

Rediscovering the Secret Sacred in Contemporary Professional Life



Anthroposophical Society and Steiner Education Australia Conference

8th-12th July 2012

Alice Springs, OLSH Sadadeen Campus

**Invitation for contributions to a multi-faceted conference
exploring this theme**

The phrase *Secret Sacred* is often used in relation to Aboriginal spiritual ritual and initiation rites. What is often not appreciated is that the *Secret Sacred* has been part of all societies and is the source of much that we take for granted in our modern secular society.

The Anthroposophical Society in conjunction with Steiner Education Australia would like to join with other interested individuals and organisations to explore the theme.

This conference is proposed in response to a perceived need for:

1. A renewed recognition of the role of the *Sacred* in the past, present and future of society (the *Sacred* is an *Open Secret*, in the words of the German poet Goethe – himself no stranger to the *Secret Sacred*)
2. Suppliantly requesting and facilitating dialogue between Aboriginal Australians and the new Australians at a level which possibly has not been given enough attention (the historical role of Karl and Ted Strehlow in this dialogue can be given due recognition)
3. Examples (workshops, performances, speakers) of how this incorporation of the *Sacred* can and in some cases is being applied today in various fields of social life.

Please see accompanying thoughts (see p.3) to the conference theme. The work will be organised into strands serving the differing interests and modes of working.

We will invite as Keynote Speakers people who have worked outstandingly with the idea of the *Secret Sacred* and its role in professional life or who have striven to understand the tension between indigenous life and modern secular life. They will explore the bigger general questions.

We invite workshop proposals by practitioners who strive to bring ‘deep knowledge’ of the human being into daily vocational practice e.g. those involved in any area of education, , architects, farmers, scientists, artists, health practitioners, social workers, craftsmen etc.

We invite suggestions for Dialogues e.g. between people involved with the *sacred* from different walks of life.

We invite proposals for Artistic Performances which bridge cultural gaps or address the conference theme– music, dance, eurythmy, visual art and drama etc.

We propose excursions into Nature - for those interested there will be a three to four day pre – conference excursion into the spectacular MacDonnell Ranges, Hermannsburg, Uluru and Kata Juta area.

Where will it take place? Alice Springs, Central Australia where there is space and rooms for central gathering and also smaller gatherings, where those who need some comfort can be accommodated as well as those who are happy to camp. We are using the new hall built at the campus of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Sadadeen.

Initially, we are gathering interest in the theme.

What comes forward by way of offerings will build the palette for the conference and give rise to a defined program which will be finalised and advertised early in 2012.

We aim to offer speakers, workshop givers and performers a nominal fee and to subsidise their travel and accommodation costs. As the conference is not run for profit and we are committed to keeping costs low, the level of remuneration will be related to the number of participants.

Those wishing to contribute to the theme should state what their minimum requirements would be.

Please contact us with your **expressions of interest by December 16th 2011** (see p.5)

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Accompanying thoughts to the conference theme

Rediscovering the Secret Sacred in Contemporary Professional Life

The phrase *Secret Sacred* is often used in relation to indigenous spiritual ritual and initiation rite. What is often not appreciated is that this *Secret Sacred* has been part of all societies. I would venture to add that this has been the source of much that we take for granted in our modern secular society.

The spiritual has been in a state of continual change and evolution since pre-historical times when traditions were passed on orally as they are today in Aboriginal society. In time these oral traditions came to be written down and formalised and became freed from those who had originally carried the teaching and made available for all humanity. If we take the European spiritual tradition as an example we can trace roots that extend back to the Vedas of India, the stories of Persia, the wisdom of Egypt and Israel, the ideas of Greece and Rome, the beginnings and elaboration of Christianity as its trajectory intersected an increasingly independent consciousness that came to a flowering point in the 14th and 15th Century as the Renaissance/Reformation. This time also saw the beginnings of secular society.

We see around us, in our secular, multicultural societies the results of the *Secret Sacred*: the large cathedrals, churches and Masonic halls on the main streets of many of our major cities; the temples and mosques which increasingly are part of Western societies; the clothes and traditions still displayed and practiced in our society today; the plays and music that often have their origin in the *Secret Sacred*. Non-Aboriginal peoples are also becoming more aware of the need to care for our land/plant/animal/landscape which is/was the Aboriginal people's cathedral. All these expressions of cultural life, if explored, open up vistas onto the inner life of human beings and its development – the realm of the *Sacred* and sometimes the *Secret*. The traditions go back in history and sometimes disappear into the mists of time.

During and at the end of the 19th century there were significant encounters between Europeans and Aboriginal people in Australia. Though many of these meetings were barbarous and cruel, some were meetings of culture carried out with human dignity. Such a one was the meeting of Karl Strehlow –the Lutheran missionary with the Arranda people of MacDonnell Ranges. He lived among them and commanded respect for 28 years and wrote voluminous work about their customs. He learnt their language. Here was a meeting to be taken note of – a man of culture out of Europe, who spoke six languages came to meet a people who had lived largely isolated from the cultural changes that had taken place since the late Pleistocene. His son Ted, born at Hermannsburg, also commanded respect and translated and learnt by heart large sections of their *Secret Sacred* oral traditions (songs of Central Australia). Although Ted Strehlow's life cast some shadows, he struggled with a way to reconcile the underlying unity of the *Secret Sacred* tradition. The intriguing possibility of joining these western spiritual traditions with an Aboriginal traditional spirituality of the law and the land and the people requires an acute awareness of the desperate plight of Aboriginal society and culture in the 21st Century.

An attitude equivalent to that of a suppliant may be needed, for any 'white fella' wanting to try to understand Aboriginal spirituality. It is a living and fragile tradition, subject to dramatic cultural change, with a younger generation not able to be held in

the tradition as previously and with the law having no answer for modern problems. 'Petrol is not part of our law' said Kawaki Thompson to the state Coroner in 2002. 'You brought it here you fix it. My son is dead from petrol'.

In Aboriginal life the 'Law' which stems from the *Secret Sacred* informs traditional life in detail. In the early life of many societies the same is true – think of the mystery centres of Egypt and Greece where the initiates brought motives and practice into exoteric life based on the inspiration derived from the initiation knowledge they gained.

What is the *Secret Sacred* in modern secular society where so much of the past has been deconstructed and we inhabit a 'wasteland' as characterised by TS Elliot?

How can we, in our secular society, bring into, our professions – as teachers, parents, scientists, builders, architects, lawyers, doctors, nurses, farmers – the knowledge of the wholeness of the world (the integration of the cosmos and the earth), the wholeness of the human being as a part of the world where consciousness has become conscious of itself, the knowledge of the portals of birth and death, the knowledge of identity and its role in creating values.

This year, 2011, many in the world are celebrating the 150th Birthday of an extraordinary human being, Rudolf Steiner, who lived through the transition from the 19th into the 20th century and participated in the modernist movements of the time. He too took part in the deconstruction of the societal norms of his time. However, what characterises Steiner's work especially is that he never deconstructed without the inner substance for reconstruction. Fundamental to the philosophy of freedom which he worked so hard to develop was the understanding that the reconstruction of human society would only occur out of insight into the underlying spiritual nature of the human being and nature.

The Anthroposophical Society is a group of human beings who try to make use of Steiner's legacy to better the world we live and work in. Steiner Education Australia is the representative body for the Steiner Schools in Australia. We would like to join with other interested organisations, which have a similar striving to bring this gathering of interested people about.

Peter Glasby

November 13th 2011