound experience of the inner self.

John Main learned through his use of the mantra, taught him by the Hindu Swami, to discover this deeper dimension of his being, but the decisive moment came when he discovered in Cassian, the Christian monk of the fifth century, the same method of the mantra and realized that it was part of the authentic Christian tradition. This tradition derived from the Fathers of the Desert and had been continued through the Middle Ages especially in the tradition of the Jesus Prayer in the Eastern Church, but also in the beautiful medieval English

* Adopted from Foreword to John Main's book "The Inner Christ".

treatise known as *The Cloud of Unknowing*. It was this tradition, which had been lost in subsequent ages, which John Main saw as his vocation to renew in the Church. But he saw this as by no means confined to the monastic order to which he belonged. It was his genius to discern that it was a way of prayer which was available to every Christian, and to people of no particular religious faith as well.

John Main came therefore with a definite method, the way of the mantra, the repetition of a 'sacred word', which he found to be the ideal method for awakening this deeper sense of reality.

What exactly does it mean, to be aware of one's inner self, the self beyond the rational mind? It means to go beyond the ego. As long as one remains on the level of sense and reason, one remains under the control of the ego. It is only when we go beyond sense and reason that we become aware of our deeper self, that we contact the reality, the real person in us, and at the same time begin to make contact with the reality of the world. It is the paradox which always faces us, that reality is not outside us but within. As long as we live on the surface of life, we see only the surface of the world around us. Only when we enter into our own centre do we find the centre of the world around us. To go beyond the ego is therefore to find ourselves not in isolation but in communion. It is to realize our intimate relationship with everyone and everything.

John Main had discovered that through the practice of the mantra one can go beyond the ego, the limited human self, and open oneself to others not on the surface but in depth. One begins to discover what he called the 'communion of love'. It is one of the most striking aspects of his method of meditation that it leads to communion, it builds up community, it takes one out of oneself and relates one to the real world. He became acutely aware that people in the Church as well as outside it were living on the surface of life and therefore were becoming isolated and alienated from themselves and from the world. He found in his method of meditation the answer to this human need. I emphasize this matter of method, because I find that most people today need a method. There is a search for God, for truth, for reality going on all over the world, but people need a concrete method to bring them into contact with this reality. In that lies the attraction of Hinduism and Buddhism to multitudes of people in our time, because they teach definite and well-tried methods of meditation. John Main found a method of Christian meditation, which would lead to the same experience of the inner self, the centre of truth and reality.