



Teachings from Reverend Antoinette Schoenmaker

Sin in the Context of Human Evolution

- Sex, Sin and The City -

I'D LIKE TO COMMENCE with a broad, sweeping statement and then spend the rest of my time justifying it! I think that all of you people here and all people in the world - who are not struggling to survive - think more about sin than sex, and certainly more than the city.

The basis for making this statement is that I spend more time thinking about sin than anything else, and therefore I think you do too. Perhaps this is because of the profession I have, but what was the word in the title which attracted you here? Was it sex or was it sin? I'm prepared to put money on the fact it wasn't the city! Which just goes to show where our interest really lies – still with the self, rather than the community.

I've called this talk "Sin in the Context of Human Evolution". I am a believer in evolution, not just physical evolution but also the evolution of the soul. For instance, our capacity to think has increased over the centuries. Certainly our knowledge has increased, but also our ability to think. Our ability to feel is also increasing. Where in the past our feelings would be very caught up with ourselves or our family or country, we are more able today to feel for another person who may be completely different to us and may live in another country. So that capacity has increased. Our ability to act more consciously, more creatively, more harmoniously with our ideas and feelings is also increasing. Perhaps this is the least

developed area in human life, but it is also developing. But this is what I mean when I speak of soul evolution.

During this talk, I'm going to refer to the Bible a bit because it is the book I am most familiar with. In the Bible, we have an overview of the whole path of human evolution from a spiritual point of view. We see it commencing in the book of Genesis in a garden. It progresses through different stages, where there are different things to achieve, and ultimately arrives at the book of Revelation, where the garden of Eden is replaced by a city – called the New Jerusalem. This is how the spiritual worlds see our evolution unfolding. It is a very idealized picture and pretty hard to recognize when you are sloggng it out here on earth. But we could simply say there is a divine origin to the human soul. We left that behind. We have forgotten to a great degree our divine nature, but in the end it will be restored, and we will know ourselves as complete, whole and divine, once again.

I think that all of you people here and all people in the world - who are not struggling to survive - think more about sin than sex...

This picture of evolution is not simply a returning back to what we once were. The story of humanity begins in a garden but ends in a city. That already tells us a great deal. Just bring into yourself how you feel in a garden.

One can be quite active in a garden, but essentially you are also receiving a great deal from the beauty and bounty of nature. It is also fairly solitary. Even though you can be in a garden with others, the appreciation of it, the experience of it is personal.

A city on the other hand is very much the product of our intelligence and creativity. It depends upon many different people to function. It is a cooperative community. It is a meeting place, a working place, a place in which we live, shop, work, relax and relate together. It is much more active and requires much more action on our part. We have to work things out together in order to live together. Problems, differences have to be recognized and dealt with. So the end of evolution sees us much more active, creative, perceptive, and community-spirited.

The city of New Jerusalem is not a city that we are familiar with. It has 12 gates which are never shut. It is full of the radiance of God. It has no need of the light of sun or moon. There is no temple there. It is utterly full of the divine. Of course, we can't really understand this yet, but our understanding has grown, say, from what it was in the 10th century, where it would have been conceived of as a literal place, provided by God, for souls who had lived good lives. Our capacity to understand it, to participate in it, has grown over the centuries. In that sense, we are becoming a bit more like God. We are becoming more able to encompass our universe responsibly.

Now this is all a background to what I really want to say!

Back to sin. My definition of sin is fairly ancient but hopefully helpful to justifying my sweeping statement. Sin has nothing to do with commandments, laws, rules, "accepted understandings" or anything that is externally imposed. I think of sin as a failure to reach my goal, my target, my purpose. We each set ourselves things to do and achieve, either on a daily basis, short term basis and long term basis. We aim to do certain things or the same things differently or better. And very often we fail. This is the biblical meaning of sin.

The original language of the Bible was a language which when spoken evoked images. The image evoked by the ancient Greek word for "sin" was the image of an archer aiming their arrow at a target and

missing. The soul has an aspiration, an ideal, it wants to reach. When the arrow fails to hit the target this is called sin.

This image perhaps speaks to us a bit more after the Olympic Games, where we were very aware of the targets of individual athletes, whether it was a place, a certain time, a certain speed, a certain distance. We could feel with them when they failed to reach their target. There is a certain emptiness, a deflation, sometimes a hopelessness. This is sin. And when we experience this failure a number of times it can weigh upon us so heavily, that we may even give up trying.

When we do achieve our purpose, something is added to us. We are enlarged. The soul grows in power and confidence and trust in its self. It is ready to attempt other things, greater things, based on this confidence.

This is my understanding of sin. It has nothing to do with commandments, laws, rules, "accepted understandings" or anything that is externally imposed. Sin is a failure to reach the goal, the target, the purpose I have set myself – consciously or unconsciously.

The image evoked by the ancient Greek word for "sin" was the image of an archer aiming their arrow at a target and missing. The soul has an aspiration, an ideal, it wants to reach. When the arrow fails to hit the target this is called sin.

This is why sin occupies my thinking a great deal, and I would suppose the thinking of everyone, for every soul has its own purposes that it wants to achieve and each one of us experiences both failure and success.

Because sin is to do with purpose it is very personal. It is very hard for us to make judgements about whether what a person is doing is sinful or not, for it depends upon whether they are achieving their purpose or not. It depends on the handicap, the degree of difficulty, previous personal bests and so on.

Each soul comes into incarnation with purpose. It is a hell of a thing to enter into life

on earth and no soul does it without good reason and very clear purposes. Part of their purpose will have to do with gaining experience and growing in ability, and other aspects of the purpose will have to do with balancing out experiences from previous lives so we become whole.

Say a soul has had a past life as a monk or nun. In the last 500 years there have been many nuns and monks. In the western world, the second son of every well-to-do family was given to a monastery to become a cleric. So there are quite a number of souls around today who probably come into this category of having been a nun or monk in at least one of their past lives.

If they were true to their vows in those days, they would not have experienced sex (unlike the nun's in tonight's show). In this life, therefore, they probably need to experience sex. It would be a longing in their soul. So it would be within the life purpose of such a soul to become a sex worker, for instance, or to have a quite a number of intimate relationships, so their soul can experience what was not part of them before. And it is interesting in this last century to notice that the sex industry has increased and so have the number of sexual relationships any person may have. It's a balancing out of the last five hundred years. It has purpose. It is not sinful.

These laws don't tell us this is a good situation or a bad situation, but require us to see whether it is a blessed situation. Blessed means to make beautiful. This situation is before you in order that your soul can become more beautiful, more able, more balanced, more Godlike.

There were, of course, nuns or monks who were not true to their vows. They had sex but in all probability they had it against their conscience (again, unlike the nun's in tonight's show!). Today these souls will also want to have sex but because of this innate guilt will probably have problems getting it! Or, if they can get it, enjoying it.

In a monastery or convent a soul was isolated from the world, not knowing how it

operates. They had very little to do with money for everything was provided. There were no personal possessions and very little personal space. Today such a soul may have to become very worldly. They may need to have the experience of learning how to handle money, of making their own living, of acquiring possessions, and so they pursue a very materialistic lifestyle.

We can quite easily condemn all these things: being materialistic, having lots of sexual liaisons etc – but for these souls it is entirely within their purpose. The arrow is hitting the target.

Why do people do the things they do? Why are they born into certain situations and pushed in certain directions? Why do certain people want to become lawyers? Why do some become sex workers? Why do some become priests? Why do some become accountants? And why do some people do things even when they don't want to? Why are they pushed in that direction? In the last century there has been a great interest in the invisible, hidden causes of our life. Psychology has pioneered this. But surely it is to do with the soul's purpose: to balance, to heal, but also to grow greater than they were before.

If we take refuge in external guides to right and wrong we won't see this. And this is where the next stage of evolution comes in.

The development of conscience, of the notion of right and wrong, is followed, overlaid and tempered by the development of perception, perception on the level of the soul.

This new period of evolution is also depicted in the Bible, in the NT, in the scene where Christ gives the Sermon on the Mount. I call these the "laws of blessedness". These laws do not begin with: Thou shalt or thou shalt not. They begin with the words: Blessed are you. Blessed are you when you hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are you when you are poor in spirit. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are you when are rejected or reviled.

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The development of this perception is going on in many people today. So it is not surprising that there is at this time more moral dilemmas than ever before – because today there is no simple right and wrong any more. Nowhere is one thing always the right and good thing to do. Each situation is much more complex, sophisticated and individual.

The reason our law-makers can't keep up any more with these moral dilemmas is that we are growing out of having laws which cover every situation. More and more we are called upon to exercise our own perception and judgement, and each of us has unique experiences and relationships which call forth from us this ability.

As you can tell from these examples, many times the purposes of the soul are not conscious; nevertheless they are operating. Consciously or not, each soul wants to add to its range of experiences and abilities – that is the thrust of evolution. Unless we have exceptionally clear perception, we won't know what and why a soul burns to achieve a certain thing, and why it is very difficult for them to achieve that.

Each soul is engaged in its own personal evolution, but as well as this they also play a role in the evolution of the whole human race. As an ability is gained by one person it does make it easier for other people to see its possibility and also integrate it within themselves.

If we consider sin, or purpose, then we can see it operating on a number of levels, therefore. There are individual purposes being worked out in each person's life, but there are also bigger purposes, for the whole human race, which are to do with increasing our capacities and abilities. I would consider

it a major sin to go against this stream of evolution: to stop developing our ability to think, to see, to feel and to act. We would always be wanting to move forward and increase within ourselves our capacities. But the way in which we are stretched is often very personal and hence it is difficult for us, from the outside, to make judgements about others unless we knew the whole truth about a person.

The whole truth. This is a phrase from our justice system. To tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But the truth at the present is that we don't know the whole truth. We know things from our own limited perspective. And that is usually, firstly, an earthly perspective, which doesn't take account of spiritual evolution, and doesn't take account of the divine purposes at work in the life of a soul, and it is further limited by our thinking which is conditioned by our culture, the age in which we live, our sex, and so on. We would become more able to see the whole truth if we could enter into different situations from these different perspectives, but our acceptance of current codes of morality often stops us.

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What is sin today? As our consciousness has expanded and changed over time, so I think the nature of sin has changed. What was a sin prior to Christ is not a sin now, for instance. It's no longer a sin not to have your foreskin chopped off or to eat meat with blood in it. Similarly, what was a sin in the 11th century is no longer a sin today. Laws change. And they change because consciousness changes. And consciousness changes because there are things for us to learn and take into ourselves at different times in evolution. There is an order in which things come about. This is clearly spelled out in the creation story, where different things appeared on the 1st day, the 2nd day, the 3rd day and so on.

Early on in our development as human beings, we were given the ten commandments. This story signifies that we didn't know in ourselves what was right, what was wrong, but had to receive this from outside ourselves. So we can see then that there needed to develop in each human soul a conscience: an internal guide to what is right and what is wrong. Conscience is really our awareness of ourselves in relation to the world, the cosmos, and the spiritual laws which operate. We can see that everyone has a different conscience. My conscience for instance allows me to do things which perhaps your conscience would not allow you to do. And vice versa.

Conscience is tied up with guilt and it was guilt which was instilled into the human being through the giving of an external law. This was very helpful for that stage of evolution. In our current stage we could say that in most human souls this faculty is developed to some degree – in some more than others. So there are people who worked more effectively and actively with their own evolution than others.

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As our consciousness has expanded and changed over time, so the nature of sin, of failure to meet purpose, has changed. What was a sin two thousand years ago, one thousand years ago, one hundred years ago, is not a sin today, and this is reflected in the changing laws of our society. A new stage of evolution is opening up which has to do not so much with right and wrong as with our ability to perceive the truth of a situation. No longer is one thing always the

right and good thing to do. Each situation is individual and unique. More and more we are called upon to exercise our own perception and judgement, and each of us has unique experiences and relationships which bring out in us the ability to perceive whether or not a situation is a *blessed* one.

A new stage of evolution is occurring at present. This has to do with the law, but not the law as it pertains to this earth and our grasp of right and wrong. New laws were given by Christ, during his incarnation, and they were called the laws of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We live in Australia and live by the laws of Australia. If we lived in Papua New Guinea we would live by different laws. Similarly, if we are becoming more aware of ourselves as spiritual beings, we would begin living more consciously with the laws of the spirit or the Kingdom of Heaven.

These new laws are quite different from the laws which go: Thou shalt not ... which is how most of our laws do go. The new laws say: Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn; blessed are the meek,

blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely.

These new laws involve the development of a new faculty: the faculty of perception. It requires us to see the whole truth of a situation as it exists in evolution. It doesn't tell us this is a good situation or a bad situation; it asks us to see whether it is a blessed situation. Blessed means to make beautiful. This situation is before you or before that person in order that their soul can become more beautiful, more able, more capable.

Nowhere is one thing always the right thing to do. Each situation is very individual and unique. There are big moral issues before us at present which are the direct result of the human race increasing its capacities to do things. Gene technology and advances in science and medicine are probably the first things that spring to mind, but there are many others. These dilemmas are created by pre-made laws of morality, by economics, but also our failure to see ourselves as evolving spiritual beings.

The reason our laws can't keep up with these moral dilemmas is that we are growing out of having laws which cover every situation. More and more we are called upon to exercise our own perception and judgement. Each of us has unique experiences and relationships which call forth from us this ability.

We value the individual today, perhaps moreso than in any other age. But when we simply accept the law that is handed to us on a platter, surely we are not valuing our own individuality. I would like to see us encouraged in this area not protected from it, so that more and more we take responsibility for our own personal code of living. That we don't live and act and think in a certain way because this is what has been declared by the government, the church or whatever external authority we have accepted.

This would require us to become much more observant, to learn more, to become involved: to take authority for the living of our life. When we accept certain ready-made judgements about what is good and bad, we cut ourselves off from experiences and learning. We stay smaller. We don't move with evolution. That's a sin.

At this present time, we have laws and rules and accepted understandings about what is good and bad, right and wrong, and we make judgements about each other based on these things. These laws don't encourage us to

gain insight about the purposes at work in that soul. Take the following example:

This is the story of a girl called Tina. She is now 28 years old. She has lived in Ferntree Gully all her life. One of the major pastimes in Ferntree Gully, it seems, is having babies and living off welfare. This is what Tina does. She left home and school at a very young age as a result of being sexually abused by her father. She is highly intelligent but not very literate as a result. She got a job working as a dancer in a nightclub. She became sexually active very early and had her first child at 19.

Her relationship with the father of her first child ended soon after the birth. She and the baby then shared a house with her brother who did serious drugs. There were needles left lying around the house. There was some thought at this stage to remove the baby from Tina. Luckily this didn't happen. The baby was the one thing Tina loved and from whom she also received love.

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She entered into a second relationship and had a second child. The relationship ended. She entered into a third, had a third child. All through this there was a struggle to become free from her dependence on her brother and family and establish herself and a lifestyle in which she could survive with her daughters.

She didn't have much money and lived in pretty disgusting houses. She grew more aware of her rights and how she wanted to live. She wouldn't stand for nonsense. She moved maybe 3 or 4 times a year, every year, trying to find a landlord who would accept her and treat her right, as well as a suitable house. There would be progress each time. She learned to manage money.

Finally she entered a relationship with a fourth man and had a fourth child – aptly called Faith. She married this man. I conducted their wedding. It was perhaps the best wedding I've ever been too. I was overwhelmed at the love that was present in everyone. Tina's family felt extremely fortunate that this man had come into her life. At the same time, his family, also felt that Tina was the best thing that had ever happened to him. There was a great sense of hope.

I have visited their home a number of times before and after the wedding. It's pretty untidy. Tina has recently discovered her poor energy levels are due to diabetes, a thyroid imbalance, and insufficient white blood cells. She still cares for 4 young children, under 11. Tina does a lot of stupid things. She has a big smart mouth. She has a number of tattoos and various areas of her body are pierced. She dyes her hair quite a lot. She's not that likeable because she doesn't take any shit and has a vindictive streak, probably born of the need to protect herself. She's worked out how to maximize the payments from the child welfare and milks the system for all its worth. She has a number of very good friends who are impressive people coming from different backgrounds and classes.

According to the laws and common social standards of the past what she has done and is doing is sinful - although we probably wouldn't use that word. But if we accept this opinion without thought, we not only reduce our chances of experiencing and perceiving greater things, we also, by our judgements and condemnation, make it much more difficult for people like Tina who are trying to achieve their soul purpose.

I'm endeavouring to give quite a full picture of Tina. As far as I can tell she has been born into a certain situation and is trying to develop something new. But I would never have come to know her if I had accepted some of the thinking that is around about "people like her". It's pretty much accepted that it is wrong to have four children by four different fathers for instance. It's wrong to milk the system.

According to the laws and common social standards of the past what she has done and is doing is sinful - although we probably wouldn't use that word. But if we accept this opinion without thought, we not only reduce our chances of experiencing and perceiving greater things, we also, by our judgements and condemnation, make it much more difficult for people like Tina who are trying to achieve their soul purpose.

Where is the sin here? In those who don't conform to our ideas of right and wrong, or in us who can only see them as one-dimensional figures and who resist the evolutionary impulse within ourselves to see, to learn and to become a bit greater? Where is the missing of purpose here?

I think I would be right in saying that most of you here don't hold with the ten commandments, but I would like you to see that these ten commandments, which are essentially values of right and wrong from an external source, have been replaced with the ready-made opinions of our society. The stone tablet mentality is still with us. If we accept them without thought and experience, we not only reduce our chances of experiencing greater things, we also, through our judgements and condemnation, make it much more difficult for the people around us who are trying like hell to achieve their soul purpose.

I've never been in a household where there are four children with four different fathers, four different sets of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. Each of the four girls is equally at home with each father, each grandparent. Through these

four families, each girl is exposed to quite different ways of living and relating, different values, different skills. These children have the opportunity to learn very quickly and broadly things people of my generation and older may never come to learn and experience. Quite new relationships are growing as a result, different from those we have known. These children are more able to hold more things in their heart and mind. I think there is something progressive going on

here. There is something new in this situation, for Tina, for her girls, and for us.

We value the individual today, perhaps more so than in any other age. But when we accept ready-made judgements about what is good and bad, we aren't valuing our own individuality, or accepting responsibility for our own thinking. We cut ourselves off from experiences and learning. To me, that's a sin: it's a failure to be progressive, it's a failure to see.

If authorities have any role to play in this it is to encourage us and not prevent us from taking responsibility for our own personal code of living. Surely the age has arrived when we don't have to live and act and think in a certain way simply because this is what has been declared by the government, religion, our peer group or some other external authority.

I recognize that what I am saying is dangerous. "The rule of law" is still being proclaimed as an aim to be achieved in some countries where there are gross injustices and dictatorships. So we are probably not at a stage where we can do away with external laws and authorities. It's important to recognize the order of evolution, and the different stages to be accomplished. At the same time there are individuals who have conscience well developed and who are ready to start working on the new laws of blessedness.

I think it would be good if we could recognize that the rule of law is old and dying away. More and more we have to accept responsibility for our own morality, for our own opinions and thinking about what is right and wrong. We have to enter consciously and actively into our own perception rather than accepting what is dished up by the media. And surely the place to start is where each of us is now: the situations we personally are confronted with.

I think we are uniquely placed in Australia to lead this aspect of human evolution. We live in a land where there are many different types of people, from different religious and cultural backgrounds. The different classes of

people are also more mixed up and less segregated than we find in other places of the world. There is more scope for us to inter-relate and to inter-relate with freedom and responsibility. Surely this is closer to the picture of evolution portrayed in the Bible.

The sin, I think, is not to see what is happening within us, within the person next to us and within our country and not to seize the opportunities given to each of us to progress. To move with evolution, to hit the target, is to be willing to see, to learn, to be involved. Where is the *blessedness*? Such an attitude assists us to take authority for the living of our life. Surely that is a divine quality and surely that is the target we are aiming for.

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