



Monthly Online Meditation

World Community for Christian Meditation (Singapore) SESSION 15 | 2021 August

The Significance of Christian Meditation

CHRIST-CENTRED ATTENTION – Peter Ng

I'd like to reflect with you on what is the significance of Christian meditation. What is it that we are doing when we meditate? When we meditate, we're not just doing a relaxation exercise. It is good to be relaxed when we meditate, it contributes to a better meditation. But relaxation is not the purpose of our meditation. We are doing something which is much more profound than relaxing. Actually, we are doing a work, the work of paying attention. It is the work of attention.

What are we paying attention to? We are not paying attention to our thoughts, our ideas, our self-preoccupation, our problems. In fact, we are shifting our attention away from ourselves; we stop thinking about ourselves. And our attention is directed at God's love. Our attention is directed at God's love which is available to us in the Spirit of Jesus dwelling within us. So that is the significance of our meditation, the Christ-centred attention.

Neither do we meditate just to get relief from stress. A very common question that people ask when they are new to meditation is: what is the difference between meditation and mindfulness? Mindfulness comes from the term, MBSR, which stands for 'mindfulness-based stress reduction'. But meditation gives us much, much more than just relief from stress. It gives us peace, the peace that 'passes all understanding'.

Meditation transforms us, changes us. And what changes us is the love of Christ. We are changed when we come into the presence of Christ. We experience his love flowing into us. And that is what changes us; that is what bestows upon us the fruit of the Spirit: love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23). So, when people notice that we are changed by meditation, especially our loved ones, the people closest to us, or sometimes even our friends, they will ask us, 'What is the secret? What have you been doing that has led to this change of personality?' Of course, it will be good to say, 'I did

something marvellous.' But the marvellous thing that happened to us to bring about the change in our life to enable us to grow in love, is Christ within us.

That is the secret of our meditation. So if we do change, if we do grow in love, it is because of the work of the love of Christ within us. But we have to make a contribution, and the contribution that we make is to meditate regularly, to sit still and say the mantra throughout the time of meditation so that our attention is focused on Christ present within us. In other words, our nature, we might say, cooperates with grace. It is grace that changes us.

Now, if the Spirit of Christ present within us is the agent of change in our life, then that leads us to understand how we should say our mantra during the time of meditation. The mantra is not a mechanical robotic chanting of a word, like saying a magic word. The mantra, maranatha, is said in the spirit of love and in the spirit of faith. So every time we sound the mantra and listen to it, maranatha, it is an act of faith. An act of faith that Christ lives in our hearts, dwells within us. So every time we say the mantra we sound it and listen to it, it's an expression of love, that it is Christ who loves us, and by his loving us, we are changed by his love. So that is why, the longer we meditate, the more we learn to say the mantra faithfully, our faith is strengthened and our love of Christ is deepened. So that is the significance of our meditation.

Let us now listen to Fr John Main as he reflects on the secret of our meditation. And then we will be led into our meditation by Fr John Main.

THE SECRET OF MEDITATION -John Main

Listen to St Paul writing to the Colossians, in which he speaks of the essence of the Christian message.

The secret is this: Christ in you, Christ the hope of a glory to come. He it is whom we proclaim. (Col. 1:27-28)

The secret is 'Christ in you.'

This is what our meditation is about: being open wholly, attentively, and wakefully to this great gift we are given – the human consciousness of Christ alive in our hearts. The wonder of the Christian revelation is this, that this human consciousness of Christ dwells in our hearts.

And *the* most important task of our life is to be open to it.

How to Meditate

JOHN MAIN

When we prepare for our meditation, everyone should try to find a sitting posture that is comfortable and yet alert. The only essential rule of posture is to sit as straight as you can, on the floor or in your chair. Be absolutely comfortable in the way you're sitting. Sit as still as you can. Then closing your eyes gently, begin repeating interiorly, silently, without moving your lips or your tongue, the word, 'maranatha'.

Maranatha is the oldest Christian prayer there is. It's an Aramaic word, the language spoken by Jesus, and it means 'Come Lord'. But don't bother about the meaning. Listen to it as four equally-stressed syllables: ma-ra-na-tha. That's all you have to do during your meditation, from the beginning to the end. Don't think about anything. Don't think about God. Don't think any thoughts pious, holy, or otherwise. Try and stay with the word and with the word alone: ma-ra-na-tha.

It's difficult for Christians to understand. How could this be prayer? Is this just a way of relaxing? How could this be significant in the life of a Christian?

The significance is this: the gift of God in Jesus to each one of us is an absolute gift. God has given us himself, nothing has he kept back. He has given us the fullness of the divinity in Jesus. And our Christian life is our response to that gift. In responding to the gift of God in Jesus, we place ourselves wholly at his disposition. We don't think any of our own thoughts. We don't even tell God any of our own thoughts. We are simply, totally at his disposition, totally responding to the gift, in absolute silence. Ma-ra-na-tha.

Transcript of extracts from: *The Heart of Creation, John Main, Collected Talks Vol V*

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, open my heart to the silent presence of the spirit of your Son. Lead me into that mysterious silence where your love is revealed to all who call. Maranatha, maranatha, come Lord Jesus.



<https://www.wccmsingapore.org/timer/in-the-beginning>

Scripture Reading & Reflection

Letter to the Colossians 1: 13-20 (Jerusalem Bible)

¹³Because that is what he has done. It is he who has rescued us from the ruling force of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son that he loves, ¹⁴and in him we enjoy our freedom, the forgiveness of sin. ¹⁵He is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation, ¹⁶for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible, thrones, ruling forces, sovereignties, powers – all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷He exists before all things and in him all things hold together, ¹⁸and he is the Head of the Body, that is, the Church. He is the Beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that he should be supreme in every way, ¹⁹because God wanted all fullness to be found in him ²⁰and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, by making peace through his death on the cross.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST – Fr Eugene Vaz

My dear friends, nice to welcome all of you, especially our friends from the Philippines. I didn't know you were here until I heard Peter welcome you, so I also want to welcome you. We're so happy that you are here with us. And also, greetings to Bishop Marco, whenever you get this transcript or listen to the audio; hello to you, Bishop Marco in Mandalay.

Dear friends, we have been blessed with this very beautiful passage that we just heard from the Letter of Paul to the Colossians, chapter 1 verses 13-20. I want to spend a little while on this very beautiful passage because I think it's quite central to Paul's writings on Christ. There is very high Christology actually, a very developed Christology by Paul.

There are two very beautiful hymns in the Letter to the Colossians in chapter 1 verses 15-20 and chapter 2 verses 9-15. They are Christological hymns, hymns of Christ. In these hymns, you've got beautiful poetry, beautiful lyrics, beautiful words, and you've got a wonderful way of Paul leading us into the mystery of Christ. And I think that's what we really do in Christian meditation – like Peter was trying to impress upon us at the beginning of this evening, that we are not here to relax and we are not here just to take away stress. We are here to get deeper into that person and mystery of Christ. And I'm hoping and praying, dear friends, that all our meditation is somehow really helping us, through the days and through the weeks and through the months and years of our meditating, to go deeper into that mystery of Christ. There is no end to getting into the mystery of Christ. It's a lifelong work in progress, and we will enjoy the fullness of that only in the end-time glory. But in order that we may really enjoy that in the end-time glory, Paul is saying something very beautiful here for you and me to consider.

So Jesus Christ, dear friends, who is he really to you, to me, to all of us? Who is he? If you look

at verse 13, it's a kind of introduction to the actual hymn which begins in verse 15. What Paul does is at the end of the introduction to the Letter, to the Colossians. The Letter begins with the greeting in verse 1-2 and then you have a thanksgiving in verse 3-8, and then you have a prayer that Paul makes for the people of Colossae, and the prayer is found in verses 9-14. This prayer is important because the Colossians were being influenced by some non-Christian way of thinking, even about a deity, even about power; they were being led by some kind of worship to the spirits in whom was every power and authority and force and everything. And Paul is trying to show these Colossians that power exists only in God and it is God who gives everything – being, energy, force, vitality, power. Whatever it is, God made everything to be, and everything comes from God.

And Paul is trying to say that *that* God is invisible. But an invisible God is of no use to humankind, is it? Because we human beings we are not used to relating to the invisible. That's not our normal way of practice and experience. We relate to fellow human beings. We relate to what we can see to what we can feel, what we can touch, what we can hear, what we can appreciate by the senses of our humanity. And therefore, that invisible God is made visible in Christ. That's how Paul begins the hymn. If you look at verse 15, 'He is the image of the invisible God.'

Now, who is this 'he'? Who is it? This 'he', dear friends, is Jesus, whom Paul has already been talking about from verse 3. In verse 3 of Colossians, Paul says we always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you bear towards all the saints. The 'saints' means your brothers and sisters, your fellow men and women in the Christian community. Paul always calls members of the Christian community 'saints' because the meaning of the word 'saint' is 'holy', and every member of the Christian community is called to be holy, and therefore, it is not surprising. Every member of the Christian community is called to be saint.

We are all on our journey to sainthood. But that journey begins here. We are already saints in the making here on earth, and Christian meditation helps us to see how our making towards sainthood is taking place. Paul has introduced the key to sainthood and that is: God the Father giving us his Son, Jesus Christ, in whom we believe and whose love we imitate and whose love then we share with our fellow brothers and sisters, all our fellow men and women in the community.

And then from verse 3 Paul thanks God for the gift of faith that the Colossians had in Christ. Then comes the prayer he makes that the Colossians will remain firm to this faith, because they are being tempted by unchristian ways of thinking and acting and believing. That's a huge temptation that the Colossians are facing and Paul is praying that they will stand firm, that they will stand strong. It seems, from the Letter, that even though the Colossians were tempted so much, somehow by the grace of God they were not succumbing to the temptation. That's why Paul is thanking God and praising God and praying to God for the Colossians because they are doing their best to be strong in Christ.

So, to cut a long story short in terms of verses 3-12, I want to go to verse 13 which is the

opening verse of the of the reading that we had just now. So who is that 'he'? Of course now we know it's Jesus Christ. God has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son. So he, God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, he the invisible God, has rescued us from the power of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, Jesus. Through Jesus, we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. So, that's something awesome, to begin with. Our Christian meditation leads us into the wonder of God our Father loving us so much and giving us his Son, Jesus, to redeem us, to take us out of the power of darkness and to bring us into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

How does he do this? By forgiving us, by freeing us from all our sins. And therefore, all the time, the Lord is saying to you and me: come, think about your life. Think about your focus, think about what you must be really living for every day. So, you know, dear friends, morning and evening, as we do our meditation, it helps us to have that focus. In the morning, we begin with focusing on the Lord. Then all kinds of things happen to us in the course of the day, isn't it? Then we come to evening and we ask ourselves: in the midst of all that has been happening, what has been our focus on the Lord? So Christian meditation really, as Peter put it very nicely just now, is not a relaxing moment, is not just an unwinding moment, is not just a destressing moment. But it's a moment of real joy in Christ in whom we began the day, in whom by his grace we have been able to live the day, and now in the evening, towards night, in whom we want to end the day. So, our whole life, our whole day, our whole living gets all wrapped up in the person of Jesus, which is what Christian medication is helping us to be really, wrapped up in Christ.

Why? Why must we be wrapped up in Christ? Because he is the image of the invisible God, he is exactly like God. You know, dear friends, you and I are made in the image and likeness of God, we are told in the Book of Genesis chapter 1 verse 26. We have a certain likeness of God because that's how God made us – in his image and likeness. But Jesus is even more than that, he didn't have to be made. He is. And when we look at our being created, that our creation is in that image that is Jesus, this is mind-blowing. Because it's easy to give a talk, to sit down in a very comfortable room like this and present this. It's very simple. But actually for us meditators, the more we go into this, the more we begin to realise how challenging it is, isn't it? And we cannot do it on our own.

What is the challenge? Well, as the hymn, will develop in a while, the challenge is to live in that *being*, that is Jesus, the image and likeness of God. He, the image of the invisible God, is the firstborn of all creation. That means right from the very beginning. All life came through him and this is also what St John tells us in chapter 1 verse 1: 'In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' And then John goes on, everything that came into being, came to being in that Word of God. Nothing exists that is not brought into being by God. But we already saw in Genesis chapter 1 verse 1 and the following that everything that God brought into being was 'good'. Every day God saw what he made and it was good, it was good, it was good, until he made man and woman, and it was 'very good'. Hey, you and I, we are the crown of God's creation, because we share in that

image and likeness of God. And sharing in the image and likeness of God makes us to be in the world today like Jesus. So we are all Christians, Christ-like people. Christ-like people must be the image of the invisible God.

So today, people are coming to experience God also through you and me. Not only you and I experience God, but by the way in which we live and act we also help people to have a beautiful experience of God who is love. And therefore, our Christian meditation helps us to go into that very being of God. In him, Jesus, that image of the invisible God, everything in heaven and on earth was created, visible, invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities powers. That means, there is nothing that is more powerful than God. There is nothing more powerful than Jesus, the image of the invisible God. He is before all else. In him, everything continues in being, and that's why Christian meditation is important, because if we don't have our being in him, if you are not connected with him, then we've got no being, actually. That's what meditation does, and therefore we don't think of anything, don't think of ourselves. We are just lost in God. We just let go everything just to be. We let God be God in our life, and we let God do what he wants to do in these twenty-minute periods of our lives. We don't want to suggest to God, we don't want to tell God, we don't want to give God orders, we don't want to offer him a script. We are just there to be with him, to be for him, and actually to be like him, which is really what Paul is coming to now.

It is he, Jesus, the image of the invisible God, who is the head of the body, the church. We are all the church. We are all members of the church. Every one of us brother and sister. We are the body of Christ. Every body must have a head, and every head must have a body to operate in, isn't it? And that's the organic unity of the church, you and me in Christ. Without Christ we are not the church, and there's no church without Christ. So that is something we've got to continuously think of, because in that church we meet our fellow men and women, we meet our brothers and sisters. And it is they we need to relate to in terms of family life, in terms of community life, in terms of working life, in terms of society. That's the body.

So, Christian meditation helps us to relate to one another in the body. As the whole body relates to Christ, and Christ to the body, so also the body relates within itself to each other in that way of the image and likeness of God. Beautiful. He who is the beginning, the first-born of the dead, he suffered and died for us because he loves us so much. He wanted to free us from death, and the only way to free us from death is he himself died the death that you and I will die also, to show us death is not the end of life. Death is the defeat of sin. Death comes because of sin, so by destroying death Jesus destroys sin. And by destroying sin and death, Jesus restores life. We were made for life. And therefore, verse 13 is very beautiful.

He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, so that we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. And if we have redemption, and forgiveness of our sins, then we have life, life eternal, because life has to be eternal. Only sin can destroy eternal life and sin has been destroyed, and death has been destroyed by the Resurrection of Jesus, and hence our focus on him. Nobody else can do this. No other

power, no other authority, no other sovereignty, not the strongest army in the world, not any forceful bomb or anything. Nothing can do this except Jesus. And therefore Paul says in verse 19, 'it pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him and by means of him to reconcile everything in his person both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross.' And therefore, dear friends, in Christian meditation we experience the reconciling power of Jesus in our life so that we can go on living family life, community life, working life, life at every level of human society now in a state of reconciliation.

You know, in Singapore and all over the world, there are so many angry people, there are so many hurt people, there are so many people who are wounded so badly. And therefore, there are so many people who turn violent, who turn revengeful, who do crazy things, who go out of their mind in that kind of a state. But, see what Christian meditation does. It brings us back into that person Jesus who is our reconciliation. He has reconciled everything in his person, both in heaven, on earth. And what has he done by the total shedding of his blood by the total giving of himself? He has made peace so that all of us can live in that way and in that joy. And therefore, dear friends, every meditation must end in that kind of spirit, in that kind of joy, that kind of experience of having gone deeper into that person of Jesus whom then we make visible, more and more, through our way of living. And the impact that we make (I think Peter was referring to that in the beginning of this talk) is that people can see the change in us. We don't do this so that people can see change. We are not doing this to go around bragging or boasting. Christian life is not a competition. Christian Life is a collaboration where everybody can get caught up in that impact of Christ. So, if we have been impacted by Christ, we must impact other people also. And that is by the way in which we live – very ordinary, very simple, but very powerful Christian witness.

USEFUL LINKS

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