

## THE WORLD COMMUNITY AND OTHER COMMUNITIES

*The World Community is one among other networks in the world involved in the rediscovery and teaching of the Christian contemplative tradition. Among these there is a close friendship with Contemplative Outreach expressed in this statement by Laurence Freeman and Thomas Keating.*

### **A Joint Statement from The World Community and Contemplative Outreach**

The contemplative communities of Contemplative Outreach and The World Community for Christian Meditation began independently of each other but in interdependence on the gospel tradition about twenty-five years ago.

Both communities grew from the Christian contemplative and apophatic heritage. We therefore share a special respect for the early monastic tradition, represented for example by John Cassian, the hesychasts of the Orthodox tradition and the medieval mystics such as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. We believe these traditions are living streams and have a significant and urgent value for Christian life today, for the renewal of all the churches and for enhancing the sense of the sacred in the modern world.

It seems to us that the Spirit is awakening the contemplative life among the people of God beyond the usual lay or clerical categories. It also nurtures an experience of communion beyond denominational boundaries. The same Spirit is reminding us of the forgotten treasures of our Christian heritage. Seeing contemplation as a dimension of prayer and of personal lifestyle and finding a contemplative path taught in our own tradition often come as a welcome discovery to many Christians. We believe this discovery and its widening influence needs to be encouraged by all Christian leaders.

Contemplative prayer grows with faith and perseverance and, in order to sustain them, community is born. For both our communities small local groups characterize this growth, both in depth and numbers. We encourage friendship and the sharing of faith between these groups which are committed to be open, hospitable and ecumenical. We believe that greater growth will follow if the groups of each community meet together from time to time to share the silence of Christ and his Word.

The differences of approach to practice, particularly on the issues of the mantra or sacred symbol, are subtle expressions of the richness of the Christian tradition, not divisions. Wisdom and experience however suggest a person persevere in the same practice once undertaken. Living the wisdom of the contemplative path is a matter of faith active in love, not of spiritual techniques. Contemplation is primarily practice not theory and hence requires fidelity to a method or discipline. While recognizing

common sources and the ultimate goal for Christian contemplation we also accept that different interpretations and recommendations concerning practice can be equally valid. When differences are respected and similarities shared we are open to true unity and liberty of spirit.

Out of the deepening experience of contemplation the fruits of the Spirit are born in ever-new ways. Charity, compassion and tolerance, peace-making and courage for social justice characterize Christian contemplation as lived by individuals and communities. A better appreciation and understanding of inter-religious dialogue is also a fruit of the practice of our two communities.

Both our communities are, in the scheme of history, still very young. We are still discovering our full vocation in the Body of Christ. By our spiritual communion and by learning from each other we pray that we will be faithful to the contemplative journey and to the sharing of its spiritual riches with the world.

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*The World Community for  
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We believe that welcome progress has been made recently in overcoming the ancient divisions between Christian churches. The power of the Gospel has often been veiled by the failure of Christians to love one another and to celebrate diversity as a sign of the richness of unity that there is in Christ. We believe, however, that a new era is opening. In these times there is less call for words and ceremonies and more need for the authentic spiritual knowledge that arises through the silence of contemplation.

The spiritual hunger and the widespread suspicion of religion in our society firmly points Christians to this depth dimension of their common faith. The contemplative dimension of the Gospel is not a speciality of particular churches or groups. It belongs to all and summons us all, through the signs of the times, to recover it. Nor is this contemplative dimension of faith to be identified only with the vocation of some to solitude and quiet. It applies equally to the life of good works, prophetic protest against injustice and the patient labour of peace making. Indeed, the integrity and vigour of the Christian life and its witness to the world depend upon the marriage of contemplation and action in the full experience of the mystery of God that passes understanding but is intimately known in daily acts of kindness.

If we cannot understand the silence of Christ we will not be able to understand his words, as an early Christian teacher asserted. Because we are convinced of the urgent need to recover the contemplative dimension in our prayer, worship and ministries, we have committed ourselves to search for ways in which this can be better appreciated by all Christians and by the whole of society. The new Centre for Christian Meditation at St Mark's, Myddelton Square is an ecumenical sign of this resolve to cooperate at that deeper level where unity in Christ is already achieved.

We invite our brothers and sisters in all churches to reflect on and join in this contemplative endeavour and so enrich its vision with their own special insights and traditions.

We believe, too, that in this age of violence and terror, friendship between the world religions is an indispensable foundation of the work for global peace and justice. If this friendship is to be sincere and transformative it also must be rooted in that experience of silence, stillness and simplicity that is the common ground of contemplation.

If we really can achieve a fuller harmony between contemplation and action in this way we will surely better fulfil the greater desire of Christ that we 'may all be one'.

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