Meditation in the Christian Tradition.

*“The Benedictine, John Main adapted the prayer of the desert monks to provide a means of building prayer into daily life… It is this contemplative prayer form that we would especially like to see developed. While its simplicity masks the effort required, it is one of the best responses to the spiritual vacuum in our modern society. It is already active in some in some of our schools… Knowing how to go into your “inner room” and meet Jesus, is thus the first stage in a personal relationship with God through Jesus and the doorway ... to ongoing renewal*. *Support groups are almost essential and is something parishes might consider setting up.*

“Prayer in the Busyness of Life”

NZ Bishops’ Conference in May 2009

Weekly meetings of meditators are held in the CTK Oratory on **Wednesdays at 10:00**. Those wishing to explore whether or not this form of prayer suits them are most welcome.

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Christian Meditation – a background.

Meditation has been part of the life of the Christian church from the beginning and can be seen in the teaching of Jesus on prayer, e.g., when he tells us to go into our inner room, when he tells us to lay aside our worries and anxieties at the time of prayer, when he tells us to set our mind on God’s Kingdom before everything else. Meditation is mentioned numerous times in The Old Testament.

The origins and history of Christian Meditation (CM) are intertwined with that of monastic life. Christian ascetics who, in the 3rd,4th and 5th centuries, fled from the instability of the material world to seek God in the deserts of North Egypt and Syria came to be known as the Desert Mothers and Fathers. Monastic communities began forming during that time, though sometimes they lived as [hermits](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermits). They wanted to live in solitude, meditate on scriptural texts they had memorised and practice spiritual exercises which brought them serenity. The first written record we have of meditation within Christianity comes from John Cassian (360 to 435 CE/AD) a Christian monk and theologian whose writings reflect the wisdom and teaching on prayer of the early Christian hermits and monks.

Following the fall of Rome, Western Europe was plunged into a dark age for 700 years with its culture, including meditation, being nurtured largely in isolated monasteries. The emergence of the Christian monastic tradition included the development of simple secluded lifestyles and practices that were intended to strengthen spiritual practice by freeing the mind from worldly matters.

Towards the middle of the 20th century, a Benedictine monk, Fr John Main (1926-1982), recognised that the tradition of meditation as practised by the early Desert Monks was a simple method of prayer of the heart. Significantly, he realised that this practice was suitable not just for monks but that Christians from all backgrounds could find a spiritual, daily discipline adaptable to their ordinary lives; a discipline that will help us find Christ within if we follow him in our daily lives, within a world of great distraction, materialism, consumerism, stress and self-interest.

In 1975 Fr John Main started the first Christian Meditation Centre in London and the first of the family of weekly meditation groups began to meet. In 1991, meditators from around the world came together to shape the future direction and organization of the community as a “monastery without walls”. They named it The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) because it was not only formed and nurtured by the practice of meditation but existed to share this gift with others. It is ecumenical in that it belongs to all the Christian churches as it has its roots earlier than any of the tragic divisions between the churches.

The World Community is now present in 120+ countries. Individuals, weekly groups and centres share the peace and compassion that are the spiritual fruits of meditation. In New Zealand, there are about 100 weekly meditation groups. Because meditation is a universal wisdom, contemplative dialogue with other faiths is a priority.

What distinguishes CM from other forms of meditation is that its aim is to allow God’s mysterious and silent presence within us to become not only more of a reality but the reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, everything we are. To quote John Main: “*In contemplative prayer we seek to become the person we are called to be, not by thinking of God but by being with God. Simply, to be with God is to be drawn into being the person God calls us to be*”.

Prayer these days is often dominated by our intellect and thus can lose its connection with the heart. CM is prayer, not of the head, but of the heart. It is there that we encounter our own spirit and we gradually become aware of God’s spirit that lives within every one of us and of which our own spirit is part.

All forms of prayer have their own particular value, and far from being in competition with any, CM tends to enrich our other prayer practices and our reading of scripture. Like any form of prayer, we need to give it a time and a place in our life, and we need to do it daily. It is based on stillness, silence and simplicity. The aim is to move closer to union with God and to be attentive to His presence within our hearts.

Those who persevere will inevitably see the results in their lives. The spiritual fruits of CM, as do all forms of prayer, show themselves in our lives as we find ourselves gradually gaining a vision of greater love and learning to live that love in union with God. As Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians (5:22-23), “*the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*”.

The website of the NZ Community of Christian Meditation is [www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz](http://www.christianmeditationnz.org.nz)

And that of the World Community of Christian Meditation

[www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org).