



Teachings from Reverend Antoinette Schoenmaker

Our Cosmic Significance: Our Individual Responsibility

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."

John 3:4-8

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift ... And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

Ephesians 4:7, 11-16

Born of the Spirit

Some people may think it is strange that we speak of The Centre having a birthday. But this is because we became used to Mario speaking of The Centre being born. In this way, he was telling us that The Centre is a living entity – not just an organization. Mario and Colin were the means through which this entity came into physical expression, but this entity itself has been born of the spirit. The spirit of Christ has called us to be together in this life so that something may be seen, heard, felt and known. And we have answered this call. And none of this is a small thing.

A Lofty View

Recently I was accused of being lofty! Yes, unbelievable I know! This person was giving me some feedback on my interview in CentreCOMM. They said this is a pretty big picture – The Centre affecting the world's ability to keep evolving. I can't really relate to that. I don't have a sense that what I do means anything or affects anything. I am not even sure my prayers do anything. Although, sometimes when I light a candle I do have some sense that something has happened.

Well, I thought to myself, if you think I am lofty, try reading St Paul! Especially his letter to the Ephesians. In that letter he goes a lot further than me. He says that the whole cosmic hierarchy, the principalities and powers, are learning about Christ through us! He has a very big picture of our significance, but then, also, to his credit, he does come down to the nitty-gritty of "how" do we do this. And it is from this section of his letter to the Ephesians that I want to read this morning - Ephesians 4:7, 11-16

Called out by Christ

I don't know about you but over the years I have found what we call The Centre increasingly difficult to define and I think that is because it is a living entity, with a past, a future and a purpose. It is the vehicle which has been formed in this life by the spirit of Christ and for the spirit of Christ. A bit like a petrol engine has been created for petrol. As with any living entity, the spirit works into the body through means of the soul, the driver. The soul of The Centre is a large soul, a group soul, which we call the Brotherhood and more specifically the Order of Melchizedek. This soul was formed a very long time ago, on the sun. It's forming is our first memory and it is a strong one: our first experience was the sun, the Christ, and one another; this was the dawning of our human consciousness. And it means that those who call themselves sun souls are intimately connected with consciousness and with Christ.

We know that this group soul that today we identify as The Centre has appeared at different times in history. It has appeared, it's been called together, and then we have dispersed. As it is with one born of the spirit. And throughout those centuries, throughout those incarnations, we have been developing consciousness.

We each have our individual paths to tread in that respect, but I think that when we are called together, such as we have been in this life, we are here to work on the consciousness of the Brotherhood. Any soul incarnates in order to progress and develop. So also this group soul, our Brotherhood. This also means that we are here in this life not for ourselves, not for our individual life's purpose, but for the life purpose of the Brotherhood. And I don't think we are called together lightly. We are called at times of great spiritual activity and change.

As a group soul in this life, we are 40 and we know that at 40, in terms of the seven year cycles, we are right in the midst of life's purpose. And there is, I think, a strong desire on the part of all of us to make this appearing of the Order of Melchizedek a worthwhile and worthy appearing. There is a strong urgency to fulfil our purpose.

This purpose Mario described very succinctly in one of his founders day addresses. He says: Through all the years we have held Christ before our people. *He is a power, he is a force, he is an influence, he is a love, he is a consciousness. This we have held before you over all the years of our existence and this we shall continue to hold before you until we have attained that consciousness, until Christ is revealed and magnified within us to the fullest extent possible.*

How the Melchizedek Group Soul works to develop the consciousness of Christ is what I want to focus on today.

The Nature and Task of the Order of Melchizedek

We know from some of the spiritual readings that Mario gave for The Centre that there were other groups souls formed on the sun. He said that the Order of Melchizedek was one of sixty sun hierarchies. I don't know how the other sun hierarchies referred to themselves, but we refer to ourselves as the Brotherhood. That word alone says a great deal about the nature of our fellowship. We are also named for Melchizedek which indicates our task.

The first time we read about Melchizedek in the Bible, we see him offering bread and wine to Abraham. Abraham is one of the first individuals in the Bible who was able to maintain his consciousness outside of his own country, outside of his tribe. He was one of the first to develop an individual consciousness and it was to him that Melchizedek appeared and gave the bread and the wine.

It tells me that the Order of Melchizedek appears when consciousness is developing and changing. The bread and the wine were offered to the one developing a new consciousness, in Abraham's case the consciousness that could be sustained by an individual.

This explains to me why we were born in the 1960s, for that is when what Mario called the second consciousness started developing. In the 1960s there was a real movement of the spirit; it was mightily at work, highlighting the difference between ego and the I, and I think it was the perception of this spiritual change and what it was creating and how it was affecting people that caused Mario and Colin to

inaugurate The Centre. There was a need to bring some understanding of what the spirit is doing in this world. So, in the 1960s, when something new happened in terms of consciousness, in terms of spirit, our Brotherhood was called into being, to manifest again.

The offering of bread and wine is firstly an act of perception and recognition. I see you, I see what you have done. I honour that. I see what is happening. I see what is needed. It is secondly a nurturing, a strengthening. The bread and the wine sustain and replenish. Thirdly the symbols themselves indicate to us a great deal. The bread and the wine, the head and the heart, the heavens and the earth, the substance and the spirit. These symbols speak of bringing things together, or reconciling, of taking something in. They speak of a process of integration.

Our name, Melchizedek, indicates that we are here to recognize the breaking through of a new consciousness, to honour it, to sustain and nurture it, and to assist in its integration. How we do that takes some understanding.

Our Work:

To recognise and nurture the new consciousness

As I indicated in my “lofty” interview, I know that what we do together and how we are together has an effect on the cosmos. I know that what we spend our energy and love on makes a difference. What we are able to achieve with each other makes a difference. The very fact that we meet to celebrate the Cosmic Mass for instance is a bit of a clue that we are doing something on a cosmic level. But I do acknowledge that it does take a different sort of vision to see this. To look past the physical and see the spirit at work, the intentions, the thoughts, the love, the energy, purposefully directed, in the giving of self rather than the taking of self. It’s a vision that sees where the light is, how the colours flow; it sees how things distant and separated on this earth by time or space, are actually very connected. This is a spiritual vision, and one we have been encouraged to develop.

The forces we deal with here are the same which cause conflict in working places around the country, and between people’s and

nations across the world. Didn’t Mario teach us that the wars and conflicts in this world are our fault? They are not something that is happening far away, but a result of the way we think, feel and act. He was speaking about the need for vigilance and discipline in our inner life and in the life of our fellowship. He saw our effect on this world. He saw that if we could deal with these forces here, then other human souls – seemingly distant – would be more enabled to deal with these forces too.

This is a big picture of the human being, but back in 1969, the little church in Washington Street also had a very big idea of itself. It was never going to be a local parish—it had the world and all its people in its sights. Our theme song in those days was “We’ve a story to tell to the nations”. I think it had this idea that if they, that small group of people, could do something new in themselves and with each other, that that would open the way for others to experience this also. They took literally Neil Armstrong’s words: One step for man; one giant leap for mankind. They had a picture of being a prototype, of blazing a trail others could walk. These big ideas reveal a compassion for the human race and a deeply felt responsibility to assist it to move on. They display a belief in the potency of the human being and that our inner invisible actions have great power to affect the world. They display a knowledge of our cosmic significance and our individual responsibility.

A new consciousness was being born in the world at that time, and that new consciousness has been nurtured and strengthened within our Centre and this in turn has flowed out into the world.

Forty years later, the consciousness of today is far wider and deeper and higher than the consciousness of the 1960s. I see more harmony and understanding between people of different faiths and spiritual expressions, cultures and classes. I see more compassion, thought and energy going in to caring for the human and natural world. We seem more cognizant of each other, of our responsibilities as stewards of this earth, and of the importance of our inner world and its health. Of life in all its forms.

This is a result of learning the difference between the ego and the I and finding the

possibility of raising ourselves up to a higher level.

Does this mean our mission is accomplished? I don't think so. Mario said: *we shall continue to hold the Christ before you until we have attained that consciousness, until Christ is revealed and magnified within us to the fullest extent possible.*

In 1995 Rev Mario told us that consciousness was changing again, and he described it as the third step in our journey towards having that mind that was in Christ. He urged us to become able on the level of the third consciousness so we in turn could assist others to become able on that level.

This third consciousness belongs to those who can go beyond themselves, beyond the senses and see the spirit at work in others, in the world. It goes beyond a psychological view of the human being. It goes beyond just differentiating between ego and I. It wants to spiritualise the I. In fact it yearns for the spirit of Christ and to know the spirit of Christ. That is the consciousness that is emerging in this present time. This is the consciousness we are called upon to recognise, nurture and integrate.

To me this indicates the next frontier, the next trail to be blazed. I think it will lead to us becoming able to openly recognize and claim the spiritual dimensions of the human being. So far what has been happening with consciousness could and has been described with words devoid of spirit. We say there has been social reform. Equal opportunity. Human rights. It can be described as "humanitarian". And while it is all good, it still leaves, I think, an emptiness and poverty in the human soul. There is a yearning for something more. To openly speak of the spirit working in human affairs would be a great refreshment indeed. To have the spirit openly augment and partner our current worldly endeavours—can you imagine? This is a new frontier. At present it remains a boundary to be broken, and a new experience to be had. A new thought-trail to be blazed. Another small step ...

Our Inner Work

To equip The Saints to build up the Body of Christ

To recognize, to nurture and help integrate this consciousness is our task. This is our outer work, but there is also an inner aspect of this work we must consider. St Paul speaks of it in his letter to the Ephesians. He is actually speaking about the role that the group soul has to play in developing the consciousness of Christ. Instead of saying "group soul", he uses the word *ecclesia* – to signify a group of souls who called out from their normal lives, their normal pattern of incarnation, to work for the spirit of Christ. And instead of saying develop a Christ consciousness he says "build up the body of Christ". But we understand what he means.

The task of such a group, he says, is to equip the saints. Help those so committed to develop and nurture this consciousness. Give them the means to make Christ visible, known, felt, experienced.

The purpose, he says, of doing this is so that all may attain the fullness of Christ, all may attain the same stature as Christ, all may have the same mind as was in Christ Jesus. This is mighty and he obviously sees this as being possible.

The consciousness of Christ is taken in step by step. Nurturing the growth of this consciousness is the outer work of our ministry. Our inner work is to equip the saints to do this; provide the means. And I see that over many years this is what we have been doing: we have provided the means for those so committed to integrate a new consciousness in themselves. The means have been given to see it, to feel it, to honour it, to nurture it and to integrate it.

This equipping is done in many ways. Too numerous really to mention, but some things struck me again in reading the different articles in CentreCOMM. Perhaps first was the importance of our teachings and of bringing back the mysteries, so we can be intelligent about the spirit and confident in working with spiritual laws. There is also the great importance of creating opportunities for individuals to make a conscious commitment to Christ, as well as the spiritual gifts and blessings and expressions which accompany

these commitments. I was also struck by the need to be touched – on many different levels, the need to be healed, to be blessed. I was struck by the sensuality of our ministry, our desire for beauty, for symbols, for touch, for sound, and remembered Mario indicating that we were bringing back the Egyptian mysteries into the present. I saw again how powerful and helpful these things are in equipping us for the work of making the Christ more visible, more known, more felt – in ourselves, in each other, in each person we meet.

Our individual responsibility

The gifts we have each received in this process, the spiritual office we may hold, are all for this purpose, this purpose alone, of equipping the saints to build up this body of Christ.

When we don't use our gifts and fulfil the spiritual office we hold, when we don't develop our abilities, when we don't connect up with the ecclesia, the growth of the body of Christ becomes stunted. We hinder the development of the ecclesia. We hinder the spirit of Christ.

Such is our cosmic significance, and such is our individual responsibility.

What we do or don't do, what we think, what we feel, has an effect. It affects our fraters and sorores, it affects our Brotherhood, and it affects the possibility of building up the consciousness of Christ in this world.

Therefore it is important that we do as St Paul urges, speak the truth in love to one another, or as Mario says, communicate with each other without fear. For when one member is failing or suffering St Paul says, all suffer. Christ suffers. Such is the nature of our group soul.

Underlying this picture I have painted today of our fellowship, our Centre, is the fact that it has been called into being by the spirit of Christ and it exists for the spirit of Christ. We are here to know him once more, to commune with him, to take his spirit into ourselves more and more, so that through us, his life may be displayed and many more can come to know a greater dimension of themselves.

My prayer is that you can commit yourself with renewed vigour to the purpose which has called us out to be here together.

I hope that we can increasingly have that mind of Christ at the forefront of our being together.

I hope that we shall work to become able on the third consciousness level so that we can provide the nourishment needed by many souls in the wider world.

Use the means provided to equip yourself. Follow the guidance given by both our founders and inspirers. and encourage each another to use and develop the gifts and offices we have received so that the mind of Christ may grow within us.

What we do has cosmic significance. It echoes in eternity. Together we share the weight of this, and the great benefits and privileges. Let us speak the truth to each other in love. Let us communicate without fear, so that the consciousness of Christ may grow in us and in this world.

So shall it be.

An address for the 40th Anniversary on Founders Day 2009, Melbourne



*Published by ICA Press – the publishing division of
The Centre
The Independent Church of Australia
The Independent Church in New Zealand
Het Esoterisch Christelijk Centrum in The
Netherlands*