

## INTRODUCTION

The ideas that prompted 'Second Birth' came first of all from Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus in the night, in which the concepts of **'the kingdom of God'** and **'rebirth in the Spirit'** are central themes (John 3, 1-13). This book represents an attempt to establish a link between a new consciousness and access to the kingdom of God. Within this complex of problems, an understanding of the division of roles between man and woman as envisaged in the creation plan is crucial. A positive attitude towards equality of the sexes will undoubtedly help in understanding this book.

If we search our conscience none of us can deny that we are becoming increasingly egocentric. The result is a slow but sure shift in western values. Today's goals are no longer tried and tested models; material values dominate the scene. Too much information - some useful, some quite superfluous - forces people into an extremely complicated process of selection. And since the material on offer consists largely of inferior, simplified or extreme images and stereotypes, it is highly probable that regressive material is retained. The insidious effect of this process is that new models are superimposed on tried and tested ones and take their place. The new personal 'ideals' of our modern western world are determined more and more by money, egocentricity, profit, pleasure and excitement, an obsessive desire for power and importance and the dream of easy, short-term success. Following the 'death of God' for non-Christians, even Jesus is gradually disappearing from the Christian's consciousness and any connection with the transcendent is fading away. The 'personal' relationship with Christ is dying out, replaced by an all too strong attraction to material things. The spiritual dimension is being suppressed. Is anyone still interested in being open to a non-material world and to transcendent values? Yet from time immemorial people have acted in the name, and with the sanction, of a personal God, and have dealt harshly with followers of a different God. The battle between the 'Bush' God and the 'Saddam Hussein' Allah is a recent example. These 'personal' Gods, however, are the prerogative of great statesmen...

These ideas are meant as an incentive and an aid to those searching in an ever more rapidly changing environment. I do not claim to be presenting scientific or theologically perfect and up-to-date arguments. My primary concern is to communicate experiences and ideas on how people live together in a world that constantly surprises us. The origin and source of life are revealed to those who have not yet forgotten how to be humbled and amazed and question themselves, those who have not yet lost their powers of discrimination in the dance round the

‘golden calf’. We can recognise intuitively that an elemental force is at work, but we still have to see with our eyes and hear with our ears and perceive with our hearts. Its presence is evident at all times and in all places: in the warm rays of the sun, in the magical sound of a piano sonata, in the body’s complex defence mechanisms, and also in a person’s eyes.

My reflections concern the conscious and unconscious impact of the message of Jesus Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am trying to interpret the words of Christ for our time and intuit their deeper meaning without losing contact with the myths, the gospels and the apocryphal texts but also without over-valuing them. Even after 2000 years they are still the quintessence of what is most important in Christianity. Christ does not talk about a church of dos and don’ts, but about freely chosen involvement and personal freedom. Jesus does not talk about people’s resurrection after death, but about the joy of life amidst our fellow human beings, about helping the poor, accepting the outsider. Jesus shows understanding of sinners and at the same time points to a possible way out of transgression. He does not threaten with eternal damnation. He hardly ever speaks of the ‘human’ sins, the sins of the ‘flesh’. For Christ, however, hubris - ‘*quis ut Deus*’ or the ‘who is like God’ on Archangel Michael’s shield - is a revolt against the ‘Holy Spirit’. This is the most serious crime against God that humankind can commit. Human beings should not succumb to the temptation to put themselves on a level with God, but should open up their spirit to God. Christ does not talk of religion and spirituality, but of love and transcendence: love as a central theme in his message and transcendence in the sense of man coming closer to his spiritual father.

Again and again people react against the purely materialistic world and yearn for a different life with a new scale of values marked by solidarity, tolerance, humanity and love. Erich Fromm characterises these two worlds as ‘having’ or ‘being’.

Is a ‘being-world’ the visible expression of the kingdom of God? Can a person of today find a way to the ‘being-world’? Is a life in a ‘being-world’ even possible? Are ‘being-people’ even taken seriously in a materialistically oriented world, or are they merely written off as nut-cases?

The New Testament and a whole range of apocryphal writings describe variants of the words of Christ, his message and his call to humankind. His words focus on three fundamental ideas, three important topics, and all are connected with the will of God or God’s ‘plan’ to spread out His kingdom on earth for and with humankind. The most pressing tasks can be described as follows:

- learning to understand the meaning and aim of God’s ‘plan’ on earth

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- seeking the path to knowledge through a process of spiritual renewal
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- learning to recognise and carry out one's own role in the 'being-world'.

When Nicodemus asks Jesus what he must do to enter His kingdom, Jesus replies: **“No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit.” (John 3,5)** So Christ demands of people neither more nor less than a second birth, a rebirth in the spirit that will enable them to understand his words and act accordingly.

Evolutionary theory describes the physical process of how living organisms develop. An evolutionary theory of the human mind might reveal interesting perspectives on the future of humankind. Humankind's potential for mental development is enormous; a great deal has been published suggesting that we use only a fraction of the human brain's capacity. The lightning pace of technological and scientific developments in the information age is particularly important for the expansion of our mental abilities. The internet increases our access to stored information and knowledge in a way that is unprecedented and becoming steadily easier. Future human beings will be concerned less with piling up knowledge and more with intellectual discussion.

In many preparatory discussions on second birth it became apparent that women have a particular interest in the subject. Men, caught up in the culture of “Men no longer have jobs, but jobs have men”, tend to consider the subject unimportant. It appeals more to the intuitive, hidden, instinctive nature of women than to men, who are trained to be rationally-minded. Yet both are called upon to live life as a couple rather than alone, in mutual respect and complementarity.

There are no standard recipes or patented formulae for revealing the path to self-discovery and spiritual rebirth. Every individual has to learn by his or her own experience. “Wisdom is brilliant, she never fades. By those who love her, she is readily seen, by those who seek her, she is readily found. She anticipates those who desire her by making herself known first.” (Wisdom 6, 12-13). Nevertheless the seeker must let himself be guided by fundamental principles. He must try to find a way to the source, the origin, and must not allow himself to be led astray by what is superficial or what is visible. He must be able to question himself constantly. He must learn to be free and to respect the freedom of others. Above all he must learn the art of loving. He must constantly strive to find a true system of values. He must learn to develop a good degree of self-

confidence, for he will otherwise have no confidence in others. He has to be incorruptible in every way, succumbing to neither material nor spiritual temptation.

Every seeker must be sufficiently strong to be free and independent. This is the conscious school of life, teaching oneself to concentrate on what is essential and reject what is trivial, knowing one's self, leading an autonomous 'being-life'. Most seekers – and everyone faces this problem at some point in their life – fail in all these extremely complex processes, and content themselves with an intellectual '*dolce farniente*'. Anyone who is incapable of learning from a negative experience and correcting his or her behaviour will find it impossible to activate the crucial learning process.

People need other people they can love and who love them. They need companions who support them in every situation, disregarding their own interests - people who believe in them and bring out their self-confidence. A companion must simply be willing and able to offer help to the seeker and support him or her selflessly. The seeker must then also be able to be a companion.

In the emerging information age there are numerous indications that humankind's mental development is finally on the verge of something new and great, that the human mind is about to undergo a kind of rebirth. Women have the key role in this, in spiritual birth just as in physical birth.

This book was written particularly for those women who intuitively, in their heart of hearts, have always been aware of their mission. And in my opinion, that means all women.

In our innermost self 'eternal' laws, precise norms of conduct, natural perceptions of justice, and immeasurable potential for love lie dormant, just waiting to be discovered, understood and put to use. But if we do not seek we cannot find, and without questioning ourselves, we cannot progress.