



Meditatio

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The Reality of God

JOHN MAIN OSB

Selections from MOMENT OF CHRIST

The reality of God is the truth revealed in Jesus. The Christian proclamation of the gospel is that Jesus, in all his reality, is to be found in our own hearts.

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The Spirit of Christ dwells in our hearts, and in our hearts the living Christ summons each of us to fullness of life. We respond by becoming present to him ourselves, by our own self-giving, our own self-sacrifice. That is what meditation is about.

1

Reality and the Truth

Saying the mantra is turning from all illusion, from all imagination, from all falsehood, to ultimate truth. And arriving at the truth is to experience the graciousness of God and the loving kindness of God.

All of us I think feel within ourselves the necessity to come to grips with the truth. To find some principle in our lives that is absolutely reliable, that is certain – something that's worthy of our confidence. All of us feel this necessity, somehow or other, to make contact with rock-like reality.

What is real? What is truth? God is real, and the reality of God is the truth revealed in Jesus. The greatest thing about the Christian proclamation of the gospel is that Jesus, in all his reality, is to be found in our own hearts. Listen to the words of Jesus:

He who sent me is present with me and has not left me alone. If you dwell within the revelation I have brought you, you are indeed my disciples. And you shall know the truth. And the truth will set you free. (Jn 8: 29-32)

If then the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free.

When you begin, you have to begin in faith, and you have to continue in faith. Every time you sit down to meditate, your faith will be tested, and your faith will be strengthened. The time of meditation, when you say your mantra from beginning to end, might often seem to you to be a complete waste of time, a complete loss of time, but remember Jesus dwells in your heart. He is the revelation of God, and only in God and only from God do we have our reality.

Saying the mantra is turning from all illusion, from all imagination, from all falsehood, to ultimate truth. The wisdom teaches us that arriving at the truth is to experience the graciousness of God and the loving kindness of God. In the Christian vision of meditation, the whole purpose of meditation is simply to be open to the presence of God in our own hearts.

People often ask why should I meditate? Why do you meditate? I think part of the answer is that in the experience of meditation we come to know ourselves as real – not ourselves as acting a role, not ourselves fulfilling other people's expectations of us, but the experience of being who we *are*. And meditation is important for us because each of us has to learn to be true, to be faithful to the truth of our own being.

The power of meditation is that, in the experience of it, in the silence to which our word leads us, we learn to live out of the goodness of God; we make contact with his goodness in our hearts. God is true, and anyone who discovers their own oneness with God has entered into the fundamental relationship, and as a result all our relationships are filled with the kindness and the truth of God. Jesus says, 'The truth will set you free.' (Jn 8:32) The freedom is the freedom to be ourselves and the freedom to let others be themselves; the freedom to love ourselves, to love others, and to love God.

But that freedom depends upon a total commitment to truth. The opposite of truth is falsehood or illusion. Meditation is a commitment to the truth, a commitment, that is, to turn from trying to make our own reality and a commitment to live in the light of God, to live by the light of God. The daily commitment to it, and the gentleness of it as we meditate day after day, is a way of learning to accustom our eyes to seeing what is before them rather than trying to imagine what is before them and then taking that for reality.

Remember the way again. Sit comfortably, sit upright, and sit as still as you can. Meditation is a way of total stillness of body and spirit. And say your word *ma-ra-na-tha* as faithfully as you can. ■

2

The Ground of Our Being

In meditation, we become anchored in truth, anchored in God, and we begin to know from our own experience that he is the ground of our being. In him we live, through him we live, and with him we live.

I want to say a word to you tonight about meditation as a commitment to reality. Reality: the reality of our own being, the reality of all creation, and the reality of God. The truly religious man or woman is the one who lives their life responding to reality. Not to goals, not to ambitions, not to secondary things, not to material things – not to what is trivial.

Let me give you an example. The great illusion that we all start from is the illusion that we are at the centre of reality. This is an illusion that is very easy to fall into; because it seems that we are understanding the external world from our own centre, and so it seems as though the world is revolving around us. Then we begin to try to control that world, to dominate that world, to put that world at our service.

What we find in meditation, from our own experience, is that God is the centre, and that God is the source of all reality. And what we discover, from our own experience, is that there is nothing real outside God, only illusion. In meditation, we find the courage to live in the clear light of reality: the reality that is God; the reality that is his creation; the reality that is my being, created by God.

The result is that in meditation, and in our commitment to it, we become anchored in truth; we are anchored in God, and we begin to know, from our own experience, that he is the ground of our being. In him we live; through him we live; and with him we live.

In meditation, we are open to the life source within us, and once open to it the life source flows in our inmost being at every moment of our lives. That, in essence, is what Christianity is about. That is what Jesus came to proclaim: 'That we may have life, and have it in all its fullness.' (Jn 10:10) In other words, we don't need to

apologise for being, to make excuses for being. We don't need to spend our lives making ourselves acceptable to others. We need only to be rooted in reality. And then to stand in the ground of our own being, to live out of the power of the reality of our own being.

So meditation is a way of liberation from all fear; fear is the greatest obstacle to fullness of life. The wonder of the vision proclaimed by Jesus is this, that the great power that dispels fear is love. This is the power that we make contact with in the depths of our own being, the power of love. Love is the energy that sweeps all before it. But again, what we need to understand and what we need to proclaim, if we are going to proclaim the Christian message to the world, is that in prayer we begin to live fully from the life force that is set free in our inmost being. That life force is love; it is God.

This requires on our part commitment; commitment not to a cause, not to an ideology, but commitment to life and commitment to love. That is the proclamation. Jesus proclaims with his own life, with his own love. What we must understand again, from our own experience, is that this life and this love are a present reality. And they are a present reality to be found, to be contacted, within each one of us. But again, this is something we must learn from our own experience. The Spirit of Christ dwells in our hearts, and in our hearts the living Christ summons each of us to fullness of life. That's what we must be committed to. Committed to living, committed to love, committed to living in the power of Christ.

There are no half measures; you can't decide to do a bit of meditation. The option is to meditate and to root your life in reality. And the reality is the reality of liberty – that you are free to be, and to be fully every moment of your life. As far as I can understand it, that is what the gospel is about; and that is what Christian prayer is about – a commitment to life, a commitment to eternal life. As Jesus himself puts it, 'The kingdom of heaven is here and now.' (Lk 17:21) What we have to do is to be open to it, to be committed to it. Listen to these words from the Gospel of Matthew:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure lying buried in a field. The man who found it buried it again. And for sheer joy went and sold everything he had and bought that field.
(Mt 14:44)

Here is another picture of the kingdom of heaven.

A merchant looking out for fine pearls found one of very special value. So he went and sold everything he had and bought it. (Mt 13:45-46)

That's the sort of commitment that we need – a commitment to meditate every day, and in our meditation to say the mantra from the beginning to the end. ■

3

Attuned to God

Learning to say your mantra means learning to follow a way of life, in which everything in your life is attuned to God. The challenge for us is not to reject the world, not to reject ourselves, but to learn to sacrifice. Meditation enables us to offer ourselves in our entirety to God.

The essence of the Christian message is that God is a present reality. This is to say that God is a reality who is present to us. If you consider that for a moment, that God is *present*, we begin to understand that he is present in every moment of our life, and it is so because of the extravagant generosity of Jesus, the presence of Jesus. The call to us, the call to each one of us, is to respond to his presence, to live in it and to respond to his generosity.

We respond by becoming present to him ourselves. That means our hearts open to him at all times. The generosity of Jesus demands of us that we seek that presence selflessly. Not so that we will become wiser, not so that we will become holier, not so that we will possess God, but simply that we respond to his generous self-giving, his generous self-sacrifice, by our own self-giving our own self-sacrifice.

The challenge of meditation is that it does make each of us face the basic redemptive question: Do we seek our own destiny within our own confined limits, merely within our own resources? Or do we seek our destiny beyond ourselves, in God? That is what our meditation is about, seeking to burst the limits imposed on us by our own egoism.

In a previous incarnation, I served in the counterintelligence service, and one of the jobs that I had to do was to locate radio stations operated by the enemy. So we would tune in our receivers. But the enemy were very clever; if they were operating, say on a frequency of ninety meters, at eighty-nine meters they would send out a jamming wave, a jamming signal, and at ninety-one they'd send out another jamming signal. So in order to tune in exactly on their station you had to have a very, very fine tuning on your radio.

But we liked to think that we were just as clever as the enemy. So we found out the frequencies that they were broadcasting on and we made quartz crystals. Then we would plug in our crystal to our receiver and then our receiver would only pick up, absolutely spot-on, their signal and none of the jamming devices.

I was just thinking about this the other day, and it struck me that the mantra is very like a quartz crystal. The enemy that we all face, our ego, is sending out all sorts of contrary signals around the wavelength of God, and what we have to do is to get on the God frequency exactly, as exactly as we can.

As you all know from your own experience, the mantra is not magic; it's not an incantation. Learning to say your mantra means learning to follow a way of life, a way of life in which everything in your life is attuned to God, and in a sense everything in your life is attuned to the mantra.

Now the challenge for us is not to reject the world, not to reject ourselves, but the challenge for us is to learn to sacrifice. As you know, to sacrifice we offer something to God. Everything offered to God, that is what meditation does to our life. The mantra, meditation, enables us to lose ourselves entirely, to offer ourselves in our entirety to God. Everything that we are is offered to God. That's why we keep only the mantra sound, and when the time comes we are prepared to surrender that too. In our meditation, we are entirely at his disposition. We exist only in his presence, and we are in his presence because of his generosity.

The wonderful thing about meditation is that in that self-sacrifice, in that loss of self, his presence becomes our presence, and his generosity becomes our generosity. As we persevere in meditation, the loss of self becomes more and more complete. The sacrifice becomes more and more perfect, and the generosity is constantly increasing. That's why I stress to you so often the importance of saying your mantra from the beginning to the end. No thoughts, no words, no imagination, no ideas. Remember the sacrifice.

The invitation of Jesus is given to each of us to take up our cross, to follow him to Calvary, and to join him in his sacrifice, and to go through with him into the infinite love of the Father. Perhaps this is the greatest thing that we can do as conscious human beings, to offer our consciousness to God. And in that offering we become fully conscious. ■

4

The Christian Vision of Life

The experience of meditation leads us to unity, to oneness – to a unity of everything that we are. That is the vision of life that we enter into in our meditation: completion, wholeness, unity – in love.

The experience of meditation in our tradition is the experience of unity, of oneness. It is an experience that changes the whole of our perception of reality, because we see reality as unified by the basic energy of the cosmos, the energy of love.

The experience of meditation leads us to unity, to oneness – to a unity of everything that we are. Just listen to St Paul writing to the Ephesians:

Therein lies the richness of God's free grace lavished upon us, imparting full wisdom and insight. He has made known to us his hidden purpose, such was his will and pleasure, determined beforehand in Christ, to be put into effect when the time was ripe: namely, that the universe, all in heaven and all on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ. (Eph 1:7-10)

That is the vision of life that we enter into in our meditation: completion, wholeness, unity – in love.

We all know that the greatest theological statement ever made was made by St John, when he said 'God is Love' (1 Jn 4:8). And the great mystery of the Christian faith is that this love is to be found in your own heart, if only you can be silent and still, and if only you can make this love the supreme centre of your being. That means turning to it wholeheartedly, paying attention to it. It means going beyond yourself into the reality that is infinitely greater than you are and yet which contains you, in which each of us has an essential and unique place.

The most important thing that we as Christians have to proclaim to the world, to proclaim to everybody, is that this Spirit

does dwell in our hearts, and that by turning to it with full attention we too can live out of this fullness of life, that we too can live out of this power that is the kingdom of God. The way that the early Christians described this was that you approach your life with love, because what you encounter in your own heart is the principle of love. Listen to St Paul again. He is suggesting how we should be in our relationship with one another:

Be forbearing with one another and be forgiving, where any of you has cause for complaint; remember you must forgive as the Lord forgave you. [And then he goes on.] To crown all, there must be love to bind all together and to complete the whole. (Col 3:13-14)

Now let me remind you, the daily return to meditation is essential. The discipline of it is essential – the discipline of the mantra from beginning to end. But don't become discouraged or downhearted. If unity is our end, we have to begin from a fairly fractured beginning. Learning to say the mantra requires great patience; it requires great perseverance. Don't give up too easily. When you find that you've strayed from it, return to it immediately. Stillness of body and stillness of spirit, this is the aim – totally open to the only reality, which is ultimately real, the reality that is Love. ■

5

Our Nearness to God

In meditation we awaken to our nearness to God, all our powers, all our potential, directed towards their true end. That end is God... We are on the journey away from fear, from unreality, from illusion, into the only reality there is. That reality is God; that reality is Love.

Meditation is about the realisation of the *nearness* of each of us to the source of creation – the source of our own creation and of all creation – to God. It is realising that the power of creation, the energy of creation, flows in our hearts. Listen to these words of St Paul writing to the Ephesians:

Your world was a world without hope and without God. But now, in union with Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near through the shedding of Christ's blood. For he himself is our peace. (Eph 2:12-14)

One of the things that all of us are invited to know, from our own experience, is that we have been brought near to God; that through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, all of us have been brought near to this profound peace.

Aristotle defined peace as the tranquillity of order; and peace is necessary for all growth. It is necessary for being, so that each of us can realise our full potential. Peace could perhaps be described as the harmony of directed energy. The enemy of peace is distraction. We lose sight of the harmonising goal of our life, the harmonising power within which we have our being; we lose sight of it. Distraction is caused by desire, by the wish to possess. And the loss of the goal leads us away from what is real into unreality.

Remember again the way of meditating. We sit down; we sit with our spine upright. We breathe calmly and regularly. And we begin to say our word. The word I recommend you to say is *maranatha*. Four equally stressed syllables, ma-ra-na-tha. We say our word, we say our mantra, from the beginning to the end.

The purpose of the word is to keep us on the path: to take us away from illusion, from desire, into the reality that is God. As long as we are on the way, as long as we are saying our mantra, we are turning aside from distraction, and we are on the way to make contact with the root from which we are sprung. Once we lose sight of our goal, we become confused, we become frightened. That is when we tend to seek solace in more and more distraction and in more and more illusion.

What the way of meditation invites all of us to do is to confront the unreality, the fear, the illusion, the distraction, and to pass through it. On the other side of all this illusion, of fear and unreality, is peace: the tranquillity of order, energy directed to its ultimate end. What each of us is invited to know in meditation is that that energy is love, and what each of us is invited to discover from our experience is that God is Love.

Meditation has nothing to do with quiet reverie; it has to do with wakefulness. We awaken to our nearness to God, all our powers all our potential directed towards their true end. And that end is God, the end who is our beginning. In the experience of the peace of meditation, it is revealed to us where we are, it is revealed to us that we are on the journey away from fear, away from unreality, away from illusion, into the only reality there is. That reality is God; that reality is love.

Each of us has to learn to say our word, to say our mantra. We have to learn to say it from the beginning of our meditation until the end, to root it in our hearts so that we can listen to it sounding there in the depth of our being. Learning to root the mantra takes time. If you ask yourselves how much time it will take, you can answer the question by saying that we are already there. Listen to St Paul again:

But now in union with Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near through the shedding of Christ's blood. For he himself is our peace.' (Eph 2:13-14)

This is what we have to come to understand and to know in meditation, and to know it as a personal experience in our own hearts, each one of us, that our redemption is accomplished. What prevents us from realising this is that we are distracted. Our minds are cluttered, and we must free them.

This is what meditation is about, and that's the importance of

returning to it every morning and every evening. To sit down, and in saying your mantra to loosen the chains, the bonds that bind you to unreality, to illusion, and to fear; and to understand that those bonds have no power over you if only you are open to the experience of Jesus.

His experience is this, that he is the beloved Son of God. This is what he has achieved for us: that we can be open to the self-same experience that we are sons and daughters of the loving compassionate and understanding Father; and that our meaning is to be wholly open to his love, wholly open to the nearness of his mysterious being, wholly open to our own hearts, to our own centre. For in our centre, he is to be found.

Meditation, saying the mantra from beginning to end, saying the mantra every morning and every evening, is simply our pilgrimage to that centre where he is and where we are in him. ■

6

Created for Union

The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ and Christ dwells in us. In his indwelling, we find our own completion.

Sainthood, wisdom, are simply names for reality. God is real. And what we discover in our meditation is that this godliness flows freely in the depths of our own heart. Just listen to this excerpt from the Letter to the Colossians:

Therefore, since Jesus was delivered to you as Christ and Lord, live your lives in union with him. Be rooted in him; be built in him; be consolidated in the faith you were taught; let your hearts overflow with thankfulness... For it is in Christ that the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied, and in him you have been brought to completion.
(Col 2:6-7, 9-10)

Those are very remarkable words, addressed to each one of us. 'Live your lives in union with him' – this is the Christian invitation. Not to admire from a distance, not even to worship from afar, but to live in union. That is the staggering invitation that the gospel gives to each one of us.

As you all know from your own experience, union requires selflessness, loss of self; in union we surrender ourselves into the greater reality of the union. In the union, each finds the other, and in finding the other, we discover our own essential personhood. We discover ourselves because in union we experience ourselves as known, loved, cherished, cared for. The Christian gospel says to each of us that this is what we have been created for – for union, for this perfection that comes to us from knowing ourselves known, from discovering ourselves in love. 'Live your lives in union with him.' This is the invitation we respond to in our meditation. We respond to it just as St Paul describes it, by being rooted in him, by being built in him.

What each of us has to discover from our own experience is that God is the root from which we are sprung. He is the ground of our being, and the most elementary sanity requires that we live out of this rootedness. Living our lives rooted in Christ and knowing ourselves rooted in him on a daily basis, on an experiential basis in our daily return to meditation, means that we enter into a basic stability. In the silence of our meditation, we gain an experience of ourselves: that we are, that we are in God, and in him we discover our own essential identity our own essential meaning.

The wonder of Christian prayer, we discover, is that we have meaning for God. So it seems to me that the astonishing thing about the Christian revelation is that our meaning is not less than to bring perfection to God. That is, to be so in harmony with him that we reflect back to him all the brilliance of his own glory, all the fullness of his own self-communication. St Paul tells us that 'in him you have been brought to completion (Col 2:10)'. The Christian mystery summons each of us to enter into the divine milieu and to take our own appointed place within the divine milieu. The fullness of the God-head dwells in Christ and Christ dwells in us. In his indwelling, we find our own completion. To be complete as human beings, we must live this mystery not just intellectually, not just emotionally, but fully.

What the New Testament cries out to us is that that fullness of being, which is our invitation, we find in our being and the being of God coming into full resonant harmony. This is what our meditation invites us to enter, the resonant harmony of God. All language, as we've often seen, fails us. We have to try to use language to direct our attention towards the mystery and to its depth, but the mantra is like God's harmonic. By rooting it in our heart, every corner of our heart is opened to him and every ounce of his power is channelled into us. That is why we must learn to say the mantra faithfully, continually, in ever deepening poverty. ■

7

The Temple of Your Heart

The wonder of meditation is that we do lose ourselves, that we are in the temple with him. It is in that loss of self, that we find ourselves in Christ and, in him, infinitely expanded in heart in love.

I want to put before you this evening the conviction of the early Church of the presence of Jesus within us, the reality of the presence of his Spirit within us. The real wonder of the Christian life is that each one of us is called to live out of this reality, to live out of an eternal part of our own being.

Two great Christian words are *meditation* and *contemplation*. *Meditation* is 'remaining in the centre', being rooted in the centre of your own being. *Contemplation* is 'being in the temple' with him; *contemplate* – to be within the temple with him. The temple is your own heart. And the essence of being with him, in the vision of the early Church, is an absolute oneness. This is what we've got to try to proclaim to the world, that it is our destiny to be divinised, to be one with the Spirit of God. Divinisation is something that is utterly beyond our imagination, utterly beyond our own power of understanding to comprehend. But here is the mystery that St Paul speaks of: it is *not* beyond our capacity to experience it in love. It is our capacity to love and to be rooted in love that is the essence our own divinisation.

Listen to St Paul when he speaks about the reality of this, the presentness of it. 'For he it was who brought us salvation (2 Tim 1:9).' Salvation is deliverance from all our own limitations. *Salvation* is the Jewish word for deliverance from bondage, from slavery, into the wonderful liberty of the children of God.

It is he who brought us salvation and called us to a dedicated life, not for any merit of ours, but for his own purpose and his own grace, which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity but has now at length been brought fully into view by the power of our Saviour Jesus Christ. For he

has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim 1:9-10)

The gospel is just that 'good news' of our deliverance from slavery. If we wanted to put that into terminology for our own time, it is the deliverance from our own egoism, from everything in us that isolates us, from everything in us that limits us, into the limitless love of God. And it is the reality of this that we must be open to in our prayer, the presentness of it. This gift of Christ, the gift of his Spirit, is the very basis of all reality. And the art of living, the art of all human living, is not to live at the surface, not to live at the level of trivia, but to live out of what Jesus called that spring of eternal life welling up within us. Listen to St Paul again:

I want [you] to continue in good heart and to come to the unity of love, to the full wealth of conviction which understanding brings, and to grasp God's secret. That secret is Christ himself; in him lie hidden all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' (Col 2:2-3)

And listen to this:

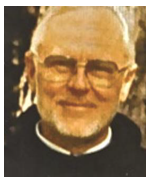
For it is in Christ that the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied, and in him you have been brought to completion. (Col 2:9-10)

That is why in our prayer, as we meditate as faithfully as we can every morning and every evening, we must go beyond all imagination, must go beyond all thought, even holy thought and holy imagination, and we must be utterly still and utterly reverent, in the presence of the mystery of God. We must approach it with simplicity and with humility. That's why we must learn to say our word and to say it with ever greater faithfulness. To say it every morning and every evening without expectation, without thinking that we are going to put pressure on God, not going to twist his arm, to have him reveal himself to us in some way. That is the real wonder of meditation, that we do lose ourselves, that we are in the temple with him. It is in that loss of self, that we find ourselves in Christ and, in him, infinitely expanded in heart in love. Listen to St Paul writing to the Colossians:

Therefore, since Jesus was delivered to you as Christ and

Lord, live your lives in union with him. Be rooted in him; be built in him; be consolidated in the faith you were taught; and let your hearts overflow with thankfulness... For it is in Christ that the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied, and in him you have been brought to completion. (Col 2:6-7, 9-10) ■

Everything offered to God, that is what meditation does to our life. The mantra in meditation enables us to lose ourselves entirely, to offer ourselves in our entirety to God, entirely at his disposition. In that self-sacrifice, in that loss of self, his presence becomes our presence, and his generosity becomes our generosity.



JOHN MAIN OSB (1926-1982) served in the diplomatic service in the Far East, and taught law at Trinity College, Dublin, before he became a Benedictine monk. He founded an open Benedictine community in Montreal, from which sprang The World Community for Christian Meditation. His books and CDs make available to people today the unique and transforming power of his teaching. They retain the authority, clarity and humour of his original teaching and carry the spirit of the gospel directly into the heart.

These selections draw from talks John Main gave to the early meditation groups in Montreal. The selections focus on meditation as a way to awaken to the reality and the nearness of God. God is real, Fr John says, and the reality of God is found in our hearts, in the Spirit of Jesus. In meditation, as we open our hearts to his presence, we experience God as the source of our being and of all being. We begin to know God as the only reality there is, as love, and the experience liberates us from fear and illusion. As Jesus said, 'the truth will set you free'. (Jn 8:32) These talks are selections from *Moment of Christ*, published on CD and in print under the same title.



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