

Prayer & Meditation



Notes for the Journey

by

Bruce Charles

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Preface

These notes were originally written as simple notes on 'Prayer and Meditation' with some additional more complex information for those who were interested. They were written for a Christian audience within the Anglican Church, but with universal undertones. Although written for a Christian audience, it assumes little knowledge of its subject matter. For many, it will be purely a revision of the basics. Similarly, the booklet focuses primarily on personal prayer as our own capacity for prayer is foundational to communal worship.

Although I am a Christian and I write as a Christian, this booklet illustrates an attitude of heart that seeks to discern how God speaks in the whole of creation and the various cultures of the world that have emerged through the creative process.

Based on this, a fundamental premise of this booklet is that prayer, silent prayer, meditation, helps us to have God as our teacher, to grow in love. In Christian terms, the night before Jesus died, he said that "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." (John 14:26)

As the psalmist said: 'Be still and know that I am God'. (Psalm 46:10)

A second fundamental is that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, male and female he created them (Genesis 1:26-28)

A third fundamental is that Christ died for the sins of the whole world. One of our roles is to recognise that we and all people are saved. As believers we are to walk the journey of sanctification, of becoming truly human as God created us to be, of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and experience God as one God, three persons. Our prayer life is central to this process.

Prayer is a journey that virtually everyone, except probably atheists, are on. As Foster describes it in his book on Prayer: a journey inward to knowing one's self in Christ, a journey, metaphorically speaking, upwards into the transcendence of God and a journey outward, empowered by the Spirit.

This booklet could also be helpful to those who have not yet come to believe in God, to know God. As noted in the section specifically on meditation, meditation can be practised without believing in or knowing God, but, ultimately, this limits the power of meditation to transform our lives but can lead a nonbeliever to experience God.

The booklet is dense and could have been spaced out more but that would have made it less practical for printing for parish use. Some of the material is seminal and points in directions which are not developed. Space, again, does not permit this.

This booklet is still a work in progress and I hope you will see it as such and forgive some of the shortcomings, particularly in terms of how the material is structured. It has been revised several times and I am working on a book that develops the material more thoroughly.

It is based on 54 years of practice and research, including comparative religion.

1. Prayer – the Basics

Introduction:

Read Matthew 6: 1-14; Luke 11: 1-9; 18: 1-8

Prayer is to communicate with God. It is a three-way process between God and us as human beings and individuals.

It is the most basic ingredient in the Christian life and, for that matter all religions and certainly the major religions of the world.

Prayer is essential for growing in our faith, believing in God and experiencing God's presence in our life and establishing a true foundation for our whole life. Prayer is personal, but also communal; an activity we can share with others in a variety of ways, especially in the common (communal) prayer of our faith community.

As Christians, we pray to God, the Father, through the Son, the Word, the image of God, in the Spirit. Our prayer life is, on one level, an exploration of our experience that God has been revealed to us as one God, three persons.

In our time, where we are called to explore the appropriateness of the revealed way of referring to God, with masculine language, some people prefer to speak of the Trinity as, and these are only some of the alternatives:

- Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier or
- Source, Word and Spirit
- Father and Mother God, Word or Son and Spirit.

Richard Rohr, a well respected contemporary spiritual writer, says of the masculine and feminine in God:

“And let me say right up front, don't waste too much time trying to argue about the gender of the Three; the male names ascribed to two of them and the common feminine attribution to the Holy Spirit are in great part arbitrary—to the underlying Mystery. What the early theologians overwhelmingly agreed on is that what mattered was the relationships between them (a technical term being “the subsistent relations”) and not the individual names or genders of the Three.”
(*The Divine Dance* p.83)

There are several basic ways of prayer:

(A) Formal Prayer

All our praying needs to be based on being attentive to our breathing, breathing from the heart, as a foundation of the rhythm of prayer. For more detail see chapter 3 on meditation.

(i) Talking Prayer:

- a) Where we talk to God as we would talk to another human being
- b) Liturgical prayer where we listen to and say prayers, we worship God in our faith community or by ourselves using a liturgy.
- c) In tongues which is a form of talking but not one we generally use when talking to one another but a language inspired by the Holy Spirit.

(ii) Meditation:

where the main emphasis is on silence, being with God and listening to God.

(iii) Contemplative prayer:

where we contemplate passages of Scripture, creeds, ideas, symbols etc. in order to learn more of God.

(ii) and (iii) are sometimes interchangeable.

(B) Resting Prayer

Where we pray lying down on the floor or in bed.

It is only in the last few years that I have realised the importance of this way of praying. In Psalm 4, the psalmist says:

Tremble, and do no sin: commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still.

(C) Active, Informal Prayer

The Way we live our life and practicing the presence of God in all we do. Each type involves the methods of the others to some extent. In other words, as we develop a prayerful heart and mind through formal prayer, this flows into every aspect of our life.

Because prayer is one of the most basic ingredients of the Christian life, every disciple of Christ needs to learn to pray. To do this, it is necessary to develop a discipline or habit of prayer; to have a formal time of prayer.

As already mentioned, Formal Prayer can lead to active, informal prayer and vice versa.

Development

(A) Formal Prayer

Time for Prayer

To develop our prayer life, we need to set aside some time each day to pray, preferably at least twice. Usually, morning and evening. This can be when we first get up, or after breakfast, before we begin our daily tasks. The second time should be at evening or at the end of the day, before you go to bed. Some people will be able to put some time aside during the day as well. Jesus used to spend long periods of his time in prayer.

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Luke 5:16)

Of course, there is also Sunday Worship and other times of Worship in our faith community.

The place of prayer

For our personal formal prayer, it is helpful to have a particular spot, although it is not essential, that you use regularly. This is your holy place. It might be decorated with a candle, a cross or some icon or religious symbol. Sit yourself comfortably, preferably with your back straight and your hands resting upon your lap or in the traditional pose for prayer with your hands. You might also prefer other positions such as the traditional prayer one, that is to kneel or to sit cross legged on the floor.

As already mentioned, another important place for prayer is your bed or lying on the floor.

Prayer: Talking, communicating with God

(having a conversation with God)

Prayer in its simplest form is communicating with God. In this way we communicate with God as we would with one another, often using physical gestures as well. The difference is the way that God responds. For God does not always seem to talk back in the way that we do to one another. Some people feel that God does talk with them, regularly. Others feel that they have had an occasional moment or moments, when God has directly communicated with them. Ultimately, how God communicates with us, is, *on one level, very personal, as we seek guidance in our own life. This is the foundation for learning to discern God's will and purpose in the various communal dimensions of our life and, ultimately, for all humanity and all creation*

For some people, it is not that God is not communicating with them but rather they are not recognising how God is communicating. It might well be that God is, but that we have not really learnt to hear God speaking to us. In the first book of Samuel, chapter 3, God spoke to Samuel, but, at first, he did not recognise, that God was speaking to him, because

'Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.' (1 Samuel 3: 7)

We will be mentioning this passage from time to time. For the moment, note that Samuel thought that it was someone else talking to him until Eli, the Priest helped him to recognise that it was the Lord.

Ways of Talking, Communicating with God

The best way to find out is to do it. Remind yourself that although we cannot see God, God is present everywhere. We are reminded of this every time we share in the Eucharistic liturgy, in the prayer of preparation at the beginning of the liturgy:

*“Almighty (loving) God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden;
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.”*

This is the basis of all effective prayer; in fact, it is the basis for our personal *and communal* relationship with God. We would do well to say this at the beginning of every time of prayer.

As we trust in God's presence with us, talk to God about your lives. People often say that they find prayer difficult and artificial. Yet there is usually something that worries us or that we are concerned about, or something that we are really interested in. These are the best things to start with. Talk to God about them; commit them to God, trusting in God's guidance.

It is important that we converse with God with TRUST, with FAITH, with BELIEF. TRUST, FAITH and BELIEF that God is present everywhere and sees and knows everything. As you do this, you will find that you begin to experience the mutual love that flows between God and all who believe in him. The mutual

love that is shared between the three persons of the Trinity. One of the main limitations to God, is our not realising God's presence in our lives.

Another aspect of talking prayer, is when, after some very significant effort, we clarify an issue that we really need guidance on. We put it to God and listen, waiting for God's response but not going over and over it again. This links in with other forms of prayer, such as meditation or contemplative prayer.

This way of communicating with God is the most informal form of formal prayer and needs to be a central aspect for our prayer life.

Using a Structured Format or Liturgy Resources for Prayer

There are many prayer resources, books of prayer available today, including a number of Anglican Prayer Books. The Book of Common Prayer being the oldest. There used to be a time when many people in our culture each had a Bible and a Book of Common Prayer.

The Book of Common Prayer was revised in 1928, but this revision was never fully authorised in the Church of England or the Worldwide Communion.

Around the middle of the last century, there was significant Liturgical reform and most, if not all National Churches developed their own prayer books. There were many similarities between National prayer books, but they were not all the same.

In Australia, after some years of trial liturgies, 'An Australian Prayer Book' was published in 1978. It included 'First Order Services' which were the Book of Common Prayer Services in more modern English and 'Second Order Services' based on the Liturgical reforms that preceded the book's publication. These 'Second Order Services' included daily morning and evening prayer as well as a service for prayer at the end of the day.

In 1995, 'A Prayer Book for Australia' was published. As well as a greater variety for Eucharist Liturgies, it included greater variety for non-Eucharist Public Worship. In this book the 'Second Order' daily prayer services were placed in a separate section, 'Daily Prayer'. One of the main purposes of these services being for personal prayer, or small groups whilst still a resource for church worship.

There is also a Revised Common Lectionary that gives us the various readings

for Sundays and each day of the week. These include readings for morning and evening prayer. Following the morning and evening readings helps you to read quite a lot of the Bible in a year.

These various prayer books are one significant resource that we have for our personal prayer life. *There are many other resources available from various faith traditions and ministries.*

The Lord's Prayer

(See Matthew 6: 1-9; Luke 11: 1 -13aa)

The Lord's Prayer, included in all our worship services and forms of prayer, was the universal prayer of our culture but that has been rapidly changing.

The Lord's Prayer is itself a prayer book or service or guide for personal prayer.

It is central to Jesus' teaching on how to pray.

When Jesus disciples asked him how they should pray, Jesus said to them:

- (i)** Do not pray for public show
- (ii)** 'Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; or is in the secret place and your Father who sees in secret will reward you' (Matthew 6:6)

This advice has a literal meaning. Spend some time by yourself and pray to God, the God who is invisible, the God who sees everything, and God will reward you appropriately. In other words, God will reward you, answer your prayer in the way that God knows is best for you.

As well as this it can have a more spiritual meaning. Go within yourself, your own body and pray to God who sees into your innermost being and find *the* place within yourself where you meet with God. Jesus said that the Kingdom of heaven is within us. St. Paul said that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are like a room that we live in. Consequently, to go within is to close the eyes, separate ourselves from the things of the physical world and pray to God in our Spirit.

(For further discussion of this important point, see later sections)

- (iii)** Do not use lots of words, God already knows what we need.

This puts the emphasis on prayer as being a way of coming into God's presence and surrendering our lives to God's will. We commit our lives to God waiting on

God for guidance, trusting that God knows what we need before we even ask. We say to God 'you know my life show me your way'.

It is important to note that Jesus also says we should be persistent in prayer in the story of the unjust judge where a woman pesters the judge until he responds. (Luke 18: 1-9)

The foundations of prayer are revealed in the Lord's Prayer that follows.

The Traditional Form

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.*

A Modern Form

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.*

As this is the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, it is good to use it as a basis for your time of prayer. You might pause after each phrase, using it to guide your prayers. If you pray it phrase by phrase it can take some time to pray.

Just recently, I realised that I had to some extent been partially blinded or limited

by mantra or formula prayer, which I discuss later and missed a vital factor of the value of the Lord's prayer. This was partly through growing up with the Lord's prayer and its public rote edition. Now I have come a full circle and breathe the prayer, trusting that, because it is THE prayer that Jesus taught, that it is, at least, fairly certain, that there is value to the prayer that we might not fully understand in this life.

Our Father in heaven

In prayer we talk to God as we would to our Father. Note that the word 'our' is used not 'my'. This sets the tone for the whole prayer and for our prayer. We always pray for others, when we pray for ourselves. What we will for ourselves, we will for others. For example, if you want to be rich, you want everyone to be rich. If you want God to heal you, then you want everyone to be healed as well, etc.... etc....

Calling God our Father, does not mean that we take God for granted, but that we both love and respect God. It emphasises that there is only one God and that God is our creator, the source of our life. Consequently, God has our best interests at heart. Heaven locates God where God is and the nature of God's existence, namely Spiritual. Reflecting upon the dwelling place of God is an important part of our spiritual journey. Where is heaven? *How is the gate to heaven within me? How is God within me?*

In our journey, our quest, we learn to understand what Jesus meant by saying in the passage quoted above on prayer, that there is a secret place where we meet with God.

This is also a time when we might pause and express our love, gratitude, praise and adoration to God for creating us, creating all that is, seen and unseen as we say in the Nicene Creed.

Hallowed be your name

We reverence God because of who God is. The word hallowed is based on the word 'Holy' which means to be set apart and revered. God is unique and different to any other being. The name of God signifies God's nature and character. As a phrase this petition means that we need to reverence God above everyone and everything.

In the concluding chapter of the 'Last Supper Discourse' as recorded by St John, Jesus says

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were

yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.” (John 17:6))

It is worth Reading the whole of chapter 17 to understand better, Jesus’ teaching on God’s Name.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The second phrase helps explain the first phrase. There is a sense where the kingdom of God is wherever God is honoured, loved and the will of God is followed. Jesus often spoke of it. The kingdom of God was and is present in him and was present in all those before him who responded to God’s love. It is also present in us, as we seek to respond to God in our lives and points us to the day when God’s purpose will be achieved. On that day, we will experience the joy of eternal life and the bliss of God’s pure love. The darkness will have passed. There will be no more suffering, no more war, no more bloodshed, no more violence. Creation will have been perfected.

Another important consequence of this phrase is that it reorientates our assumptions about prayer and then gives us a new and true basis for prayer.

It reorientates us, by taking us away from the idea of always asking God to put things right, to realising that life is a process whereby God’s will is achieved on earth as it in heaven. This means that most, if not all, the problems that we experience, are the effect of God’s will not happening on earth as in heaven, of people not responding and living their lives in love of God and one another.

This then gives us a new basis for prayer in that prayer is seeking God’s solutions to our problems and the problems of life. We are not asking God to do what we already know God wants to do e.g., heal people but rather seeking to learn how this is to be achieved.

This is a time when we pray for ourselves and others. This is called ‘Intercession’ or sometimes, ‘Supplication’. In this time:

(i) ASK for God’s guidance on any problems that you might have or things that you are learning to do. In other words, seek God’s guidance on every area of your life.

(ii) INTERCEDE - PRAY FOR OTHERS that is ask for God’s blessing for other people and in various situations. Your family and friends. This will include praying for people who are sick, starving, without homes etc...

Give us this day our daily bread.

This reminds us that we, and, in fact, all creatures, are dependent upon God for all our needs. We should not expect more than we need, or in other words we should have what we need and not necessarily what we want. Asking God for our needs does not mean that we do not expect to work. But rather that we will have the work that will provide for our needs. As with every other section of the prayer we ask this for ourselves and for everyone.

There was a banner in one of the churches in one of my parishes, that said:

'To pray for God to give us our daily bread and not to share it with others, when the prayer is answered, is blasphemy'

This petition also has a deeper meaning in that we ask for the spiritual sustenance that we need. The Jews often talked about the bread of God's kingdom- the experience that we tried to speak of when God's will is done. Jesus described himself as the bread of life. Those who eat that bread do not hunger any more. There is an experience that only God can give us that is truly satisfying. Similar to the experience of having our physical hunger satisfied but far more fulfilling in that it is an experience that we know satisfies our very being.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

This leads us into a time of confession where we

- 1) confess our own sins, we say sorry to God for the times when we have strayed from God's ways. As to what is right and wrong, we are guided by the teaching of the Scriptures, particularly, the teaching of Jesus; the Holy Spirit, the teaching of the church, modern science and our conscience. As we grow as a Christian, we become more and more aware as to what sin really is and the different ways that we sin. (See the later section on the contemplative way of knowing) This awareness should lead to confession.
- 2) forgive those who have sinned against us. Jesus says that forgiveness of others is the main condition for God forgiving us. We are reminded of Jesus Christ on the cross, praying 'Forgive them Father for they do not know what they are doing'.

This is also a time to thank God for his forgiveness and for what Jesus has done for us through his death and resurrection.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Or Save us from the time of trial or And do not carry us inward - putting to proof (by experiment (of good), experience (of evil), or adversity

The puzzling point of this petition is that we ask God to not lead us into temptation. If it was the devil, then, on the surface, that would seem to make more sense.

The explanation that makes most sense to me, is that the word tempt can mean 'to test a person's strength'. Abraham was tested by God when asked by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Similarly, God allowed Satan to test Job and the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the dessert where he could be tempted by Satan.

Consequently, we ask God not to test us. But then you might say, 'But I like a challenge. Won't being tested make me stronger?' The reply to this would seem to be, that by praying this petition, we face those possibilities within ourselves, we face the forces within us and without of us that would have us doubt God, or lead us away from God into darkness, to that which is not of God and test us or create the need for us to be tested. By asking not to be tested and to be freed from evil, within and without, we are affirming our Faith in God and our desire to be freed from any influence of the evil one. This would seem to fit with a literal version of the Greek Text, which could be expressed as 'on our inner journey may we not be tested beyond our capacity, be protected from inner temptations, the inner temptations of the soul, our inner darkness and the power of evil'. The implications of this are very far reaching.

For the Kingdom, the power, the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

This Affirmation of God's sovereignty follows from the previous petition. In it we acknowledge God's right to rule us. That all life love, power, energy and will power come from God, and that all that we glory in, our various gifts and abilities come from God and that God alone is the one who deserves our praise and adoration.

This Doxology is not included in either Matthew or Luke's version of the prayer but was probably added in the early days of the church.

Some Types of Prayer ¶

The Lord's prayer teaches us how we should pray. The Scriptures in various ways illustrate the ways of praying that the Lord's Prayer leads to. They can be remembered by the Acrostic Word 'ACTS'.

A - ADORATION

C - CONFESSION:

T - THANKSGIVING:

S - SUPPLICATION: (Intercession)

As you can see from the commentary on the Lord's prayer, these can be woven into your prayer based on the various sections of the Lord's prayer.

Some other Ways of Praying

Tongues¶

There has been a lot of talk in some parts of the church in recent years about 'speaking in tongues'. Some people have said that speaking in tongues is the only sign of being a Christian and having the Holy Spirit living within our hearts. This is not really accurate. But equally, people who say that you should not pray or speak in tongues neglect the fact that it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. If you find yourself being moved to pray in sounds or in what appear strange words, do it, because that can be the Spirit praying within you and guiding you into a form of prayer that enables you to speak to God in a spirit language and not a human language. As St. Paul says:

"Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the Saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8: 26-27)

Personally, I believe that tongues have been overly complicated by a rather sectarian approach to them. Our learning of the human language, as a baby, begins with making sounds. The same can apply to us learning our language of prayer. Just as the baby expresses to its parents and those around it, how it feels through making sounds but not words, so we can do the same in our prayers. Sometimes it can be much more effective to moan, groan or cry to God, rather than just saying I feel terrible. For more about praying in tongues see 1 Corinthians 12 -14.

Tongues should not normally be used for public prayer, unless there is someone who can tell the others what is being said; interpret the prayer in tongues.

Body Prayer

As suggested above, just as we communicate with each other, in other ways apart from words, so we should pray in other ways apart from words. Body gestures are one of the ways that we communicate without words or in conjunction with our words. Some body gestures when you pray are:

- 1) To kneel
- 2) To stand still

- 3) To place your hands together
- 4) To prostrate yourself on the ground
- 5) To make the sign of the cross
- 6) To stretch your arms upwards
- 7) To move around, to dance.

(B) Resting Prayer

- 1) as mentioned earlier, for many years, I have never considered 'Resting Prayer' as a part of my prayer life, even though I would go to sleep praying every night. This was partly because, in my younger years, I would put my head on the pillow and start praying the Lord's prayer and would frequently only get as far as 'Our Father.....' And I will have fallen asleep.
- 2) In yoga, Resting Prayer is called 'Yoga Nidra' and is recognised as a very important spiritual practice. The website BeYogi describes the practice
- 3) *"as the practice of psychic sleep. It's..... a conscious state that flirts on the border of sleep. Deep transformation can happen in yoga nidra because you can set a resolve that permeates into the subconscious through the practice, bringing powerful potential for healing and self-growth."*
<https://beyogi.com/yoga-nidra-practice-psychic-sleep/>

(C) Active, Informal Prayer

Prayer can lead to informal prayer and vice versa. Informal prayer is prayer that we share with God at any time of the day or the night in any place and in any situation. This type of prayer can be summed up as:

The Way we live our Lives.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians says:

"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5: 16 -18)

Similarly, Jesus once told a parable:

"to the effect that they should always pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18: 1)

For many people this seems rather strange, because their only understanding is of more formal prayer either at home or at church and not so much of the 'inner prayer of the heart'. Formal prayer is important and we will discuss this further later, but for the moment, it is important that we understand that one of the

basic goals of the Christian life is to seek to live your life in such a way that you are constantly mindful of the presence of God and in fact, we seek to be energised and guided by God in all that we do.

(In some circles this is described as living in a state of God-consciousness.)

For example, if you have someone who is a really close friend, then you like to spend a lot of time with them. It is the same with our friendship with God, except there is one important difference - GOD IS SPIRITUAL AND CAN BE PRESENT WITH EVERYONE AT ALL TIMES, whereas our human friendships are, to some extent, limited by time and space.

One form of Prayer, then, is learning to be with God every moment of the day and let God guide you in all that you feel, think, do and say.

How do you do this?

- i) As with all prayer, learn to be attentive to God in whatever you do. Be aware that God is always with you; learn to experience God's presence, God's energy
- ii) Ask for God's guidance in all the decisions that you have to make, and in your various relationships with people. Some examples: I am talking to someone who is unhappy about something. Not only do I try and do something to help the person, but I inwardly ask God to guide them and help them.
- iii) I see something tragic on the News on T.V. that makes me feel sad. I ask God to help that person or persons.
- iv) I come across an accident as I am driving along the road or see an ambulance passing at high speed - I pray to God to help that person.
- v) I am playing Golf: after setting the shot up I ask God to guide me as I play the shot. etc., etc....
- vi) In Star Wars terms, to be a Jedi Knight living in the Force, the power of the Holy Spirit. As Richard Rohr would say: living in the energy of the divine dance of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This can lead us into exploring what in some faith traditions, are called the Chakra's or energy centers in the body. These and the meridians of acupuncture are sometimes spontaneously experienced by people through the practice of meditation, without necessarily being taught much about them. They are first learnt during our formal meditation as you progress in your practice of it but as they become a part of our lives, we can experience them energising our activity.

The effect of this is not only do you live your life more and more with a conscious sense of God's presence, but you are also serving God in whatever you do more effectively

A brief description of the Chakras

Chakras are the circular vortexes of energy that are placed in seven different points on the spinal column, and all the seven chakras are connected to the various organs and glands within the body. These chakras are responsible for disturbing the life energy, which is also known as Qi, Prana or the Word of Life (my comparison)

There are 7 chakras in the body and each has a specific function.

- i) Root chakra at the base of the spine and is the foundation energy of our life.
- ii) Sacral chakra just below the bellybutton. Sexual energy and creativity
- iii) Solar plexus chakra located in your stomach area related to confidence, self esteem and helping feel control in our lives
- iv) Heart chakra near the heart in the centre of the chest related to our ability to love and show compassion
- v) Throat chakra related to our ability to communicate verbally
- vi) Third eye chakra located between the eyes and is related to our intuition and imagination. I believe this is referred to when Jesus said: “

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is single or clear, your whole body will be full of light; (Matthew 6: 22)

- vii) Crown chakra at the top of the head related to our spirituality and spiritual connection with others in the whole of life.

You can explore these more if you wish and a lot of information is available on the web.

2. Some Ways that God Communicates with us

The Scriptures record many instances where God seems to communicate directly with a person. For example, the story already quoted where the boy Samuel hears God speaking to him. There seems little doubt from the way that the experience is described that God spoke directly to Samuel, and not only did

he speak to him but came and stood beside his bed. The meaning of this particular story is best discovered through meditating on it. There are other examples where God speaks directly through a messenger, usually an Angel. This is regarded as the same as God speaking personally. For example, the story of Abraham and Isaac. God speaks directly to Abraham, but then revokes his command to sacrifice Isaac through the message of an Angel. Ultimately, God communicates to us through God's Word, who is an expression of God's very own nature.

'The Word was with God and the Word was God' (John 1: 1-2)

Jesus is the Word made flesh. The Word can be communicated to us in various ways.

In your Mind

When you talk to God, stop and listen to God. Hear what God has to say. It might be that you think you hear nothing, so then you start thinking about what you had been talking to God about and you find yourself coming up with a solution to what you were praying about. Or it might be that you feel that God is speaking back to you and then suddenly, you stop and say 'I was really only talking to myself. Were you???' The tricky thing about prayer is that sometimes that is all you have been doing, inventing God's answers; but even that is not so far from the truth; and in other cases, God has been speaking back to you in your mind. We need to learn to discern the difference. You will see this later in the section on meditation where I reflect on one of the most critical disciplines of meditation is to learn to discern when God is speaking in your thoughts or when it is just your mind rambling on.

In your Heart

Being attentive to your heart and what you are feeling. This takes us beyond our thoughts, our minds and helps us to distinguish between ideas and thoughts that are really an expression of what we are feeling. Listening to our feelings leads to us dialoguing with God about why we are experiencing what ever we are feeling and discerning how God is communicating in our feelings. Ultimately, prayer leads to the unity of heart and mind, which in turn deepens our communion with God. The Eastern Orthodox speak of bringing the mind into the heart.

The union of heart and mind in prayer is fundamental in developing a relationship with God. To say any more at this stage is beyond the scope of this booklet.

In our Lives

Another way that God answers prayer is to actually direct the situation that you are involved in so that it works out in the right way. You might have prayed about something and felt that nobody was listening. A little later, someone comes a long or something happens that seems to be the answer to your prayer. **GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS SPEAK TO US IN WORDS, BUT OFTEN THROUGH THE WAY THINGS HAPPEN IN OUR LIVES.**

Through Other People

Part of God speaking in our lives is that God can answer through other people, either directly, when the person has felt guided to do something for you or say something to you; or indirectly, when they have been an instrument of God's purpose without them knowing it. Sometimes, the message they give us really challenges us, but we should not be put off by that. We cannot really grow without accepting challenges. We also need to have the courage to share what God might have given us for another person.

It is a very profound experience in our lives when an experience that we have had is confirmed through someone else. For example, after Paul met with Jesus on the road to Damascus, his experience was confirmed through Ananias.

(Acts 9:1 – 19)

Through the Scriptures

Often God will speak to us through the Scriptures. In the Scriptures, we reflect upon the story of salvation as revealed in Christ and how it speaks of our journey in Christ. We reflect upon Scripture in the light of God being triune.

God will give us insights into who God is and God's purpose for human life, help us to understand our own lives and sometimes the Holy Spirit will apply a passage of Scripture to us often by giving us a passage as an answer to our prayers or a glass to look at our life through.

Through the Church

The ways mentioned above can take place outside the church, but is usually more clearly expressed within the church, that is the community of believers.

Worship within the faith community, is central to our experience of God and coming to know God better. God speaks to us through Word and Sacraments, in the sharing of this experience together. We learn to experience the presence of our risen Lord within our midst. The experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is illustrative of this

“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”” (Luke 24:30-32)

The Church, through its various processes of discernment, helps us to recognise how God speaks to us and makes God's will and purpose known to us both as individuals and as human beings.

The disunity of the church and the significant differences being between the various denominations and also between religions, is one of the greatest hindrances in every human being's relationship with God. As part of praying: 'Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven', we pray that human beings will listen to God together.

Through the cultures of the world

We learn to listen to God in the various cultures of the world and the understanding of life and humanity that they express. This includes the various sciences of these cultures.

In dreams

Many of the encounters that people have with God in the Bible, are through dreams. Abraham had dreams of God communicating with him, showing him things, Joseph had dreams that were essential to the fulfilling of God's purpose in his life and Joseph accepted Mary as his wife and Jesus as his son, after God spoke to him in a dream, to name just a few of these instances.

Interpretation of dreams is a complex subject and often where we need the help and support of others. In the limited scope of these notes, it is sufficient to say that we need to listen to the dream and what we feel it means is the foundation of any other exploration of its meaning we might do.

The absence of God - Not hearing anything

Although God might seem absent God never is. God's silence God's apparent absence gives us space to become more who we are

Summary:

God can speak to us:

- 1) directly in our minds, and sometimes as a voice or through our ideas.

- 2) in our hearts
- 3) in our lives
- 4) through other people
- 5) through the Scriptures.
- 6) through the church.
- 7) Through the cultures of the world
- 8) in dreams

Keeping a Spiritual Diary, Journal or Notebook

It is often helpful to keep a spiritual diary, Journal or notebook. It could contain:

an outline of the things that you include in your prayer time. A record of how you felt God has spoken to you, including dreams as mentioned above, which are a very important way for God to communicate. A note of the passages of Scripture that you have read or are going to read.

Notes or questions that you might have of various things that concern:

- 1) passages in the Bible.
- 2) teachings of the church.
- 3) issues that we face as human beings and in our lives.

3. Meditation – Silent prayer

Quieting the Mind – Listening to God

Christian meditation has many techniques in common with other forms of meditation: Breathing techniques, use of symbols, the imagination, and inner mystical experiences. The one important difference is that the object or focus of our meditation is the personal God, revealed to us through God's Son, the eternal Word and the Holy Spirit. Meditation should be a part of our normal prayer life.

Unfortunately, many Christians still associate meditation with Eastern religions and as a consequence think that is not a part of Christian spirituality.

One of the problems is our use of words. Traditionally, many Christians have regarded meditation as a spiritual way of reading the Scriptures. This can be part of what meditation is, although, as can be seen later, I prefer to see this as contemplation. But in a sense, it does not matter, for one merges into the other. In more recent times, I have often avoided this difficulty by calling meditation, Silent Prayer.

The following schema is a suggested way of using your prayer time, incorporating a period of meditation.

Preparation for Meditation

- 1) Your normal prayer time and then conclude with meditation
or
- 2) A brief opening prayer, Meditation, then conclude with your normal prayer time or
- 3) moving through the different stages in your prayer time, in a way similar to how a symphony or piece of music unfolds.

Meditation

Relaxation of the Body

Having begun your prayer time, close your eyes (if you have not already done so), and begin the time of meditation, of holding yourself before God, of being with God. Let yourself breathe in naturally - enjoy just breathing. At first, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Become aware of your breathing, the gentle in and out of the breath. Feel your heartbeat and

breathe in harmony with it. Breathe with your heart, let it determine your breathing and the pace you breathe at and whether you pause at anytime whilst breathing. (If breathing with your heart does not make sense to you than just try to bring your focus of attention to the area of your heart and then breathed into and out of the area of your heart)

Learning to breathe with your heart takes time and practice. It is a foundation to practicing the presence of God. We can be attentive to breathing with our heart in every aspect of our daily lives. Obviously, this not easy to do but we can do it every time we pause for a moment and reestablish our attentiveness.

Some people count whilst they are breathing in and out, but it is my understanding that breathing with your heart is far better.

From breathing out through your mouth you can then change to breathing out through your nose as well as breathing in through your nose.

You can also practice breathing through one nostril and out through the other or out through your mouth. Then repeat the process with the other nostril. Doing this for sometime can be really helpful.

This time of focusing your attention upon your breathing is important, for the Spirit is often experienced through our breath. Remember what St. Paul said about the Spirit praying within us. Through Jesus we receive the Holy Spirit. When God first created human beings, he breathed the breath of life into us.

When you are comfortable with heart breathing, check your body for tensions, energy blockages etc., beginning with your feet (one at a time), then moving upward through your whole body to the top of your skull. If you experience tension, et cetera, then consciously relax.

During this time you might feel an energy moving through your system, just let it relax you, for you are experiencing your inner life, the power of God that lives in you, the Word of Life, the energy of Jesus, the Word become a human being, given to us through the Holy Spirit (referred to by John in his letter see 1 John 1: 1ff), beginning to work more actively. If this does not happen, wait until it does (even weeks, months, years!) As a young boy Samuel had to do, this is a process of recognising the Word or having it revealed to us.

The significance of this experience needs a more detailed study, particularly in seeing how it is the foundation of all major religions.

Repetition of the Name of Jesus or some other meaningful Word

After many years of practicing meditation, I have come to the realisation that breathing with your heart, as described above is the most powerful way to quieten your mind and focus your attention on God, and experience *Jesus as the Word of Life*. If you find this is too difficult at first, then chose a short word such as one of the following: (*this is called using a mantra in Eastern religions or a formula in Western*

Christian traditions)

- Lord; Jesus;
- the 'Jesus Prayer' "O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me (a sinner)";
- Maranatha (Come Lord Jesus);
- Alleluia (Praise the Lord)
- "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"
- Demamah: literally, a soft murmuring sound. The word used to describe Elijah's experience of God in 1 Kings 19:12. It is linguistically related to 'Ohm', the word used in Hinduism and Buddhism to refer to the primal sound of the universe, that we, as Christians, would say is Christ, the Word of God.
- Ohm could also be used in the context of what I have described above.
- Find your own sound that resonates with you.
- or a more general word such as love, joy, or peace.

Other alternatives for you to consider could include:

- Putting vowels to the name of God YHVH, used in the Old Testament is another way.

The way we refer to or speak of God, the Names of God, is fundamental in all spiritual, faith traditions. (Note the comments on the Lord's Prayer). For the ancients, to know the name of God or how to refer to God, gave them some power over God or at least a relationship with the God they could name. This is a very complex topic, we can only touch on it in these notes. In the old Testament we need to remember that the people of Israel came to the belief in there being only one God, through a long process of growth and development in their relationship with their God. Without going into the development of this process, we need to know that there was a time when the God of Israel was the greatest of all gods but there were still other gods. As Israel's monotheistic faith

and their understanding of God developed, there were two ways that God was primarily referred to:

1) **Elohim** - God in English translations. This name referred to the God who was just and consequently it was in a sense, God's judgmental name. It is important to note that the Hebrew word is plural. Hence in Genesis 1:26, God says 'let us make...' For the early Christians, this was important for our understanding of the Trinity. Elohim is the name used for God in the first chapter of the book of Genesis.

2) **YHVH Elohim** - Lord God in English translations. This was God's personal name, God's merciful name. The people of Israel never said it out aloud. When they came to this Name, they would say 'the Holy One, blessedly he' or Adonai and they would refer to this name as the 'hashem', the Name.

This is the name of God referred to in **Gen 4:26**

To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.

More importantly, this is the name that God gives to Moses, when Moses meets God on the holy mountain, in the burning Bush.

Then Moses said to God,

"If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (Exodus 3:

I am who I am is in the format of the Hebrew verb to be, which is also the personal name of God, and although it is in the same format it does not mean that we know how to pronounce it. Importantly, the Hebrew verb to be means either 'I am who I am' or 'I will be who I will be'. This vagueness about how the name of God is to be spoken is illustrated later on in Exodus, when Moses asks God to show him God's glory. God says:

"I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall

not see me and live.” 21 And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”
(Exodus 33:19 – 23)

As you can see there is a deep spiritual tradition behind the Hebrew names of God. Whilst being aware of this it might be that you use the personal name of God, YHVH Elohim and ask God to teach you how to pronounce it as he pronounced to Moses.

Apart from these two primary names of God in the old Testament, there are many others. Usually they describe a particular attribute of God, for example,

Shalom – peace or

El Roi – the God who sees, the name used by Hagar when God saved her, and Ishmael after Abraham had to send them away from his camp at Sarah’s insistence (Genesis 16:13)

For Christians, Jesus gave how we address God a seemingly radical new perspective. As we have already heard in the Lord’s prayer, he referred to God as Father (Abba). This does not mean that he walked away from the deep spirituality of the old Testament ways of naming God. For example, in the Last Supper discourse as recorded in John’s gospel, as mention earlier, Jesus speaks of his going to the Father and how we can ask the Father in Jesus name, in our prayers; but he also says how he has:

‘revealed your name (the Fathers) those you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word.’ (John 17:6)

In the acts of the apostles and epistles, Jesus becomes the name by which we can be saved.

Once you have chosen a word or sound, repeat it quietly and easily, waiting upon God in your heart. *Being attentive to sounding the word or phrase.* We will say more about this later in talking about contemplation.

Exploration of the Kingdom of Heaven

Meditation is also a time for exploring your inner room, discovering what St. Paul means by saying that a Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit. It is a time for discovering that the kingdom of heaven is within you or experiencing Jesus in the very depths of our being, for St Paul said in Corinthians ‘That Jesus Christ is in you’ (2 Corinthians 13:5), and in Colossians ‘the mystery of the gospel is

Christ within you' (Colossians 1:26) and in Luke 'the kingdom of God is within you or alternatively the kingdom of God is coming into being' (Luke 17: 20-21.

See also (Matthew 6: 5-14) mentioned earlier in the section on the Lord's prayer

The Development of the Meditation

As you become quieter, stiller, you will begin to sense more clearly the life activity around you. Listen to it all for a short time, notice the various sounds but do not become involved with them. Just let it all be.

You might see images or visions in your mind or with your eyes whilst they are closed; don't concern yourself with these. If any of these are of significance, you will know in time.

Similarly, as thoughts come to mind, let them pass, don't dwell on them. (If, they seem to be of particular significance then make a mental note to spend some time in the prayer time that follows to think and pray about them)

If people come to mind, repeat their names slowly, holding them before God, that is intercession; then leave them with God. (Again, it might be that you need to come back to them and pray for them, again, in your prayer time).

If during this time, you come across aches or pains in your system that you were not previously aware of, don't dwell on them; notice them, leave them with God, trusting in Him to work as He will and pass on.

One of the most important aspects of the meditation is the gentle way that we deal with any of our problems or things that concern us. We let God's Spirit work within us rather than relying on the strength of our wills. The energy of meditation is -- often called passive energy.

Sometimes your meditation will end in deep stillness and you will sense that the Lord, through the Holy Spirit has directed or guided you or in some way has answered prayer. You might even have felt that you heard or experienced, 'the still small voice' (1 Kings 19:10,12).

Enjoy the stillness until you find yourself beginning to think about other things. Depending on the time you have for meditation, you might come back to your word, seeking to enter the silence again. If this experience of peace, the peace which passes all understanding, and a deep sense of the Lord's presence does not come immediately; be patient and keep up your meditation practice. Keep waiting on the Lord, trusting in God. You will find that in time, your life will become more peaceful; even when the outer events of your life are busy.

The process of letting things go, described above, and not dwelling on them is important in the early stages of practicing meditation. Once you become more experienced, it is important to practice *discernment*. If what you see, hear or think seems to be God communicating with you, you do not say ‘oh I am too busy meditating’ but be attentive to what is communicating, then return to the meditation process.

There are many and varied experiences that can happen to us during our times of meditation. They cannot be spoken of here. In a sense, the bible is a guide to these, in that we find the spiritual experience of others described to us and we are able to recognise this experience in our own lives.

The descent of the Holy Spirit

The descent of the Spirit upon a person is central to the Christian Revelation. Although we talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit, there does not seem to be a lot of understanding or discussion about the Significance of the Descent of the Spirit. In the New Testament, it begins with Mary and her conceiving of Jesus. On her asking the Angel

“How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you....(Luke 1:34-35))

Next is the descent of the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism, which is spoken of in the four gospels. Although the accounts vary slightly, the essence is the same as described in Luke’s Gospel

“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:21-22))

John’s account is also important to note. John the Baptist testifies

“I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:32-34))

The climax of this stream of revelation is ‘the Transfiguration’.

“Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his

face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.....While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"
(Matthew 17: 1-2,5)

Our understanding of the descent of the Spirit comes from noting Mary's experience and comparing Jesus' Baptism with his Transfiguration.

At his baptism, heaven was opened and the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and a voice was heard from heaven. The Spirit hovering above Jesus head is vital for us to pray about and come to understand and experience. This is paralleled at Pentecost when the Spirit hovers above the heads of each of the disciples, in the form of a tongue of flame and empowered them for ministry.

At the Transfiguration, it could be said that the radiance of Jesus was caused by him being filled with the Holy Spirit. This moment being part of the process of the revelation of the Spirit that culminated with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The Eastern Orthodox spiritual tradition call this process 'theosis', that is being divinised; being fully indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

When we pray both personally and communally, whilst being present to Christ within us, we are aware of how the Holy Spirit will 'overshadow' us, hover above our heads as the Holy Spirit fills and inspires us.

Completion of the time of Meditation and the beginning of a more formal time of Prayer

As you come out of this time of meditation, open your eyes and let yourself adjust, and then conclude by either completing your prayer time, if you have not already done so, or by collecting together, your thoughts and experiences from your meditation and then, if you have a Spiritual Journal, note them in it.

Although you have finished your formal prayer time, it does not stop there. We need to try and be prayerful, that is be listening to God in our heart, in whatever we do throughout the day. As Jesus and St. Paul teach us, we should pray constantly.

Conclusion

As you grow in prayer, you might find that you are able to put more time aside. If you can; do it: because this is a very helpful ministry that you can exercise to the people of God. You will find that, apart from feeling greater peace in your life, that you are learning to recognise how God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit can dwell within us as Jesus promised he would. You will come to know Jesus as the eternal Word of God, the Word of Life, the power through

whom all things were created and the light that shines on every person who comes into the world (John 1)

"Those to whom the eternal word speaks are delivered from uncertainty. From one Word proceeds all things, and all things tell of Him; it is He, the Author of all things, who speaks to us. Without Him no one can understand or judge aright. But the man to whom all things are one, who refers everything to One, is enabled to remain steadfast in heart, and abide at peace with God." (Thomas A Kempis)

4. Some Further Notes on Meditation and Prayer

The Physiological Effects of Meditation

Scientists have discovered that the human brain emits faint electrical impulses which can be measured in microvolts by an EEG machine. There are four basic types of brain wave:

(i) Beta waves:

13 or more cycles per second. These are the waves that are emitted in our normal state of consciousness. It is associated with focused attention and the active thinking of a mind turned towards the outside world.

(ii) Alpha waves:

8-12 cycles per second. These are produced by a state of 'relaxed awareness' with a move towards interiority or what is called 'internally focused states'. These waves are difficult to produce with the eyes open. Hence the eyes are normally closed for meditation.

(iii) Theta waves:

4-7 cycles per second. These are produced when we are drowsy and the production of them is often accompanied by dreams.

(iv) Delta waves.

0 to 4 cycles per second. These are emitted during deep sleep.

Put simply, when our mind is active, it emits these waves. The number of cycles per second being determined by the intensity of the process. If we are worried or tense this can cause our brain to work faster and we will emit higher frequencies. The activity of our mind affects the whole of our nervous system. Meditation is a

way to consciously control the speed and type of our brain waves. Through the repetition of the word, we can slow our mind down and consciously experience other states of mind or consciousness, whilst sending harmonious waves through our nervous system. For example, in meditation you can consciously experience the rest of sleep, something that we are not normally aware of. Similarly, we can learn to tap the more creative aspects of our mind and as a consequence become more effective as a person.

I had a good example of this recently, when I started meditating about 2:30am in the morning. I borrowed my wife's 'FitBit Watch'. I was what I would call 'in the Word', with the energy of the Word flowing through me. Although I was totally conscious, the watch recorded me as being in light sleep.

States of Consciousness

No one would deny that the way we experience life during our dreams is often very different to the way that we experience life in our normal waking states. Similarly, within our waking state, we have a great variety of experiences. We don't really know whether we all see the world in exactly the same way. What your experience of a rose is might not be the same as mine. We both know that it is a rose and that, in this instance, it is red, but we do not see the rose through each other's eyes. The fact that we agree that the rose is beautiful points to the fact that there is much in our experience that is the same, but there is still an indefinable level where we cannot really know what another's experience is.

The more we reflect upon this question, the more interesting it becomes. Philosophers have tried to analyse whether the way we see things in the world is exactly as they are; or whether we only see them from our own experience. For example: a trained musician hears much more in sounds and in a piece of music, than someone who has not really received any musical training, whether as a listener or a performer. Yet no matter how trained a person's ear, it is doubtful that we ever, totally, experience anything. There is an area, which is beyond our understanding, partly because 'anything' ultimately points to its maker.

This leads us to the conclusion that the way we experience the world and understand it, is largely determined by our own knowledge and understanding. For example: when we see a tower in the distance, we know that although it appears small, really it is a tower of approximately such and such a height.

It is not our purpose to resolve these issues but rather to reflect upon the question. For it leads us to think about 'Who we are' or to put the question personally, it leads us to ask the question 'Who am I'. Who is it that sees, hears

and experiences? Who is it that lives, loves, thinks, feels etc....?

As we ask this question, we can find that there are many levels to each of us and many levels of our experience. Some psychologists have called these different levels; 'states of consciousness'. But beyond all the different states of consciousness,

experiences or things that we are aware of; is the person who is aware, the person who sees and experiences. As we develop our consciousness, so the way we experience and the things that we experience, grows.

Meditation helps us to become more aware of who we are, who it is that has the experiences. In meditation, we experience different states of consciousness, but eventually, we go beyond these and experience ourselves as we are; we experience pure consciousness. We experience the 'I AM'. Remember how God reveals himself to Moses as the 'I AM'. 'I AM WHO I AM'. This is a statement of pure consciousness or being and represents an important stage in our spiritual journey.

Jesus Christ as the Image of the Self: The Image of God and Man

As we seek to discover who we are and to experience true consciousness, we find that the more aware we become of ourselves, the more aware we become of God. For as the book of Genesis tells us 'human beings are created in the image of God'. As we discover the image of God within ourselves, we also come to know Christ; for he is God's image and likeness. Jesus said: 'If you have seen me you have seen the Father'.

Christ being both God and Man is our pure image and God's true image.

Jesus shows us what God is like and shows us what we are really like. As the image of our true self, we see in him a person who lived as God wanted him to. He was a person who really knew himself, who truly knew who he was. A person who was both conscious of himself and conscious of God. His teaching shows us the way and how we should live, to grow spiritually. Meditation is only a part of the process of knowing yourself. It lays a basis for the whole of life to become a process of learning and finding out our own true self and as a consequence experiencing the truth of others.

The Kingdom of Heaven is Within You

Mention was made of this teaching earlier on.

Christians are often described as pilgrims, as people who are on a journey. Yet often we have little idea, where it is that we are heading to. The theme of the

Kingdom of Heaven featured strongly in Jesus teaching. He began his ministry by announcing that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, that the Kingdom of Heaven was near. Not somewhere far off but right here now. Meditation is a very important way of learning to discover and explore that reality. It helps us to know for ourselves what is meant by the Kingdom of Heaven.

Spiritual writers emphasised that finding the Kingdom of Heaven is like discovering another world. A world that we have to learn to live in, just as we have to learn to live in this world. St Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15: 35-58 writes "...If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body." (V54). We need to learn to see, hear, taste and experience the things of this other world. We need to learn to use our SPIRITUAL SENSES. For example: Jesus is described as being the Word of God, light and life of the world. Do we experience him as such?

St. Paul in Colossians as quoted earlier:

"the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." 1:26-27 (NIV)

In 2 Corinthians 13: 5, he says:

"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?"

If this experience of Jesus, has not become consciously yours yet, then, we should be aware that the time will come when this will be a part of our experience.

Similarly, Jesus tells his disciples how he can give them the Bread of Life. Bread after eating, we do not hunger. These images point to the fact that in God's Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, there are experiences comparable to the sensual experiences of this world. In fact, the two eventually merge.xxxx

The Kingdom of Heaven being within us also opens us, as mentioned in the descent of the Spirit, to how the Holy Spirit comes upon us.

Ultimately, we seek to experience the love of God, the triune God, with our very being.

Contemplation - Meditation as a Way of Knowledge

Much of what we have learnt about Meditation, takes us far beyond the practice of a simple technique, but we need to remember, that the whole process is based on a very simple technique. As we learn to use the technique, we learn to **discern**

when to use the `word' as a means of dispelling thoughts and when to leave the `word' and follow the thoughts and feelings that the practice leads us into contact with. Learning to discern when to hang onto the `word' and when to let go, is a very important skill of meditation. This process of discernment is critical for our development.

Learning this skill is part of learning to use the technique as a way of knowledge. It can be used with **passages of Scripture**, as a means of penetrating into their deeper meaning by visualising the scene and by slowly repeating key verses. This approach is what was traditionally called 'Meditation' in many Christian traditions. Again, the example of the descent of the Spirit. Imaginatively pray: Mary's encounter with the angel, Jesus Baptism and Transfiguration, his breathing of the Holy Spirit on the disciples, that first Easter evening and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. xxxx

The method can be used with **Concepts**. Instead of thinking about something, you take the word that refers to the idea that you want to learn about and you repeat it as you would repeat your `word'. An example of this is: Suppose that you want to find out more about `sin'. You take the word sin and repeat it to yourself. A strong sense of what sin is will emerge in your understanding. You will sense, inwardly, what it means; what it means to be separated from God, to miss the mark.

This is a very profound way of learning, but so different to what we are used to in our culture. It leads us into deeper experiences of Revelation and the dynamics of how God is revealed to us in many and varied ways. It can lead us to reading less and praying more.

Another important application is for **'Intercession'**. As we meditate, instead of using our `word', we use the person's name whom we are praying for or the issue that we are praying about, to bring the person before God, to help connect the person with God or to pray about the issue

It can also lead us into exploring the spiritual value of the cycle of the church year. How the various events of Christ's life celebrated from Advent to Trinity Sunday and then through Sundays after Pentecost ordinary Sundays, and God's way of revealing the deep mysteries of the faith to us.

For example, Christmas is not just what we understand it to be in our culture, the celebration of the birth of the human Jesus, whom we believe to be the son of God, but it also is about us experiencing the birth of the Word of God in us. As St Theophan, the Recluse said

“the birth of Jesus, God’s Word, God’s son, of the Virgin Mary in human history, is one thing; the birth of the Word of God in us by the holy spirit is another”.

As with Christmas, so with Easter, a time to experience spiritually the death and resurrection of Jesus, as St Paul says in his prayer to Ephesians, to experience the same power at work in us that raised Jesus from the dead. Similarly, one of the best ways to experience spiritually the depths of the Revelation in the Transfiguration is to be present at the Feast of the Transfiguration.

Summary

To sum up: Meditation is a very simple technique than can be used as a means:

- i. of relaxation
- ii. of prayer and contemplation: of speaking and listening to God.
- iii. of self-knowledge and of developing our awareness or consciousness
- iv. of developing our personal relationship with God, through His Son, God’s Word and the Holy Spirit.
- v. of exploring the kingdom of heaven
- vi. of developing our knowledge of things through a process other than by thinking about things.

Conclusion

In his address to Synod in 1921, our, Bishop, Richard Treloar, in his introduction quoted Richard Rohr, a Franciscan Priest:

“The Christ Mystery [is] the indwelling of the Divine Presence in everyone and everything. . . in Him every kind of life has meaning and has an influence on every other kind of life.

Those familiar with Rohr’s thinking will know that is not some exclusivist or colonising claim for the truths of Christianity over against other world religions.

From within the riches of our own tradition Rohr speaks this good news of radical inclusion – ‘a cosmic notion of the Christ’, he says, that ‘competes with and excludes no one, but includes everyone and everything’.”

May this booklet help you on your journey to be inclusive and experience more fully the love of God.