

ENVIRONMENT and SPIRITUALITY

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION, ENVIRONMENT AND SPIRITUALITY

(edited with permission)

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CHRISTIAN MEDITATION



My hermitage is located in the heart of the ancient temperate rainforest, near Vancouver Island, B.C. The forest borders on the Oyster River which sings throughout the day and night, it is like music to my heart and its sound is like a mantra. It reminds me of another river, the river of love that flows between Jesus and the Father which carries us on our journey.

My life long search led me here. A strong desire to go into the woods to see "what life was all about" started in my teens. New England transcendentalists like Emerson, Parker, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman inspired me. The words of St. Paul, "Pray always without ceasing", admonished me. Was there a link between the forest and the meditative life?

As my journey and search continued, it included: (1) Teaching "natural history" subjects at Osceola Boy Scout Camp in the Ozarks of Missouri. (2) I was invited into the Honorary tribe of Mic-O-Say, where I came to know and respect the Native Culture and the deep religious spirit of its people who knew that "Spirit filled the whole earth". (3) Working as an Air Force Navigator. (4) Studying Ornithology at Cornell University. (5) Entering the Anglican Priesthood. (6) Traveling to England to explore the Contemplative dimension of the church of England. (7) Living as an Anglican hermit in Connecticut. (8) A long prayerful study of the Catholic church. (9) Spent eight years as a Hermit monk in Iowa where I studied the roots of monks. It was during this study that I found the history of the Hermit monks, realizing that they were the first monks of the Egyptian desert. (10) I was ordained into the Catholic priesthood with a written mandate to be a Hermit, the first such ordination in 200 years. (11) After studying with Saccidananda Ashram, Fr. Bede's Ashram in Tamil Nadu, India and spending time at the Montreal Priory, I began teaching the practice of "Christian Meditation."

Fr. John Main, a Benedictine Monk learned to meditate in the East from an Indian Monk. Later, he found that these teachings were imbedded in the Catholic tradition. Cassian a teacher of St. Benedict, learned "Mantric prayer" from Abbot Isaac an Egyptian hermit who passed on the tradition that he believed went back to Apostolic times. He dedicated his life to teaching and writing the simple way of the mantra. Today Fr. Laurence Freeman carries on this work with over 1,000 meditation groups across the world.

Main's theology of prayer or his Christology is: We enter into silence and stillness via the mantra, exposing our human consciousness to the glorified, human, infinitely expanded consciousness of Christ and through him we are carried to the Father.

This leads to transformation of our consciousness. A monk takes a mysterious vow, (conversion morum), conversion of life. This should lead to a total inner transformation. We meditate to leave ourselves (our false self or ego) behind, to fall into the earth and die so as to bring forth fruit, to become Christ, our true self. Since we have the archetype of monk within us, we are all called to this same transformation, an ever deepening surrender to the love and grace of God within our hearts.

Where does contemplation (Christian Meditation) lead one? Since it finds the "Ground of Love" in all reality, it leads to one's sisters and brothers. It creates a social consciousness and it leads to a deeper unity and love for the earth.

In the Christian Meditation Retreats that I facilitate, I always link meditation with the environment. As John Main says, "We find Christ in our hearts and then we find ourselves in him, and with him, in all creation." The natural world is here primarily to be communed with, not to exploit. Of course we can make use of it, but primarily it is there to commune with. If we can

enter into this communion with all beings of the earth, both living and non-living, we will come realize that we are a part of the earth and the earth is a part of us. This type of communion not a rational discursive process, but is a way of love. Perhaps there is no other way to enter into this communion other than contemplation. We come to experience the earth and the universe as our larger self. We come to care for it deeply and passionately.

We are closing down our life support systems. This is terrifying! However, there is hope that this can be turned around. As Thomas Berry points out, it is necessary for the human community and the earth community to enter into the future as a single sacred community. I think it is important to recognize that while we are distinct from the "Ground of Love", we are not separate. Then we realize our unity and communion with every human being, with the earth and with the universe. Let us not undervalue our "great work", the work of meditation.

Editor's notes: Fr. Charles Brandt presently serves as a Consultant to Government on Environmental issues.

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Dear Fr. Charles Brandt:

I am sending you a copy of the CHOMagazine. On behalf of the Board of Directors I want to sincerely thank you for your contribution. I hope that you will be able to write again in the future. I hope to meet you again someday at a meditation conference. I have become a more regular meditator since the conference here in Wpg. but am not totally disciplined.

God Bless You!

Sincerely,
Mataulic